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cu football

Deehan mature beyond his years

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

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BOULDER — Weighing in this week at 6-feet-6 and 245 pounds, freshman tight end Ryan Deehan looks as physically ready to go as any newcomer in Colorado's August camp.

Deehan also is about as mature for an 18-year-old as anybody could be. Facing a catastrophe early in life will do that.

Last October, the Deehan family lost its Poway, Calif., home in the Witch Creek Fire, just north of San Diego. Ryan was at home when the family was evacuated.

"It was pretty scary," Deehan recalled Wednesday morning after a two-hour practice. "Two days after we left, our house was gone. That was tough.

"There was a fire four years before that came within a third of a mile, so we thought we might be OK. Then it was gone."

The family was able to move some possessions out of the house ahead of the fire. But they have not yet begun to rebuild.

Colorado Football

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- practice

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"We're renting right now, and I'm not sure we'll build another house there," Deehan said. "We've had some problems with the insurance company."

While adjusting to college football, that's a lot on a freshman's mind.

"I think it has helped me learn to deal with stuff," Deehan said.

"It's part shock, part maturation," agreed CU coach Dan Hawkins, who was recruiting Deehan before the fires. "It's very tough on anybody when you're young and you deal with adversity. . . . It forces you to grow up maybe a little sooner than you'd like to."

Deehan was considered one of CU's top signees in the 2008 recruiting class, earning a four-star ranking from [Rivals.com](#) as the nation's ninth-best tight end prospect. He chose the Buffs over Oregon and Arizona State.

Colorado also signed two other tight ends in February: Will Pericak (6-4, 245) from Boulder High School and Ryan Wallace (6-5, 230) from Bowling Green, Ky. Each has made some nice catches during their first two days of practice.

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Footnote.

Offensive guard Mike Ittis, a 6-3, 305-pound redshirt freshman from Sarasota, Fla., injured a knee late in Tuesday's practice. He underwent an MRI on Wednesday morning and learned he has a torn ACL in his right leg.

Ittis was in the mix for a starting spot at offensive guard until he got tangled up in practice Tuesday, the first day of two-a-days.

There's an outside possibility he could be back by the Big 12 championship, he said.

"It was a broken play and I got tangled up," Ittis said. "I'm going to get stronger and get back as soon as I can."

Said Hawkins: "I just bleed so much for these guys when anything happens to them."

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Thursday, August 07, 2008

TIMES-CALL

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WR's star on the rise

Smith's talent taking over

*By Patrick Ridgell**Longmont Times-Call*

BOULDER — The poor defensive back lined up across Josh Smith must have had no idea what was coming.

The ball was snapped. Smith faked left, then ran right while the defender fell far behind. Smith dashed down field before looking back to see the ball float into his outstretched hands. He glided to the end zone.

Was that catch and run that unfolded Tuesday afternoon on Colorado's practice field a preview of things to come in Smith's immediate future?

Possibly.

As CU receivers coach Eric Kiesau said, Smith, a sophomore, is a year further along and much more confident in what he's doing. He's no longer thinking so much. Instincts are taking over.

Kiesau wouldn't say Smith is on the verge of something special. He didn't deny it, either.

"I never want to say that — he still has a ways to go — but the whole world is in front of that kid," Kiesau said. "If that kid wants it, if he works hard, if he trusts in what we're doing, he can do anything he wants on a football field."

CU might need him to do a lot on the field in 2008. Kiesau called CU's receiver depth better than last year's, and solid, but it took a hit when Markques Simas didn't make grades. Walk-ons like Steve Melton and Jason Espinoza could end up on the field a lot.

Another concern is Kendrick Celestine, a sophomore who's finishing two summer school courses this week.

"Right now, for him, we're trying to get him to focus on school," Kiesau said. "When he comes out to practice, he's doing well, but he has to get these last two classes done. I think right now his mind is so locked in to getting the school work done. He'll be able to unleash it on Saturday."

Asked if Celestine's academic eligibility is borderline, Kiesau said, "No, he's doing very well. In fact he just told me (Tuesday) he got three papers back and he got all 'As' on all three of them." Kiesau said no other receiver is in danger of becoming ineligible.

Whether depth becomes an issue hinges on several things, not the least of which are injuries and production. Kiesau said there will be fewer circumstances in 2008 that call for wholesale changes in personnel prior to a play. Instead, CU's faster-paced offense will just "let guys go and play," Kiesau said.

That bodes well for the athletic Smith, whose big-play abilities are obvious. He missed the first two games of 2008 with a bruised kidney he suffered running into a wall inside Folsom Field during an August scrimmage. He played in the final 11 games, started four times, and led the team with an average of 19.6 yards per catch in 2008.



Colorado receiver Josh Smith cools down during a break from practice in Boulder on Wednesday in Boulder. **Joshua Buck/Times-Call**

If there is a difference in him, Smith said, it's that as camp begins this week, he does not feel nervous.

"I've done it too much to ever get the butterflies again," he said. "The way I feel is, like, this year is a whole better experience than last year as far as familiarity and comfort. Smith also said depth won't be an issue with Simas' absence.

"The learning curve is better. There are a lot more guys who know what they're doing better than last year," he said.

"In my opinion, his absence is big, but I'm sure Markques would agree we can get it done with talent we have at the wide receiver position."

Will opponents double team Smith? That could happen if he starts to shine. But Kiesau said doubling Smith will open opportunities for others. He listed every running back, including Smith's nephew, running back, Darrell Scott, from whom big things are expected immediately.

"Even if they try to load the box to stop Darrell, then Josh and the outside guys are going to have fun," Kiesau said.

"We've got some balance now where teams can't hone in on what we're doing."

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TIMES-CALL

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O-line depth takes a hit

Knee injury sidelines promising Iltis for season

By Patrick Ridgell

Longmont Times-Call

BOULDER — Mike Iltis, a redshirt freshman guard who was challenging for a starting spot on Colorado's offensive line, tore his right ACL in practice on Tuesday, the first day of camp. He is out for the season.

Iltis had an MRI Wednesday. He revealed the diagnosis before the afternoon practice.

"It's all good," he said while limping to the field. "I'm not going to let it get me down. I just have to come back next year."

Said CU coach Dan Hawkins: "I just bleed so much for these guys whenever anything happens to them. He's handling it great. He's very positive."

Hawkins said the injury happened on a "total freak play" when Iltis was "out in space." Iltis called it a broken play that had been whistled dead. As he tried to slow down, he got tangled up with a teammate, his knee went one way and his body twisted the other.

"It's hard, but things happen, it's football," Iltis said. "You have to be prepared for stuff like that. My thoughts now are I have to get better mentally and physically." Iltis said surgery is being determined. He said he'd like to return by any bowl CU might reach this winter.

He is from Sarasota, Fla. He said he will not travel with the team to Jacksonville, Fla, next month when it plays Florida State.

CU's depth along the offensive line is being tested. Two players — guard Erick Faatagi and tackle Sione Tau — were deemed ineligible prior to camp. Kai Maiava, a starting guard in 2007, transferred last spring.

Offensive line coach Jeff Grimes said no decisions have been made yet on who'll redshirt. It appears unlikely Max Tuioti-Mariner will.

Grimes said he'd like tackle Bryce Givens, a Mullen High product listed at 250 pounds, to take the year to get bigger and stronger. If injuries and other problems continue to mount, Grimes might have his decisions made for him.

BURTON'S BACK: Junior linebacker Marcus Burton is listed on the preseason depth chart as the starter at one of the inside linebacker spots. He said he feels blessed to be back after missing 2007 with grades. He also said he feels comfortable in the defense. He said he has to finish summer school courses, but expects to be eligible.

One other thing: Burton is weighing 260 pounds these days. Is that a problem?

"I'm losing weight, but coaches say as long as I can move, that they're good with it," Burton said. "It's just a matter of conditioning."

EXTRA POINTS: CU is practicing east and west on two fields, but will change in a few days back to one field that

goes in another direction. Hawkins said the change is being done to preserve the grass. "Toward the end of last year, it was like we were playing AVP volleyball out here. So we're trying to avoid that," he said. ... Linebacker Lynn Katoa practiced Monday morning. One play that drew cheers from teammates and observers came during one-on-one passing drills, when Katoa covered touted running back Darrell Scott, and the two ended up wrestling for a reception. Scott won. ... Hawkins moved up Wednesday afternoon's workout by two hours to avoid bad weather. ... Today is media day for CU football and CU's fall Olympic sports. The team is scheduled to hold practices at 9:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. today.

Patrick Ridgell can be reached at pridgell@times-call.com



Cabral excited over latest LB crop

Buff assistant has talented class to break in

By Kyle Ringo
Thursday, August 7, 2008

The loudest noise heard on the Colorado football practice fields during the first two days of training camp came from 52-year-old linebackers coach Brian Cabral when he stepped on the field for the first time in his 20th season as a member of the coaching staff.

A scream erupted from Cabral whose hands were cupped around his mouth for a moment Tuesday morning. He was happy to be back in his element facing what he calls one of the biggest challenges of his career, getting the most out of a deep and talented group of linebackers.

Earlier this year Cabral said the four linebackers in the 2008 recruiting class -- Lynn Katoa, Jon Major, Shaun Mohler and Doug Rippy -- made up the most talented group to enter the program together during his two-decades in Boulder. He said it was be his responsibility to help them reach their full potential and it's a challenge he relishes.

The players have already taken some of the pressure off Cabral by studying the defense during the spring and summer and working hard to arrive at camp in good shape. That inspired another bold statement from a man who has sent multiple players to careers in the National Football League and coached a Butkus Award winner and two Butkus runners-up.

"The group as a whole is further along as an incoming class than probably any group I've ever had," Cabral said.

Despite their ability and readiness to compete, it remains to be seen if any of the new linebackers will earn playing time this fall. It is clear Katoa won't have a chance because he is ineligible after a spring semester arrest and suspension prevented him from earning enough credits to remain eligible.

Mohler is probably the most likely candidate to see the field, because he is a junior-college transfer and probably has the smallest learning curve with previous college experience.

Rippy is practicing at outside linebacker where the team already has senior Brad Jones and sophomore B.J. Beatty. Major is practicing at the same inside linebacker position as Mohler and fourth-year junior Marcus Burton, who many seem to have forgotten about after he missed last season with academic problems.

Burton was a standout in the spring leading the team in tackles in several scrimmages. He became a father and got married in the past year and those experiences on top of having football taken away have led him to take a more mature approach.

"I think for me the last year kind of helped me grow up a lot," Burton said. "You know, I was following some guys that I probably shouldn't have been following. It allowed me to see some perspective on why I was here and why I got recruited, which was to play football and get a degree."

Burton said he has gained confidence in the past six months because he is being allowed more freedom to roam in the defense. He hopes to become a starter for the first time since joining the program in 2005 from Channelview, Texas.

"I expect him to be eligible," Cabral said. "I expect him to compete for a starting position."

"I thought his spring was a learning experience. It was really the first time he got significant playing and practice time. He had a lot to learn and he learned a lot. He's come a long ways."

If Burton wins the starting job at the "Will" inside linebacker spot he would be Jordon Dizon's successor. Dizon led the Big 12 in tackles last season, was a runner-up for the Butkus Award and was drafted by the Detroit Lions. Burton said he learned a lot last season watching how Dizon conducted himself.

Burton said Cabral has talked to him about the similarities between Dizon and former CU Butkus Award winner Matt Russell.

"It's not really how they play the game, but it's how they prepare to play," Burton said. "Just watching him every day at practice, he was full speed. He was hurting just like we were hurting, but he had a bigger heart than a lot of guys."

Sorting out the linebacker situation over the next three weeks could come down to finding that quality in three or four guys.



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Buffs lose Iltis for season

Torn ACL sidelines lineman vying for playing time

By Kyle Ringo
Thursday, August 7, 2008

For the second year in a row, the Colorado football team lost a player to a season-ending injury on the first day of drills.

Coach Dan Hawkins learned Wednesday that when redshirt freshman guard Mike Iltis went to the ground on one of the final plays in the evening session Tuesday, Iltis had suffered a torn anterior cruciate ligament in his right knee. Iltis was a strong candidate for playing time this season among a group of six linemen vying for two open spots at guard.

Iltis, who joined the program in 2007 from Sarasota, Fla., said his feet got tangled with another player during a busted play and he was trying to slow down when his body went one way and his knee went the other. It is the first significant injury Iltis has suffered on the football field.

He will undergo surgery this month and doctors have told him he could be healthy for a postseason game, but it is unlikely coaches would choose to play him in just one game if he was available.

"It's hard, but things happen," Iltis said. "It's football and you have to be prepared for stuff like that. All I'm thinking about now is just thinking about getting better mentally, getting better physically and going through rehab with a 100 percent positive attitude and coming back better than I was."

Junior Devin Head is now the only player remaining from the pre-camp depth chart at left guard.

Prior to Iltis' injury the team learned senior Erick Faatagi is academically ineligible.

Losing Iltis and Faatagi forces truefreshman guard Max Tuioti-Mariner into the two-deep on the third day of training camp. Tuioti-Mariner has the type of talent that he might have earned a spot there soon enough anyway.

A year ago on the first day of training camp, walk-on wide receiver Cameron Ham suffered a season-ending broken leg that later required surgery

Celestine expected

to play

Sophomore wide receiver Kendrick Celestine acknowledged earlier this summer that he needed to do well in two summer courses to remain academically eligible this fall. Celestine earned a B in his first summer course and is finishing up the second class this week.

Wide receivers coach Eric Kiesau said Wednesday he expects Celestine to be eligible this fall and isn't concerned about depth in the receiving corps. Kiesau already lost one receiver this summer to academic problems when redshirt freshman Markques Simas was ruled ineligible

Kiesau is working with a group that includes Celestine, Patrick Williams, Josh Smith, Scotty McKnight, Cody Crawford, Jason Espinoza and Steve Melton. Kiesau said he is confident about the depth because while Espinoza and Melton are walk-ons, they have proven to be good hands people.

"Are they going to go out and take a 12-yard curl and go 80 yards for a touchdown? Probably not. But they are just good, solid guys," Kiesau said. "I know I can count on them. They will be productive and make plays."

True freshman wide receiver Chance Blackmon has been competitive in his first two practices as a Buff, but he might need a year in the program to gain weight and strength.

Notable

Hawkins said grounds crews will alternate the direction of the practice fields this year because the fields began to get too worn in certain spots last fall. The fields have run in an north-south alignment over the past four years, but they are aligned in an east-west direction to start camp. The new alignment gives visitors to camp the feel of watching from the sidelines instead of the end zone. ...

Sports information director Dave Plati said ticket sales are going well, noting that club seats in Folsom Field are sold out for the Big 12 opener against Texas. The West Virginia game is another popular ticket in the early going. ...

Hawkins moved Wednesday's evening practice up two hours to the afternoon to avoid forecasted rain and thunderstorms. It proved to be a good decision with tornado warnings and rain that hit during what would have been the evening practice session.



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Losses on line have Buffs looking thin

By B.G. Brooks

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BOULDER — If proficiency as a unit is achieved, the University of Colorado's offensive line might wind up branded with a nickname something on the order of "The Green Machine."

If proficiency proves elusive — it's not a possibility coach Jeff Grimes wants to consider — dropping "machine" and going with "green" will suffice.

The stockpiling of all those wide bodies that began two recruiting classes ago might have seemed overindulgent at the time, but the first two days of this preseason camp have proved otherwise.

Before the Buffaloes collectively stepped foot on the field Tuesday, senior right guard Erick Faatagi's career ended due to academic ineligibility. Faatagi, a 2006 transfer from El Camino (Calif.) College, never played a down at CU.

Redshirt freshman guard Mike Iltis, listed on the depth chart as being even with junior Devin Head and Faatagi on the right side, almost made it through Day 1. He suffered a knee injury near the end of the afternoon practice. An MRI exam Wednesday morning revealed he had either a torn anterior cruciate ligament or a broken fibula. He is expected to miss 4-8 weeks.

So for now, Head, who played in all 13 games last season, is the last man standing on the right side. Grimes likely will introduce one of the left guard candidates — redshirt freshmen Matthew Bahr, Shawn Daniels and Blake Behrens currently are stationed there — to the mix on right side.

There's also true freshmen Max Tuioti-Mariner, Ryan Dannewitz and Bryce Givens to consider, although Givens is listed at tackle and is a likely redshirt candidate, as is Dannewitz.

Whatever transpires among the youngsters to fill the guard positions, CU's other line starters likely will be sophomores Ryan Miller and Nate Solder at tackle — the sides they play still is being settled — and senior Daniel Sanders at center.

Grimes, who can be forgiven for at times thinking he's overseeing a day care center, admitted to being upset about Faatagi's ineligibility. But he says the fifth-year senior merely was in the mix of players competing for a starting position. Faatagi didn't come out of spring ball with any edge.

"The job was going to be wide open either way," he said. "Whether he was here or not, he was just another guy fitting into the mix. By no means had he proven he was the guy who deserved to be the starter. He had physical tools, but he certainly hadn't proven anything."

Grimes called the competition at both guard positions "wide open," with Head's starting experience (six games in 2007) still not enough to give him an edge.

In a Monday night meeting with his linemen, Grimes opened by re-emphasizing, "The best guys will play. Whether that ends up being a true freshman or a guy with more experience, time will tell."

Of Tuioti-Mariner, Grimes conceded there is "rust" evident from Tuioti-Mariner not playing his senior season (he was recovering from a knee injury). But, added Grimes, Tuioti-Mariner was impressive on Day 1 because of how coachable he was.

The 6-foot-4, 300-pounder from Corona, Calif., appeared to be a quick study, immediately adhering to Grimes' coaching and usually needing only one reminder about using proper technique.

Said Grimes: "He's a guy I believe is very eager to learn and wants to be coached the right way."

And Miller, who moved into the starting lineup about midway through his true freshman season, offered this observation: "I watched him pass blocking (Tuesday), and I've never seen a nastier player than Max. He wanted to rip guys' heads off . . . it was beautiful to watch, just gorgeous."

Tuioti-Mariner demurred when asked about his alleged on-field nastiness, saying missing his senior season left him hungry and humble, just wanting to play more once he arrived at CU.

As for possibly finding himself thrust into the competition at right guard, Tuioti-Mariner said, "We'll see . . . I just want to go with the flow."

ETC.: Coach Dan Hawkins called Wednesday morning's practice, which featured mostly newcomers with a sprinkling of veterans, "better . . . they looked like they were finding a groove." . . . Concerned about the possibility of fierce afternoon storms, Wednesday's second practice began at 2:30 p.m. rather than 4:30 p.m. . . . Hawkins kept his staff intact, a factor he called "such a big deal" due to his assistant's familiarity with what he expects and the players' comfort level with their position coaches. "It's immeasurable," Hawkins added . . . CU's grass practice fields have a different look. To help promote equal wear, they now run east-west rather than north-south . . . The Buffs' first day in full pads is Saturday, with the day's one practice scheduled from 4:30-6:30 p.m. Practices are open to the public through Aug. 17.

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