



These opposites attract: RBs, roommates Charles, Ellis wrapping up CU careers

By Kyle Ringo
Wednesday, November 21, 2007

A city boy from Los Angeles and a country kid from outside Dallas met on a recruiting trip to Colorado four years ago. They were opposites in many ways but found common ground in their desire to expand their horizons.

They stood on the sidelines in Folsom Field that day watching the Buffs beat UCLA and decided they liked the school enough to make Boulder their home for the next four years. They also took an interest in each other.

Byron Ellis and Hugh Charles have become the best of friends in the days since. They roomed together in the dorms as freshmen and have lived together off campus the past three years.

Ellis lives upstairs. Charles lives downstairs. Ellis is a homebody. Charles likes the night life. Ellis has a girlfriend. Charles is playing the field.

Ellis studies hard and hopes to become an orthopedic surgeon. Charles sometimes needs a friend or family members to light his fire when it comes to getting his homework done.

"He motivates you, especially school-wise," Charles said. "He's a brainiac in school and knows how to keep up with his work and stay on task." "Obviously, I'm a little bit more studious than Hugh," Charles says with a laugh. "Just a little bit."

When Charles is snowboarding, mountain biking or flying airplanes, Ellis is home playing video games or relaxing with his feet up. Ellis cooks. Charles, not so much.

Charles learned to love the outdoors as a boy in Texas. He has spent time during his summers in Boulder working in gardens and fields on 35 acres of private property north of town. He taught Ellis how to mow a yard there last summer and got a big laugh one day when Ellis came with him and got spooked by a field mouse.

"It was funny," Charles said. "He just ran."

They will spend one final day together in Folsom Field on Friday trying to beat the Nebraska Cornhuskers for the second time in their careers and earn a trip to what would be their third bowl game. The opportunity for a big game is there, as NU's defense against the run ranks 114th in the nation, allowing 228 yards per contest.

Charles and Ellis have become as close as brothers, despite playing the same position and competing against each other for playing time at tailback. Four years of living together and sitting in the same

position meetings and running through the same drills have forged a bond between them that they expect to last for decades.

"I just think we're two genuinely nice guys," Ellis said. "We get along with almost anybody."

Their accomplishments on the field have mirrored their personalities.

Charles will leave CU ranked among the top 10 rushers in the program's history. He is seventh heading into Friday's game with 2,490 yards.

Ellis will leave the program forever remembered by his coaches as one of the most dependable and intelligent players they have come across. He is relied on heavily in the passing game as both a pass protector and a receiver.

He has scored three touchdowns and has 640 total yards from scrimmage in four seasons.

It will be odd next fall for CU fans to see different players wearing Charles' No. 2 jersey and Ellis' No. 27.

"I'm sure he's going to get married first and I'm sure he will invite me to his wedding," Ellis said. "I'm going to invite him to my wedding. It's going to be all good."



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CU's Smith has sights set on end zone

By Kyle Ringo

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The last time Colorado wide receiver Josh Smith was in the end zone in Folsom Field with the ball in his hands head coach Dan Hawkins came screaming off the sidelines barking at Smith about showboating.

It was mid-August and the electric true freshman had just scored on a 54-yard pass from quarterback Nick Nelson. Smith dived into the end zone at the end of the play instead of running in and handing the ball to officials at the intrasquad scrimmage.

Smith has put together a promising freshman season since but hasn't been able to find his way to the end zone in a game. He's hoping that changes Friday in his first game against Nebraska in the regular-season finale for both teams.

"I'm just going to go out there and do what I always do, try my best to make plays," Smith said. "It's my last game and I'm officially a sophomore.

"I'm going to play with a lot more energy. It's Nebraska. I see myself making better blocks and giving a lot better effort and putting it all on the line for this game."

Smith leads the Buffs with a 20.5-yards-per-catch average and has been the big-play threat when coaches choose to throw the ball deep. Like most freshmen, he has struggled to master the entire play book and coaches have used him in a rotation with other receivers.

Smith said not finding his way into the end zone didn't bother him all season until after the Buffs' last game at Iowa State, a demoralizing 31-28 defeat in which the Buffs gave up a 21-0 lead.

"I'm definitely going to try to do a lot better, average two a game next year and that will make up for it," he said.

Wheatley out

Senior cornerback Terrence Wheatley ruled himself out of Friday's game on Tuesday after attempting to practice and realizing his is still too limited by a fractured big toe on his left foot.

Coach Dan Hawkins wasn't ready to commit to Wheatley not playing, but he said he has confidence in the players behind Wheatley on the depth chart. Junior Gardner McKay is listed second on the depth. Another option is sophomore Cha'pelle Brown, who has served as the Buffs' nickel back.

"It's football, that's part of it," Hawkins said. "Everybody else will need to step up and fill it in if he can't go."

Wheatley will leave the program ranked second in career interceptions with 14. CU does not include bowl statistics in its official statistics. Wheatley said he expects to be completely healthy within another two weeks.

"I'm not going to go out there and be ineffective to the point where I just hurt the team," Wheatley said.

Academic honors

The Big 12 Conference named 13 members of the CU football team to the Academic All-Big 12 Team.

Seven Buffs were named to the first team, which requires a grade-point average of 3.2 or higher. Those players are Ben Burney, Kevin Eberhart, Byron Ellis, George Hypolite, Bret Smith, Nate Solder and Dusty Sprague.

Six Buffs earned second-team honors, which means they produced a GPA between 3.0 and 3.19. Those players are Jake Behrens, Tyson Devree, Matt DiLallo, Jordon Dizon, Marquez Herrod and Tyler Polumbus.



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cu football

Seniors saying farewell

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

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BOULDER — A farm boy at heart, Colorado senior wide receiver Dusty Sprague always can joke that he became the black sheep of the family — make that, black-and-gold sheep — by playing football for the Buffaloes. Two older brothers attended Colorado State.

"I woke up one morning and told my dad, 'Colorado is where I'm going.' This is where I was supposed to be," said Sprague, who along with 14 other CU seniors will make their final appearance at Folsom Field on Friday against Nebraska. They will exchange hugs and handshakes, perhaps some tears.

"It's going to be emotional," senior offensive tackle Tyler Polumbus said.

"These guys have been my football brothers, and there's a chance I may never see some of them

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after this," senior linebacker Jordon Dizon added. "We've been through a lot together."

They didn't knowingly sign up for a recruiting scandal, a change in head coaches, losses to Oklahoma and Texas by a combined score of 112-6 in Big 12 championship games and a 2-10 record in 2006 that was the program's worst in 22 years. Controversy and confusion

became as much a part of their playing days as wins and losses.

"Even if I could, I wouldn't go back and change a thing," said Sprague, who had his best season (43 catches) as a sophomore. "I've had a lot of awesome experiences. Some people may call them bad experiences, but I call them good xperiences. I've learned a lot about who I am. It's stuff I can carry on through real life. I'm grateful for that."

There have been good times, as well. Two Big 12 North titles. Shutting out Oklahoma State 34-0 in Stillwater. A two-game sweep of Texas Tech. A 4-1 record against Colorado State. Marked improvement this season, including a headline-grabbing, come-from-behind victory in September over then-No. 3 Oklahoma.

Beating Nebraska on Friday to gain bowl eligibility would be huge.



Wide receiver Dusty Sprague, a senior from Holyoke making a 15-yard touchdown catch in CU's 27-24 upset of Oklahoma in September, says he has had "a lot of awesome experiences. ... I'm grateful for that." (Kathryn Scott Osler, The Denver Post)

"The seniors have had a lot thrown at us," Polumbus said. "When that happens, you can either crawl under a rock or step up like a man and show the world what you're really about."

Perhaps out of necessity, the senior class produced an inordinate number of strong leaders. After each practice this week, a senior has been called to stand up and address the squad.

"The thing that strikes me about this senior class," offensive line coach Jeff Grimes said, "is how willing they've been to do everything we've asked of them. Sometimes when guys face challenging times they throw up their hands. Sometimes they give up on the coaches. To their credit, that didn't happen with this group."

Footnotes. Two other CU seniors — wideout Alvin Barnett and quarterback Bernard Jackson — were academically ineligible this season. Barnett could return in 2008 for a fifth year of eligibility. Jackson's college career is finished. . . . CU coach Dan Hawkins said Tuesday he has not completely ruled out the possibility that senior cornerback Terrence Wheatley (foot) will play Friday, but called his availability doubtful.

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Wheatley rules himself out of game

Fractured foot will keep Buffs cornerback on sideline Friday

By Patrick Ridgell

Longmont Times-Call

BOULDER — The Colorado Buffaloes look like they won't have cornerback Terrence Wheatley on Friday against Nebraska.

Wheatley said Tuesday following CU's practice he will not play Friday against the Cornhuskers (10 a.m., Ch. 7). Wheatley planned to test his broken foot in the practice, but said he did not. The hairline fracture he suffered Nov. 3 returning a kick against Missouri continues to hinder him, and at this time, trying to run is a "lost cause."

"I guess it'll sink in more once the game starts," Wheatley said Tuesday. "But it's real disappointing. I really haven't said much today, I really haven't talked to anyone today."

After talking with the doctors and thinking about, I can't do anything. I can't run, I can't push off, I can't cut. I would be no help to the team."

If CU (5-6, 3-4 Big 12) beats Nebraska and receives a bowl invitation, Wheatley said he believes he will be able to play. If not, Wheatley, who leads the Big 12 in interceptions and has battled other injuries in his career, is through as a Buffalo.

"I don't think you can really compensate for no Terrence Wheatley," senior defensive end Alonzo Barrett said.

"I think he's the best corner in the nation. You can replace him, but it's not going to be the same. Cha'pelle Brown and Gardner McKay and Jimmy Smith are going to rotate in and fill his void. Those young guys really have to step up."

McKay started for Wheatley on Nov. 10 at Iowa State. Brown remained the defense's nickel back.

CU's pass defense figures to face a test Friday. With Joe Ganz at quarterback, the Cornhuskers have thrown for 915 yards and 11 touchdowns in their past two games.

Receiver Maurice Purify, the uncle of former CU running back Bobby Purify, enters Friday after his best two-game stretch with Nebraska. He topped 100 yards in each, and he averages 14.7 yards a catch.

CU head coach Dan Hawkins said Monday he expected Wheatley to play, but called Wheatley's chances "doubtful" on Tuesday.

"Everybody else will need to step up and fill in if he can't go," Hawkins said.

FAMILIAR FACES: Nebraska offensive coordinator and quarterback coach Shawn Watson is in his second year on the job in Lincoln. He worked in similar roles at CU from 1999 to 2005.

Nebraska's receivers coach, Ted Gilmore, in his third season. He worked on Gary Barnett's staff at CU in 2003 and 2004.

Both helped recruit several Buffs who'll play Friday. It's unclear how their insights will impact the game, but it's an interesting question to ponder.

"I don't know if it means more to them, but they have a lot of insight on (CU) because they recruited a lot of those kids," Ganz said. "They have a lot of insight on the type of personnel they have, what kind of kids they are and what kind of athletes they are. That helps us out a lot, but their coaching staff is gone, so they can't really help us prepare (with) inside information.

"It probably means a lot to them. They once coached there and it meant a lot to them last year. I think coach Watson got Gatorade dumped over his head when we beat them last year. It means a lot to those guys, just like it means a lot to us."

Said CU linebacker Jordon Dizon: "We don't really think about that as an advantage. On the flip side (Watson) knows all of us, he knows us all personally and he watched us for two years so he knows our weaknesses. He knows I jump on short routes, he knows that sometimes we leave the middle open; he knows that, and he knows our defense.

"I know that he was here for two years with me, but the offense they run this year is different from the offense they ran last year. So you can't really anticipate what they are going to run because they are a complex offense.

"Thinking back to my sophomore year, I got dinged in the head too much, so I can't really remember that much."

EXTRA POINTS: Hawkins said CU will host a "few" recruits this weekend, but the Thanksgiving holiday and high school football playoffs will keep the number down. ... Hawkins said his team will practice outside today, regardless of the weather. ... As of 4 p.m. Tuesday, 1,934 tickets remained for the game. Patrick Ridgell can be reached at pridgell@times-call.com.