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Colorado faces challenge of staying sharp, focused

By Patrick Ridgell
Longmont Times-Call

BOULDER — Colorado has yet to begin earnest preparations for Alabama and the Independence Bowl. But its coordinators have studied film of the Crimson Tide, and they are impressed.

"They are big and fast," offensive coordinator Mark Helfrich said. "They are a very fast defense and very sound defense in terms of what they do schematically. They're a good tackling team.

"They make you make plays. There's nothing that really just jumps out at you that you can do this, this and this."

Helfrich and defensive coordinator Mark Collins stayed in Boulder last week while most of the coaching staff recruited out of town. Collins said similar things about Alabama's defense.

"I think they're a typical SEC team," he said. "They're big, physical; they have fast players. They play very sound football. It's going to be a challenge, a huge challenge."

The game is 20 days away, and finals loom. Coach Dan Hawkins had the team use more live drills Sunday in an effort to keep players sharp. They won't practice again until Friday.

"I wanted to get after them a little bit," Hawkins said. "It's been my experience with this thing in the past, you want to keep them sharp and you want to keep them polished. But you have to be careful. If you go too long, in my experience, without doing a little bit of stuff, that's not good."

Linebacker Jordon Dizon didn't mind. After flying all Friday night to return to Colorado from Orlando, he slept about 90 minutes and practiced Saturday morning. On Sunday, he wasn't wearing the same blue jersey in practice that he donned in recent weeks due to, he said, a sore shoulder, neck and knee.

The hitting, Dizon said, is good.

"It can't be like the first day of camp every time," he said. "If you don't hit for a week and then you hit for a day, you get headaches. I have to get back in the groove again."

Helfrich said coaches will begin putting in some of the game plan Friday when practices begin again.

NEW COMMITMENT: Shaun Mohler, a 6-foot-3, 225-pound linebacker at Orange Coast College in California, committed to CU this weekend while on an official visit, according to Rivals.com.

Mohler was formally a Nebraska commitment but reconsidered after Bill Callahan's firing. The four-star prospect will have three seasons to play two and is not expected to finish his junior college coursework until May.

EXTRA POINTS: Dizon said he weighs 215 pounds. While he stressed his focus is on the bowl (Dec. 30, 6 p.m., ESPN) and not his NFL prospects, he said he wants to weigh 230 and retain his speed next year when he's a pro. "If I make it," Dizon said. ... Asked if he anticipates any academic problems, Hawkins said, "You never know. ... You're always on thin ice there." The coach said the problems Marcus Burton and Bernard Jackson encountered will be pointed out. Both missed 2007 due to academics. ... Arizona cornerback Antoine Cason, the winner of the 2007 Thorpe Award, is the cousin of CU defensive end Alonzo Barrett.



Colorado linebacker Jordon Dizon and the Buffs will play Alabama in the Independence Bowl in 20 days. The team's challenge is to stay sharp and in game shape in the days leading up to the game in Shreveport, La. **Times-Call**

file/Joshua Buck