



Beefed-up line sets tone for Buffs

Upgrade in size, depth, talent raises hopes for success

By Ryan Thorburn
Sunday, August 10, 2008

The word of the Colorado football team's media day was:

Gi-freakin-normous.

It was the big man on campus -- 6-foot-7, 310-pound offensive tackle Ryan Miller -- who used the new adjective in a sentence when asked about the Buffs' prospects up front this fall.

"Coach (Dan) Hawkins has done such a great job of bringing in kids that are quality kids. And there are so many of them," Miller said. "Our O-line is going to be gifreakinnormous."

CU's coaching staff has been able to significantly upgrade the size, depth and talent on the offensive line over the last two years.

Three players -- Miller (right tackle), Nate Solder (left tackle) and Daniel Sanders (center) -- have established themselves as starters.

But there are still questions surrounding the unit that need to be answered in practice before the 2008 opener against Colorado State on Aug. 31 at Invesco Field.

At guard, CU has already lost redshirt freshman Mike Iltis (torn anterior cruciate ligament) and senior Erick Faatagi (academically ineligible) for the season. Both players were expected to challenge senior Devin Head at right guard entering training camp.

Redshirt freshmen Matthew Bahr, Shawn Daniels and Blake Behrens are listed as the top three candidates at left guard. True freshmen Ryan Dannewitz, Bryce Givens and Maxwell Tuioti-Mariner are also being given a serious look inside. "The good news is when I got here there weren't enough guys to compete. Now we've got enough bodies that we have some competition going on," CU offensive line coach Jeff Grimes said. "The pressure ends up making everybody else better."

Cody Hawkins sleeps well at night knowing that Miller and Solder -- two college sophomores who would fit right in, at least physically, in an NFL locker room -- are protecting him on the ends. But if one of these pillars of strength were to fall due to an injury it isn't clear at this point who would fill the rather large void.

David Clark (right) and Ethan Adkins (left), two more redshirt freshmen, are currently the backup tackles.

"That's a point of competition as well," Grimes said. "Typically, you have a third guy that can play tackle on either side. We're still in the position of determining who our third tackle will be."

The most experienced player breaking the huddle will be Sanders, a fifth-year senior with 23 starts under his belt. He will be counted on to quarterback the O-line as the Buffs will try to dictate the pace of the game against their opponents this season using a no-huddle offense.

"We just have to communicate faster because everything is happening faster. They have to know what they're doing a little bit better," Grimes said. "The fact that we're not huddling is one thing, but we're trying to push the tempo and go fast. By doing that it just forces them to really focus on talking on every play and knowing what they're doing fast enough that there's not any hesitation. ...

"We feel good about Sanders but we have to find a backup at center."

Sophomore Keenan Stevens is listed as the backup on the depth chart right now. Most of the young guards also get practice time at center to create a more versatile pool of candidates at the position.

Tuioti-Mariner, one of the most sought after recruits in the nation before suffering a serious knee injury in high school, is a very intriguing prospect.

The coaches have already seen glimpses of greatness in practice and believe it's only a matter of time before the 6-4, 300-pound talent cracks the starting lineup.

"I guess I'm getting better and better. I'm improving with my steps and how low I'm getting," said Tuioti-Mariner, who missed his senior season at Corona (Calif.) High School. "I've just got to get used to hitting again. And breathing. This is a different altitude, a different level."

Whether the offensive line is ready or not, there are great expectations for CU's running game with the arrival of super recruit Darrell Scott to headline an already impressive backfield.

Despite an overall lack of experience, it doesn't sound like the big guys up front are going to back away from the great expectations that this infusion of young talent has created.

Check that, gyfreakinnormous expectations.

"We've got five running backs that are, in my opinion, Heisman-caliber kids," Miller said. "You're starting to see little by little the pieces of this program coming together and it's exciting."



© 2006 Daily Camera and Boulder Publishing, LLC.



Colorado DE Hudgins hurt again

Senior expected to miss season with knee injury

By Kyle Ringo
Sunday, August 10, 2008

Some guys just can't catch a break. Drew Hudgins apparently is among them.

The Colorado defensive end did not practice Saturday in the first full-squad and fully padded session of training camp for the Buffs. When asked why Hudgins was on the sideline but not in pads, coach Dan Hawkins said the senior has a knee injury that will likely prevent him from playing this season.

If Hudgins is out, it will be the third season he has missed because of injury in his five years in college.

The 6-foot-4, 240-pound product of Spring Hill, Kan., spent three years at Highland Community College in Kansas, missing one year there because of a serious hamstring injury. He transferred to CU prior to last season but ruptured an Achilles tendon and missed the 2007 season.

After spending more than a year rehabilitating from the Achilles injury, Hudgins entered camp earlier this week excited about playing football again and hoping to compete for the starting spot at right defensive end.

Hudgins said he was not sure if the NCAA would award him a sixth year of eligibility at the end of the season so he planned to play this year as if it was his last. Now it might be.

With three seasons erased by injuries, Hudgins would be almost a lock for a sixth year if he chose to continue his career. Hawkins said that decision might not be made for awhile, but it will be made by Hudgins.

"It depends on what he wants to do," Hawkins said. "... I just feel bad for him. I mean that guy popping his Achilles, and then you guys are here too, I mean that guy comes every single day."

Come one,

come all

Several hundred fans watched Saturday's afternoon practice behind ropes along one side and one end line of the practice fields. Many wanted to see new members of the team for the first time and some just wanted to see how the team was progressing.

Some coaches around the country would never allow such access. Oklahoma coach Bob Stoops has opened practices in the past but has his two-time defending Big 12 champion Sooners practicing behind closed doors this year. Hawkins said he welcomes fans to practice every Sunday during the season and

keeps the first two weeks of training camp open for a variety of reasons.

Hawkins said it helps build a bigger fan base, it attracts people to campus and it helps his players who know they're being scrutinized but also get rewarded by cheers.

"No need to be that secretive really," Hawkins said.

Hawkins said there is always some concern about onlookers passing along information to future opponents and CU does have visitors to practice sign in, but Hawkins said policing that is an impossible fight.

"With society the way it is now, I don't know that you can keep all that on lock down unless we have a permanent indoor facility that we always went in and nobody got in," Hawkins said.

Hawkins on

coaches' poll

Hawkins is one of the 61 coaches participating in the USA Today coaches' poll this year. It is the seventh consecutive season Hawkins has been a voter in the poll, which was released this week.

One coach had the Buffs ranked somewhere in his poll, giving them a spot in the "others receiving votes" portion.

Hawkins is one of seven Big 12 coaches participating, the most from any conference. His former offensive coordinator at Boise State and the current Broncos head coach Chris Peterson is also a voter. Hawkins did not say if he voted for his team.

Sports information director Dave Plati assists Hawkins with his ballot each week. Hawkins said he is a proponent of the idea of waiting until mid-September to vote for the first time each year.

"We don't just throw it out there," Hawkins said. "We work on it and Dave always keeps me updated on what's going on. ... I try to do it in a responsible manner. It means a lot to me, and if I was one of the guys in the poll, I would want those guys to seriously think about it."

Notable

Hawkins said he will wait to the end of training camp to announce team captains, who will be selected by a vote by teammates. ... The Buffs practice twice today (1:45 p.m.-3:45 p.m. and 8-10 p.m.).



© 2006 Daily Camera and Boulder Publishing, LLC.

[Print page](#)[Close window](#)

Longmont, Colorado
Sunday, August 10, 2008

TIMES-CALL

Publish Date: 8/10/2008

Buff's planning block party

CU stressing pressure on punters

By Patrick Ridgell

Longmont Times-Call

BOULDER — Kent Riddle doesn't come across as the type who's prone to exaggerate.

So there must be something to it when he uses one word to describe how Colorado football is stressing punt blocking in camp.

"Huge," he said.

Why? Lots of reasons. The biggest, according to Riddle, CU's special teams coordinator, is when a team blocks a punt, it wins 75 percent of the time. He added the only statistic that predicts a better winning percentage is if a team scores a defensive touchdown.

Riddle coordinated Boise State's defenses before moving over to CU with Dan Hawkins prior to 2006. The Broncos' special teams blocked four kicks in each of his final two seasons there, including a potential game-winning field goal one time in 2005.

Last year, CU blocked two punts, both by Alonzo Barrett. One came against Nebraska, and the other came in a loss to Missouri.

That total is not enough, Riddle said. Hence the urgency during those long and frequent special teams sessions each day at practice.

"We've been hurting depthwise," Riddle said. "We haven't had a lot of guys to choose from. A lot of guys are just gassed when they have to go out there and do it. We've been trying to be solid and not give up big plays. We were better at that last year, but we weren't very good at creating big plays last year.

"The more pressure we can put on the kicks, the better our return game is going to be."

Asked if there's a schematic element to blocking a kick that's as important as having fresh personnel, Riddle said, "I'd say this: Over the last couple of years, we've had plenty of chances to get there schematically. We just have not been very good at getting there."

Several Buffs will be designated to "get there" this year, Riddle said, including receiver Pat Williams and cornerback Jimmy Smith.

"Fast guys," Riddle said, is what he's looking for.

Cody Crawford blocked a few punts in spring scrimmages. He also tipped one at Baylor last year.

CU signed Patrick Mahnke in February, and he must have a nose for it. Mahnke's coach at Mountain Vista High, Ric Cash, said Mahnke blocked between six and eight punts last year, and two were returned for touchdowns. Mahnke said



Colorado hopes to put the speed of receiver Pat Williams to good use on special teams as a punt blocker. CU blocked a pair of punts last season. **Joshua Buck/Times-Call file**

his blocks totaled six, and it was a mix of punts and field goals.

Mahnke said blocked kicks were a topic CU coaches addressed during his recruitment.

“They wanted to recruit people with a hard work ethic,” Mahnke said.

While Riddle’s determination is almost palpable, it’s clear players have thought about it, too. Crawford said he’s hears “a bunch of times” about that 75 percent stat.

He also knows the Buffs got close to many others in 2007 but were unable to convert.

“We’ve been missing that one step each year here since coach Hawk has gotten here,” Crawford said. “We’ve been getting better and better. I think as time goes on, we’re more and more comfortable with our roles and know exactly what to do.”

Then again, it could be something more.

“Special teams this year is something we’re going to pride ourselves on,” Williams said. “We’ve seen too many plays where one block would have broke a punt return, or one step this way would have blocked a kick.

“It’s not a matter of technique. It’s just want-to.”

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

[Print page](#)[Close window](#)

Longmont, Colorado
Sunday, August 10, 2008

TIMES-CALL

Publish Date: 8/10/2008

CU's Hudgins out for season

Defensive end will miss 2nd straight year due to injury

By Patrick Ridgell

Longmont Times-Call

BOULDER — More bad news for Colorado defensive end Drew Hudgins.

He tore his left ACL on Friday afternoon, ending his season before it started. Hudgins missed 2007 after he ruptured his Achilles' tendon in summer conditioning drills and also missed 2005 at Highland Community College with another injury.

He enrolled at CU in January of 2007 and will have to continue to wait some more before he ever plays a down for the Buffs.

CU has listed Hudgins as a junior in 2008 because it expected he'd receive a sixth year of eligibility from the NCAA as long as his documentation was in order.

CU coach Dan Hawkins and Hudgins have not discussed what appeals will be made to the NCAA on Hudgins' behalf following this season. Hudgins said he still wants to make one.

"Real frustrating — just real disappointing," Hudgins said Saturday. "I keep thinking it's a dream or something, I don't know. It's probably the most disappointing thing that's ever happened to me."

Hudgins said he hasn't watched film of how the injury happened. He said his knee just buckled and gave out. He plans to have surgery and start rehabilitation as soon as possible.

Hudgins came to CU with a reputation as a pass-rushing specialist. He had 19 sacks in 2006 at Highland. His injury thins depth along the defensive line

"We don't have a lot of guys, no question about that," Hawkins said. "Those other guys have to step up.

"I just feel bad for him. That guy, popping his Achilles. That guy comes every single day. But whoever said life is fair? It's sad because he's really done a nice job working to get back ready to go."

Hawkins said he does not want Hudgins making any decision about his future now. He wants the defensive end to wait and see what he wants to do. Hawkins said he'll support any plan of action Hudgins wants to take.

"In the best-case scenario, he could appeal and get both years back," Hawkins said.

Hudgins is the second Buff to tear an ACL in the first week of camp. Guard Mike Iltis suffered the same injury Tuesday.

GETTING SET: Offensive line coach Jeff Grimes said he hoped to know by week's end what tackle spots Nate Solder and Ryan Miller will play this year. They have been flipping between the left and right sides all week.

Grimes said Saturday he's going to wait a bit longer before declaring anything definitive. Solder was on the left side

Saturday, and Miller the right, just as they were at the end of spring drills.

"We're moving in that direction," Grimes said. "I wouldn't say it couldn't change, but for now we'll go with Nate on the left and Ryan on the right."

Grimes continues to want his linemen to know multiple positions. Bryce Givens, recruited as a tackle out of Mullen High, has been playing a lot of guard.

Freshman Max Tuioti-Mariner did not practice Saturday because he had fluid drained from his left knee earlier in the day. Tuioti-Mariner missed his senior season in high school with a torn ACL.

Grimes, who said Tuioti-Mariner has been impressive early in camp, added he does not expect Tuioti-Mariner to have recurring problems with the knee and expects him to return to practice soon.

EXTRA POINTS: A large crowd gathered Saturday to watch CU's first full-squad, full-pads practice. Hawkins said he welcomed the crowd in an era where other programs close practices because it motivates players, pleases fans and displays what his program is doing, which he said he's proud of. Hawkins also said he doubts CU has "any big secrets" to unveil these days. All practices are open through Aug. 17. ... Among the crowd was Keller, Texas, receiver Jarrod Darden, one of CU's three commitments. ... Among those who returned to work Saturday were linebacker Doug Rippy (fever) and defensive tackle Curtis Cunningham (ankle sprain). ... Captains will be voted upon by players at the end of camp, Hawkins said. ... Today's practices are scheduled for 1:45 p.m. and 8 p.m.

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

denverpost.com

THE DENVER POST

colorado

Miller, Solder building blocks

The sophomore offensive tackles are well on their way to making a name for themselves at CU.

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

Article Last Updated: 08/09/2008 11:06:21 PM MDT

BOULDER — At last check, and depending on what they devoured for dinner, one of Colorado's first-string offensive tackles, Ryan Miller, goes 6-feet-7 and 305 pounds, and the other, Nate Solder, stands 6-8, 300.

"Bookend Behemoths?"

"Big Tackle Dudes?"

They must have a nickname, right?

"We've been kind of joking around with 'Thunder and Lightning,' " Miller said. "I guess it's kind of starting to stick."

Which is which?

"Nate's the Thunder and I'm the Lightning," Miller said with a grin. "Nate's a little more finesse. I'm a little more brute."

Senior defensive end Maurice Lucas prefers to call them "Freaks." That's meant as a compliment — as in

freaks of nature with their unique combination of size and athleticism.

Colorado Football

- [Watch](#) video of CU coach Dan Hawkins on first day of practice
- [Watch](#) video of CU freshman running back Darrell Scott
- [Watch](#) video of CU beginning fall practice
- [Visit](#) Tom Kensler's All Things Buffs blog for a behind-the-scenes look at CU sports

The super sophomores certainly have the right DNA. As a senior at Columbine High School, Miller chased down an opponent's tailback after an 80-yard gain in the state championship game.

Until this spring, Solder was a towering tight end who could get downfield. He averaged 16.7 yards on three receptions in 2007 (all against Miami, Ohio), a per-catch average that ranked only behind fleet wideout Josh Smith (19.6) on the team.

Offensive line coach Jeff Grimes "comes into the office every day with a smile on his face" knowing Miller and Solder will be cornerstones for three years, CU coach Dan Hawkins said.

"I *hope* it's three years. In this day and age you never know," Hawkins added, referring to their pro potential.

A consensus high school All-American and rated a five-star, national top-25 recruit by Internet sites, Miller picked CU over Notre Dame and lived up to his billing. He earned mention on national all-

Advertisement

FACTORY OVERSTOCK BLOWOUT!

Leather High-Back
\$219



Leather Mid-Back
\$199



Bookcases
Various Sizes
\$149-\$259



2-Drawer Lateral File
\$399





OFFICE LIQUIDATORS
Profit From Our Experience

11111 W. 6th Ave/ LAKEWOOD
Between Kipling & Simms

303-759-3375
www.OfficeLiquidators.com

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™

denverpost.com

THE DENVER POST

freshman teams last fall after earning the starting job at right tackle in midseason.

Solder, from Class 2A Buena Vista, wasn't as highly recruited as Miller. A three-star prospect who weighed 245 pounds when he arrived at Colorado, Solder did receive additional offers from Nebraska and Iowa State. Grimes feels fortunate other marquee programs did not project Solder, who also played linebacker in high school as well as basketball, as a lineman. There aren't a lot of offensive tackles his size with feet that nimble.

"The thing that's most impressive to me at this point is how hard they worked this summer," Grimes said. "Not only have they done everything we want physically, but also everything we want in terms of their work ethic and their leadership. If we had 100 guys on the team like them, we'd be unstoppable."

Thus far during August drills, Grimes has been working Miller and Solder on the left and right sides. At some point, the most consistent pass blocker will win the job at left tackle — which protects the blind side of right-handed quarterback Cody Hawkins.

Saying it doesn't matter which side they're on, both try to elevate each other's level of play. They roomed together during the Independence Bowl trip in December and became fast friends. Solder arrived in Boulder a year before Miller but redshirted in 2006.

"It's really great to have a bond with the other tackle," Miller said. "In the run game, I've been able to help him out. In pass blocking, he's helped me tremendously. When we watch film, Nate is so balanced and straight back when he takes his first couple of steps."

Said Solder: "All my game experience has been at tight end, and he's always played offensive tackle. So

I can learn the mentality it takes. It motivates you, seeing a guy as high-caliber as him on the field."

Solder and Miller use their long arms to keep pass rushers at bay. "That reach of theirs is really hard to get past," Lucas said of the battles in practice. "You just get out of your stance and they're already on you."

"Hogs. They're hogs," touted freshman tailback Darrell Scott added. "It's going to be fun running behind those guys."

Footnote.

Colorado lost its second player for the season with an ACL knee injury. Senior defensive end Drew Hudgins was injured Friday afternoon. CU lost guard Mike Iltis on Tuesday to a torn ACL.

Tom Kensler: 303-954-1280 or
tkensler@denverpost.com

Advertisement

FACTORY OVERSTOCK BLOWOUT!

Leather High-Back \$219

Leather Mid-Back \$199

Bookcases Various Sizes \$149-\$259

2-Drawer Lateral File \$399

OFFICE LIQUIDATORS
Profit From Our Experience

11111 W. 6th Ave/ LAKEWOOD
Between Kipling & Simms

303-759-3375
www.OfficeLiquidators.com

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™