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colorado football

LB Major forced to focus on future

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

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Major thinks his injury may turn out to be good timing.

BOULDER — Jon Major knew it was bad the moment the Colorado freshman linebacker felt something pop in his left knee during practice Wednesday. Then, lacking proper support, the knee shifted.

Probably a torn ACL, he thought.

"I never had any (previous) problems, but this is football, right?" Major told reporters Thursday. "That's the nature of the beast."

Major, 6-feet-2 and 225 pounds, will undergo season-ending surgery at a date to be determined — probably coinciding with the surgeries of two teammates who also are victims of ACL tears during August drills: redshirt freshman guard Mike Iltis and senior defensive end Drew Hudgins.

"They want us to push each other (during rehabilitation)," Major said.

All three ACL tears happened without contact. Major said he was making a move during a pass-rushing drill.

"My leg just stuck, and I think momentum took me one way and I felt the pop," Major recalled. "There are a lot worse things that could have happened. As far as timing, I think this is probably the best. If I was a junior, I'd be really frustrated. This gives me an opportunity to develop, as far as mentally and physically."

Although nothing had been announced, linebackers coach Brian Cabral said Thursday that Major likely would have played this year. Regarded as the top prospect in the state last fall at Ponderosa High School, Major had been working at middle linebacker behind Jeff Smart and Michael Sipili.

Colorado is without two of the three Parade All-Americans who signed in February, with Major

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joining fellow linebacker Lynn Katoa on the sideline. Katoa, from Salt Lake City, will redshirt this fall as punishment for an off-campus altercation last winter. Tailback Darrell Scott is the other Parade All-American.

CU coach Dan Hawkins said he doesn't know how practices could be adjusted to prevent future ACL injuries.

"We'd have to stop running, because that's basically when they've happened," Hawkins said.

Five for two spots.

With August drills near the halfway point, CU defensive secondary coach Greg Brown said five players remain in the mix for the two starting jobs at cornerback: senior Gardner McKay, junior Cha'pelle Brown, sophomores Jimmy Smith and Jalil Brown and redshirt freshman Anthony Wright.

"You're always looking for two to stand out, but it may not be that way at first," Greg Brown said. "This may be an issue that doesn't get solved until the early part of the season."

Wright, a 6-foot, 185-pounder from Compton, Calif., has made coaches take notice.

"He has ability. He has stature," Greg Brown said. "He's got wingspan. He's got speed. He's got nice soft hands. He can catch the ball. And the bonus is, for a freshman he will tackle."

Still sidelined.

Sophomore tailback Brian Lockridge said some swelling remains from his April surgery to repair a sports hernia. No timetable has been set for his return, and sitting out the season could be a worst-case scenario, Lockridge said.

"If things don't go well, I may have to redshirt," Lockridge said. "Hopefully not. . . . I'm missing practice, which I really love."

Footnotes.

The 4 p.m. scrimmage Sunday (practice fields) will be the last workout that is open to the public. . . . Jimmy Smith twinged his back during the morning practice, but Hawkins said he does not believe it is serious. . . . Hawkins, on taking the team to Water World on Wednesday: "It was a good break for them. . . . These guys go pretty hard. I think you have to be prudent on how hard you push them."

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Hard luck Buffs

ACL tears leave CU frustrated

By Patrick Ridgell

Longmont Times-Call

BOULDER — It could be worse. Colorado could be Florida.

Urban Meyer's Gators have lost five players this summer to torn ACLs, including a couple of starters. CU's most recent ACL tear came Wednesday to touted linebacker Jon Major, ending the freshman's season before it started. It brought the Buffs' total ACL tears, all occurring in the first nine days of camp, to three. So maybe it's not all that bad for CU.

That, at least, is how one Buff prefers to see it.

"That's the thing: Florida has five guys with ACLs already," senior safety Ryan Walters said. "It just comes with the territory of playing football. It's a physical sport; it's a fast sport. It separates the men from the boys. You're going to get hurt sometimes. You don't know how things happen, or why."

CU's run on ACL tears has coach Dan Hawkins saying it's "kind of a freak deal." Freshman guard Mike Iltis suffered his on the first day of camp, Aug. 5. Defensive end Drew Hudgins, whose luck with injury has been nothing but bad, tore his last Friday.

Major said he suffered his tear Wednesday during pass-rushing drills when his left leg slipped. His momentum went one way, and he felt a pop in his left knee.

Hawkins said these kind of injury streaks happen. CU has had runs of shoulder injuries and concussions in recent seasons. These ACL tears might cause a bit more skull scratching because each happened in non-contract drills, leaving the coach with little preventative action to take, other than hoping more won't come.

"We'd have to stop running," Hawkins said. "That's basically when they're happening. ... It's all non-contact."

Obviously, that's not an option.

"It's sad," Hawkins said. "It kind of breaks your heart. You feel bad for the kids."

Said Walters: "It just makes you realize you have to be grateful for the opportunity to play and take advantage of those opportunities. My heart goes out to those guys."

"Jon Major is lucky — he has a redshirt year. But Iltis was probably going to play this year. And Drew Hudgins has had a string of bad luck."

"You can't really think about injuries. Usually when you're thinking about it is when you go get hurt. So you just have to go out and play."



In an ominous sign of things to come, CU freshman guard Mike Iltis suffered a torn ACL on Aug. 5, the Buffs' first day of fall camp. Teammates Drew Hudgins and Jon Major have since been sidelined with the same injury. **Joshua**

Buck/Times-Call

Linebacker coach Brian Cabral said he expected Major to play as a true freshman in 2008 rather than redshirt. Cabral added that having the decision to redshirt forced upon the team makes the injury harder to take.

Like Itlis and Hudgins, Major was in a heated battle for playing time. But Major, unlike the other two, is a true freshman. He said that's the silver lining in his plight.

"There are a lot worse things that could have happened, and as far as the timing, this is probably the best it could be," Major said. "If I was a junior, I'd just be frustrated. But this is an opportunity to develop more mentally and physically.

"I think the good outweighs the bad."

EXTRA POINTS: The defense stayed after Thursday morning's practice for extra running. Walters said it was because the defense jumped offsides too much during drills. "So they disciplined us, ran us extra gassers," Walters said. "We'll get it going here soon." ... Hawkins said cornerback Jimmy Smith sat out Thursday due to a "tweaked" back. ... Today's practice is scheduled for 4 p.m., though Hawkins warned that weather may force a change. Practices are open to the public through Sunday afternoon's scrimmage. ... Reserve quarterback Nick Nelson missed Thursday night's practice with a strained abdominal muscle.

Read Patrick Ridgell's CU sports blog at www.timescall.com/blogs/ridgell. He can be reached at pridgell@times-call.com.