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## Wheatley one glad CU grad

**The cornerback gets his degree and returns from a broken foot for the bowl.**

By Natalie Meisler  
The Denver Post

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Terrence Wheatley is one of seven fifth-year seniors getting degrees today at the University of Colorado.

**BOULDER** — Big 12 Conference referees cannot throw a penalty flag for a celebration dance today on Terrence Wheatley.

The "end zone" for Wheatley is the University of

Colorado winter commencement ceremony. And Wheatley is just happy to be able to do a dance when he receives his degree.

But he won't.

"It's not my style," Wheatley said.

His uniform today will be a cap and gown. He wasn't in full uniform for the senior ritual that took place last month in front of 51,403 fans for the Nebraska finale at Folsom Field. The cornerback limped out on a broken left foot, wearing a jersey over street clothes.

"I was trying not to look too pitiful," he said this week.

The pain only intensified when the Buffs trailed 35-24 at halftime. One of his replacements, freshman Jimmy Smith, returned an interception for a touchdown, igniting a 34-point run to land CU's Independence Bowl invitation.

"It's a bummer if you end your college career on the sidelines," CU coach Dan Hawkins said.

Wheatley broke his foot Nov. 3 during the 55-10 loss to Missouri. He's still not sure how or when it happened, because he continued to play after he felt something wrong. But when the tape was cut off and adrenaline from the game subsided. "That whole night wasn't too cool," Wheatley said.

X-rays confirmed the fracture, and he sat out

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that week when Iowa State came from 21-0 behind to win 31-28. The training staff had tried to work up some braces to get him on the field, but Wheatley knew it wasn't to be.

"It was frustrating," he said. "Ultimately the risk and reward at the personal level was not that good. If I couldn't run it would be kind of a waste of time and I couldn't help the team."

Wheatley helped the team enough in the first 10 games to repeat for first-team all-Big 12 honors. He won conference and national defensive player of the week laurels for his three-interception performance against Texas Tech. He opened the season with an interception in overtime to set up CU's 31-28 win over Colorado State.

"He's an awesome, great player and a great kid with a lot of energy," Hawkins said. "Obviously he's one of our better players, one of our leaders."

He is tied for third with Dick Anderson for CU career interceptions (14).

Not bad for a defensive back who underwent four surgeries on his hand, which now holds a collection of metal.

Through it all, Wheatley kept his humor. He called the foot injury an attempt to branch out from his usual hand problems.

"It makes everything that much better in the end," Wheatley said. "Everyone is weirded out that I'm not really that mad about it or that

upset about it. Being mad wouldn't change anything."

Wheatley returned to practice last week and was surprised his conditioning was better than he expected, although he wasn't expecting much. He figures he's catching a break with the bowl taking place at sea level in Louisiana.

"Get ready for game is my main focus," he said. "The NFL combine and the Senior Bowl are on the backburner. I want to end my college career right. After the game is over I can start stressing and worrying about everything."

And, of course, it doesn't hurt to have his career end in a full circle. Wheatley said Alabama recruited the Texan out of Plano East until Dennis Franchione bolted for Texas A&M. Wheatley was ready to commit to A&M but then didn't hear from Franchione.

Wheatley's return to the lineup at least cuts the stress level for Hawkins and defensive tackle George Hypolite.

"Put him on an island; he's going to make plays and be just fine," Hypolite said. "He'll get us off the field when we need a big play. You really can't replace a guy like that, especially on short notice. Having him back does wonders for our defense."

## Footnotes.

Six other fifth-year seniors were scheduled to graduate today, including DE Alonzo Barrett, TE

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Tyson DeVree, SS Lionel Harris, OT Edwin Harris,  
OT Tyler Polumbus and WR Dusty Sprague.

Natalie Meisler: 303-954-1295 or  
[nmeisler@denverpost.com](mailto:nmeisler@denverpost.com)

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