



Colorado football Buffs aim at fixing ground woes

Changes across offensive line could come this week

By Kyle Ringo Camera Sports Writer
Monday, September 17, 2007

The Colorado football program hasn't been operating with a full complement of offensive linemen over the past three seasons and it might have finally caught up with the Buffs.

Fewer bodies means less competition after all, and at times during that span at CU, offensive line depth has been downright pitiful. The Buffs had only six healthy offensive linemen in spring practices this year before adding a slew of true freshmen along the line this fall.

CU has been unable to establish anything resembling consistency in the running game in its past two outings, but offensive line coach Jeff Grimes hasn't felt comfortable turning to any of his young talent.

That could change this week. Grimes was the last coach off the practice field Sunday night because he spent about 10 minutes speaking with true freshmen Ryan Miller and Kai Maiava.

Grimes identified those two players as the most likely candidates to break into the lineup — Miller at right tackle and Maiava most likely at guard. But he also cautioned there are no quick fixes to what ails the Buffs on the ground.

So far this season, CU's five starters have played every offensive play. It's a group that includes senior tackles Tyler Polumbus and Edwin Harrison, center Daniel Sanders, who had played guard prior to this season, and first-year starters Devin Head and Wes Palazzi at guards.

CU has rushed 51 times for a total of 5 yards over the past two games against talented Arizona State and Florida State defenses. The Buffs managed minus-27 yards Saturday in the home opener against the Seminoles, but Grimes said he never considered making a change in his line because he doesn't believe any of his reserves have proven they are ready to play.

"I'm trying to push some young guys into action," Grimes said. "If they're going to do it, then they've got to step up and take a hold of it. That hasn't happened yet."

Coaches plan to challenge the offense this week and create more competition for playing time. Offensive coordinator Mark Helfrich, who has sat through a lot of bad offensive performances in his first 15 games in Boulder, said Saturday's loss to the Seminoles was one of the most frustrating he has endured.

"We're going to split the reps a little bit more with some guys and try to light a fire up front and at tailback," Helfrich said. "We've got to create competition to where guys are going to learn that they have

to play consistently and physically and finish. We're not that far away."

Grimes and Polumbus, the offensive team captain, put the blame for the Buffs' struggles on the ground on the line, but Helfrich said tight ends, wide receivers and the tailbacks also have played poorly at times.

Grimes is in his first season as CU's offensive line coach. He is the third man to hold that title in the past three seasons. He downplayed any effects the transition to his style might be having on his players.

While the Buffs are struggling to find room to run, Grimes assessment of the team's pass blocking was a little better. He said the Buffs have been OK in that area, but still have plenty of room for improvement.

The line allowed quarterback Cody Hawkins to be sacked only twice against the Seminoles. The relatively solid protection led to Hawkins producing his first 300-yard passing day.

"There is no doubt we've got to run the ball better or else it's going to be tough to win some games," Polumbus said. "With that said, I do think we protected Cody pretty well. He only got hit once or twice."

Several bad shotgun snaps from center Daniel Sanders and the two times quarterback Hawkins was sacked contributed minus-46 yards in the run game. Sanders is relatively new to shotgun snaps. He is playing center for the first time since high school this season and never shotgun snapped in a game before this year.

"It's frustrating because you've got a guy who will snap 100 of them just right and then he'll foul one up," Grimes said. "He and I have had that conversation a couple times.

"It's a matter of doing things the same way all the time. It's no different than a kicker or a guy with a golf swing or a guy batting in baseball. You've got to do things consistently the right way. "

The Buffs' longest run against Florida State was a seven-yard burst by true freshman Brian Lockridge.

Correction

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cu football

Freshman's quick strike

Josh Smith provides CU a deep passing threat

By Tom Kensler
Denver Post Staff Writer

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Boulder - Colorado wide receiver Josh Smith didn't want to appear happy after the game late Saturday night. After all, the Buffaloes lost 16-6 to Florida State.

But it sure was fun for the true freshman to finally get on the field. Smith missed the first two games while healing a bruised kidney.

"We were on ESPN. That's crazy," Smith said. "What can I say, the worldwide leader in sports. I love competing on a national basis."

Smith, a 6-foot, 180-pound speedster, caught two passes for 40 yards, including CU's longest play of the game - a 38-yard pass from quarterback Cody Hawkins in the third quarter.

Smith streaked past Seminoles cornerback Michael Ray Garvin down the left sideline. That had to feel sweet, considering that Garvin runs sprints for the national champion Florida State track team. Smith played high school football in Moorpark, Calif., but was born in Tallahassee,

Fla., not far from the FSU campus.

"I really can't explain how good that felt," Smith

Colorado Football

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said of the long reception. "I had to give (the Seminoles defense) a taste - 'Hey, I'm just as fast as you are.'"

Colorado coaches had said last week that Smith might not be used extensively against Florida State, figuring the rookie might be a bit rusty after his injury. Not only was it a surprise for Buffs fans to see Smith in the starting lineup, but his number was called on the game's first play.

Running from left to right, Smith took a handoff from Hawkins. FSU's defense wasn't fooled, however, and stopped Smith for a 2-yard loss. Smith said he had been informed by coaches Thursday that the end-around play would be CU's first call from scrimmage.

"When they told me, I got excited about it," Smith said. "It was an honor to be out there."

Look for Smith to be an integral component of CU's game plan in each game. He is one of the few players on the roster fast enough to stretch a defense.

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"Josh came in and did some really good things," CU coach Dan Hawkins said.

"The timing between me and Cody will improve," Smith said. "We just have to step it up."

Smith followed Florida State while growing up and dreamed of playing for the Seminoles. He has a new favorite, however.

"I really love our team's colors - the black, that's way too cool," Smith said, grinning.

Footnotes

True freshman tailback Brian Lockridge made his debut. He netted 2 yards on four carries. ...

CU's 54 pass attempts tied for second-most in school history, behind 55 against Washington State and Kansas, both in 2003. Dan Hawkins said he would rather see fewer attempts and some productivity from the running game, which netted minus-27 yards, including sacks and fumble recoveries. ...

Offensive line coach Jeff Grimes said Sunday the chances of true freshmen Ryan Miller and Kai Maiava making their college debuts Saturday against Miami (Ohio) have improved.

EYE ON ... THE REDHAWKS

MIAMI (OHIO) AT COLORADO, 1:30 p.m., Saturday

For the record: Miami is 1-2, 1-0 in the Mid-

American Conference.

Streaking: Saturday marked the 112th game in the Miami vs. Cincinnati football series - billed as the oldest rivalry west of the Allegheny Mountains. Cincinnati's 47-10 victory was the biggest in the series since a 44-0 Bearcats victory in 1940.

Who's hot: Sophomore quarterback Daniel Raudabaugh, a 6-foot-4, 216-pound Texan, relieved starter Mike Kokal and threw for 240 yards against Cincinnati.

Who's not: The RedHawks' secondary allowed a backup quarterback (Cincinnati's Dustin Grutza) to pass for 290 yards and two TDs. The Bearcats' regular QB, Ben Mauk, sat out the game with a sore shoulder.

Key stat: Against Cincinnati, the RedHawks lost a fumble, had three interceptions and a blocked punt, and allowed three sacks.

FYI: Miami athletic director Brad Bates, a former Michigan player, was CU's head strength coach from 1985-89 under Bill McCartney.

Injury report: No significant injuries.

Coachspeak: "We go to Colorado next week. They have Florida State tonight, so maybe they'll overlook us." - Miami coach Shane Montgomery, after his team's Saturday afternoon loss to Cincinnati

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Changes loom on offense

Bufs' mistake-prone O-line due for overhaul this week

*By Patrick Ridgell
The Daily Times-Call*

BOULDER — Two lousy weeks in a row look like they'll prompt change in Colorado's offense.

Coordinator Mark Helfrich said Sunday evening, the night after CU lost, 16-6, to Florida State, the competition along the offensive line will be re-opened this week while the Bufs prepare to host Miami (Ohio) on Saturday (1:30 p.m., no TV). And the running game, which produced minus-27 yards against the Seminoles and 32 yards the prior week at Arizona State, will be an area of "re-emphasis" in the days to come.

CU has scored two offensive touchdowns the past two weeks. Granted, several freshmen are playing major roles on offense, and the opponents haven't exactly been slouches. But coaches aren't happy, and they see lots of problems to fix.

"We had some mistakes in the game that we're up front," Helfrich said. "We had some mistakes that were the tight end. We had some mistakes that were the receiver. We had some mistakes that were the tailback.

"When you watch the film, it's very frustrating because there's a lot of stuff that ... are one-man breakdowns. And those get you beat."

Said offensive line coach Jeff Grimes: "I think everything starts with the offensive line. We'll shoulder the blame with the fact that it all starts with us."

CU has played the same five linemen on every offensive snap in 2007. Grimes said prior to Saturday night, the coaches decided none of the true freshmen offensive linemen who are almost ready would play, unless there was an injury. Grimes said Kai Maiava and Ryan Miller are still the nearest to playing, and their performances in practice this week will determine what they do Saturday.

"For them to get in a game, they have to prove to me in practice during the week that they know who to block, and they know how to do it," Grimes said. "Based on practice last week, they didn't show me they were ready to do that."

Miller is working mainly at right tackle, and Maiava can play either guard spot or center, Grimes said.

Helfrich said they're still waiting on guard Erick Faatagi, who could increase the competition level quickly. Helfrich said he doesn't know when they'll learn Faatagi's academic status.

Freshman tailback Brian Lockridge made his debut Saturday, carrying four times for two yards. Helfrich said Lockridge "plays tailback the fastest" of anyone on the roster. Now that he's seen the field, he figures to fill a more prominent role. Lockridge said that's good.

"My redshirt is gone, now I have to come out and play harder and see what I can do to contribute to the team this year," he said.

Grimes said in Saturday's first half, seven of CU's 13 first-down runs were efficient, which to him means they went for four yards or more. Sacks and shotgun snaps that eluded quarterback Cody Hawkins skewed the statistics, but they

were still bad.

“We obviously have to do a better job in the run game, and that’s a team thing,” Grimes said.

The bad snaps, from center Daniel Sanders, perplexed Grimes.

“You have a guy that’ll snap 100 of them just right, then he’ll foul one up,” Grimes said. “It’s a matter of doing things the same way all the time.”

Extra points: Terrence Wheatley said he took a helmet to a knee late Saturday night and suffered a bruise. He did not practice Sunday evening, but expects to play against Miami. He said the knee is stable, but stiff and sore and he’ll “just take it easy for now.”... CU will get linebacker Michael Sipili and defensive lineman Chris Perri back this week. They served three-game suspensions for off-field incidents that happened over the summer. ... CU’s third-down efficiency on defense has improved. The Buffs held FSU to 1-for-13. ... Of FSU’s 55 plays, 36 went for three yards or less. ... Saturday’s 11:46 p.m. end marked the latest a game ever extended in Boulder.

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