



DiLallo spices up Buffaloes

Junior punter cooks for team on Mondays

By Ryan Thorburn
Friday, September 26, 2008

Kickers around the country are often the loneliest members of a college football team, watching physical practices from a safe distance or being ignored on the end of the bench during most of the games.

At Colorado though, Matt DiLallo's crib is the place to be.

Or at least it is on Monday nights when players who are tired of the training table fare or Taco Bell runs enjoy some hang time with the punter.

"People tell me I make the best banana bread they've ever tasted," DiLallo boasted this week.

The junior from Wellington, Fla., scored a 29 on the ACT, has earned academic all-Big 12 honors twice at CU and is an Integrative Physiology (pre-med) major.

But had a football scholarship not been offered to DiLallo at a major university, the Food Network junkie would probably be in culinary school right now dreaming of becoming the next "Iron Chef."

"I used to help my mom out cooking. It kind of started because our family was really busy," DiLallo said of his kitchen skills. "Between me going to football practice and then my two brothers going to soccer there wasn't always time for her to cook."

DiLallo and place-kicker Aric Goodman -- who is also a popular member of the team right now after making the game-winning field goal to beat West Virginia -- host the weekly feasts for any teammates with empty stomachs and open minds.

"I've tried a bunch of different recipes (this semester)," DiLallo said. "Some recipes for marinating salmon. I made some lettuce wraps that were pretty good. ..."

DiLallo is looking forward to this weekend when he can enjoy some home cooking, so to speak. He grew up about four hours south of Jacksonville, where the Buffs will play Florida State on Saturday. About a dozen members of his family will attend the game, as well as a number of high school classmates who now attend FSU.

"It will just make it more fun. Once you're on the field you're on the field and you kind of zone everything else out," DiLallo said. "But before and after the game it will be kind of cool to see everyone. I haven't seen them in a while."

Four years ago DiLallo was receiving letters of interest from Gary Barnett's coaching staff and made a visit to Boulder that changed his life. He attended the CU-Iowa State game that fall and was sold on the Buffs despite the fact that it wasn't ideal weather, especially for a kicker.

"It was rainy. It was cold. It almost felt like it was snowing to me. It was probably 50 degrees and rainy the Friday night I came in and then all day Saturday until the game," DiLallo said. "We were coming back from the Omni (Interlocken) and it was still foggy and cloudy out, but then we came over the hill to where Boulder is and everything was clear, it was 65 degrees and sunny in the middle of November. I just fell in love with it. ... The highest mountain in Florida is a landfill."

DiLallo redshirted his first season and studied the kicking craft under all-Americans Mason Crosby and John Torp. Now he is the 13th player in school history to be the regular punter for three seasons with a chance to be just the second player to handle the job for four seasons should he win the starting gig again as a senior.

Through three games, DiLallo is averaging 43.14 yards (34.3 net) per punt with four of his 14 attempts coming to rest inside the opponents' 20-yard line. Only three of his punts have been returned but for an average of 21.3 yards.

"There's always room for improvement," CU special teams coach Kent Riddle said when asked about DiLallo. "He had his best game last week (against West Virginia), but we're still working on the details. We need more hang time and a little bit better direction, but he's doing a fine job."

Riddle said senior Tom Suazo, DiLallo's backup, has been doing a good job pushing him in practice.

Darrell Scott, the nation's No. 1 running back recruit last year, also dabbles in punting. No word on whether or not the famous freshman has the skills to hang with DiLallo in the kitchen.



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cu football

"Speedy" Stewart proving recruiters wrong

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

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Diminutive CU running back Rodney Stewart played much bigger than his size against West Virginia. (John Leyba, The Denver Post)

BOULDER — In making a case for categorizing football recruiting as an inexact science, Colorado freshman tailback Rodney "Speedy" Stewart offers Exhibit A: himself.

Actually, the usually quiet Stewart prefers that others do the talking. After the 5-foot-6, 175-pounder ran for 166 yards last week against West Virginia, his supporters are having a heyday.

Coming from Brookhaven High School in Columbus, Ohio, Stewart was rated by Internet recruiting services as just a two-star prospect. Last Thursday, he treated a national television audience to a five-star performance and left countless recruiters

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kicking themselves.

They whiffed on a good one.

The cellphone of Anthony Thornton has buzzed all week. Thornton was

Colorado Football

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Brookhaven's offensive coordinator last year and now is the head coach. Stewart rushed for 2,036 yards and 33 touchdowns as a high school senior and turned everybody's heads except those of recruiters.

"A lot of people passed on Rodney, and I couldn't understand it," Thornton said. "After he had that big game against West Virginia, I've been getting a lot of text messages from assistant coaches who recruit this area. They said, 'Congratulations on Speedy.' I didn't do it, but I wanted to text them back, saying, 'Yeah, you missed on him.'"

"One man's loss is another man's gain. The University of Colorado got a steal."

Under the radar

Of the three tailbacks signed by the Buffaloes in February, Stewart was the least heralded. It wasn't even close. Darrell Scott (6-2, 220) ranked as the nation's top high school running back, a five-star rated as high as the No. 2 overall prospect for all positions, behind Ohio State-bound quarterback Terrelle Pryor. Another CU signee, Ray Polk (6-1, 200) from Phoenix, was rated as the nation's 11th-best tailback prospect, a four-star talent. He is redshirting this season.

Stewart? He didn't seem to be on anybody's radar — except that of Colorado recruiter Darian Hagan, the Buffs' running backs coach. Hagan was told about Stewart by another CU recruit from Ohio, linebacker Douglas Rippy, who is redshirting this season. Stewart and Rippy are second cousins.

Scott led CU in rushing in the first two games and may well become the Buffs' featured back. But Speedy is off to the fastest start.

"I always look at the player, not the recruiting number," Hagan said. "Some guys might think, 'That little dude can't play.' But I knew Rodney was something special the first time I saw him. When he walked into the room, he had a swagger about him."

Never mind that Ohio State failed to show any interest in the hometown kid. Neither did Indiana or Minnesota. Until Hagan offered Stewart a scholarship a week before signing day, Stewart wondered if he would have anyplace to go.

Recruiters from Mid-American Conference schools had been in contact. But no scholarships were on the table.

Stewart's uncle, Marvin Johnson, helped raise Stewart and waited for the phone to ring. It didn't.

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"Before Colorado offered, the best thing we had was an invitation for Rodney to be a 'preferred walk-on' at Eastern Michigan," Johnson said. "I know that's laughable now. But Rodney has always had to deal with the naysayers."

Somehow, Stewart remained positive.

"I thought I'd end up somewhere," he said. "I know I'm a good player. I know I'm a good kid. If I had to, I thought I'd walk on somewhere and make the team that way."

"I didn't want to hope for anything too great and then get something little. I like to hope for something little and then get something big. That's the way I live life. I didn't think God would leave me hanging."

Injury turned off recruiters

Stewart's size no doubt caused some recruiters to turn their backs. Another concern was Stewart missing his junior season after undergoing knee surgery to repair a torn ACL.

"Talking to some MAC coaches, they wondered about his durability," said recruiting analyst Jeremy Crabtree of [Rivals.com](#).

Longtime recruiting guru Tom Lemming of [CSTV.com](#) believes the biggest factor in Stewart getting overlooked was an absence of junior highlight film.

"A lot of the top college football programs do not even evaluate senior film anymore; they're always looking a year or two ahead," Lemming explained. "That's why Colorado is going to be a team of the future. They do a great job of evaluating."

Once Stewart arrived in Boulder, it did not take CU coaches long to realize what they had. His

teammates saw it, too.

"The first thing I noticed was his work ethic, with running and lifting weights," senior center Daniel "Girthy" Sanders said. "Guys like that are the ones you can count on. They're the ones who succeed."

Stewart can bench-press 370 pounds.

"I have to admit, I didn't know he was as physical as he is," Hagan said. "Even with his size, he runs like he's about 6-2, 220. He's a really good football player. He's just compact."

Stewart said he does not think about much when he takes a handoff.

"I just do what I've been doing since I was little, playing in the backyard," he said.

As a 5-year-old in peewee football, Rodney scored on a long run the first time he touched the ball. Shortly thereafter, everybody called him "Speedy."

"Rodney also scored the first two times he got the ball in high school, when he was a freshman," Johnson recalled. "He gave me a call after his first game in Colorado and said: 'I tried to score on that first carry, I really did.'"

It was a 17-yard sweep against Colorado State. He finished with 38 yards on only four carries.

"I told him not to worry," Johnson said of that first college carry. "He will have plenty of time."

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

The Lowdown

By Tom Kensler, The Denver Post

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COLORADO (3-0)

Player to watch: QB Cody Hawkins.

After three games, Florida State already has recorded nine quarterback sacks and 27 tackles for loss. And that was without the return of four former defensive starters who are coming off a suspension. Expect the Seminoles to blitz at every opportunity in an effort to rattle Hawkins and a young CU offensive line. Hawkins must be quick with his throws and decision-making.

Key for Buffaloes: Separate.

Against Florida State's stingy defense, Colorado must find a way to score three or four touchdowns. It's not easy to gain separation against the Seminoles' speed. "Honestly, I don't think we can match their speed. I know I can't," CU junior tight end Riar Geer said. In last year's 16-6 FSU victory at Boulder, the Buffs were held scoreless until a TD with 3:39 left.

FLORIDA STATE (2-1)

Player to watch: QB Christian Ponder.

Things were so easy for the sophomore in the first two career starts, as he tossed six TD passes. But those came in waltzes over Western Carolina and Chattanooga. Last week, Ponder threw three interceptions in a loss to Wake Forest. Ponder can't afford to look over his shoulder and worry about fellow sophomore D'Vontrey Richardson taking his job.

Key for Seminoles: Finish strong.

It wasn't pretty after losing for the second straight year to Wake Forest. As has been the case in recent years, FSU must eliminate drive- ending mistakes on

offense. In addition to Ponder's miscues, Richardson threw two interceptions.

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woody paige

4-0 start would fuel CU

By Woody Paige
The Denver Post

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CU football used to start the season 4-0 regularly.

From 1894-1914 (11 times).

But then, Colorado played high school teams from Denver East, West, North and Manual, its own alumni team and athletic clubs from Denver and Littleton.

Reads like a Nebraska nonconference schedule. (Rimshot, cheap shot.)

Overall, 30 University of Colorado teams have won their first four games, or more, in every decade.

Except this one.

This is, I think, 2008. In 1998, '88, '78 and '58, CU opened with four or more victories in a row. That should be an omen. Gas prices were 24 cents per gallon in '58, 63 cents in '78, \$1.08 in '88 and \$1.03 in '98 (the last time the Buffs won their first four).

As the Buffs embark to play Florida State in Jacksonville, Fla., on Saturday, they are 3-0, and gas seems to be about \$42.68 a gallon.

The CU players would do well to walk to the stadium and beat FSU.

The Buffs have played in the state of Florida 12 times, losing eight. That would be a bad omen, except the two most important victories in school history were achieved in the Sunshine State (where temperatures are somewhere cooler this week than in Colorful Colorado).

On Jan. 1, 1957, CU defeated Clemson in its first appearance in the Orange Bowl in Miami and finished in the top 20 for the first time. And on Jan. 1, 1991, CU defeated Notre Dame in its last Orange Bowl appearance and finished as a national champion for the only time.

The Colorado game against Florida State may not have such consequences, although Colorado would become the first school in NCAA history to win the Rocky Mountain Showdown and the River City Showdown (at two neutral sites).

And if you want to get downright optimistic, with a victory and a few others, the Buffs could return to the Gator Bowl on Jan. 1, 2009, as the Big 12 representative, or could play in the Orange Bowl (which is no longer played in the Orange Bowl, but in Dolphin Stadium) on Jan. 1 as a Bowl Championship Series team.

Or, if the Buffs go undefeated, they could even play in the BCS national championship game Jan. 8.

In Miami.

Florida.

Of course, CU might consider winning Saturday's game first.

We all know that Bobby Bowden is as old as crude

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oil (which produces gasoline, and my friend Tony only buys half a tank, so he feels like the price isn't so high), and the Seminoles are not the power they once were (the real Seminoles ruled Florida in the 18th century), but the football team is not pork 'n beans.

Four suspended defensive players return this week, and the defense already was good. The offense stinks, and the Seminoles have three quarterbacks, which means they have none.

CU can win if the two-headed freshman dragon at running back rushes effectively, and quarterback Cody Hawkins throws effectively, and Josh Smith receives effectively and returns effectively, and the defense shuts down FSU as effectively as it did West Virginia.

If the Buffs do win, they should be able to wrest three or four victories in Big 12 play and go to a bowl. If they lose to FSU, the next five games could doom them to a sub-.500 and bowlless season. Only Iowa State is a given, and CU does have to finish at Nebraska, no longer a Big 12 pull toy.

Thus, this is a big game, again, in Florida.

The '98 team started 5-0, finished 8-4. The '88 team started 4-0, finished 8-4. The '78 team started 5-0, finished 6-5. The '68 team started 4-2, finished 4-6. The '58 team started 5-0, finished 6-4. But the 2008 team has a chance to be like the 1923 team — which started 4-0 and finished 9-0 as the last unbeaten CU team. Gas prices dropped to 16 cents a gallon.

That is a good omen.

(A plug: Dave Plati of CU has produced an all-time football book, "University of Colorado Football Vault," full of replicas of old photos, programs,

postcards, play-by- plays, players cards and other "p" fun stuff.)

Woody Paige: 303-954-1295 or
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CU's Mohler has refused to be denied

Linebacker called 'a good inspiration'

By B.G. Brooks

Thursday, September 25, 2008

In his lifetime, there have not been many other things Shaun Mohler has wanted so badly as enrolling at the University of Colorado.

Which explains why, an hour or so after CU's skin-of-its-teeth win Sept. 6 against Eastern Washington, Mohler, 20, a 225-pound inside linebacker, left the Dal Ward Athletics Center with his left arm in a sling and tears in both eyes.

Pending further tests that night, he had been told by CU's medical personnel that his collarbone likely was broken - news he interpreted as meaning his first season in major college football also was wrecked.

"They told me the worst, so I was thinking the worst," recalled Mohler, who had spent the past eight months burning midnight oil by the barrel, sweating and fretting to earn his associate degree from Orange Coast College in California and meet CU's entrance requirements.

The winter, spring and summer sessions saw him cram in 10 courses, most of which he hadn't planned on taking, to reach Boulder. Tom Burke, the grandfather who "basically was his dad" in Newport Beach, Calif., watched as the extra course load surprised, but never deterred, his grandson.

"California and Nebraska had accepted him. . . . Iowa did, too," Burke said. "Then, Colorado, which had offered him (a scholarship) first, came at him and said all these extra credits were required. He just said, 'I'm going to do it.'"

"Oh, yeah, there were several skeptics. The local papers said he couldn't do it. And there were times when Scotty McKnight (CU sophomore receiver and a high school friend/rival) came by and said, 'I'll take you to dinner at my mom's restaurant,' and Shaun said, 'Can't. . . . I'm studying.'"

Mohler stayed on task until he qualified, not a shock to CU coach Dan Hawkins, linebackers coach Brian Cabral or Mohler's junior college coach, Mike Taylor.

"He's relentless . . . he does everything 100 percent," Taylor said. "He's really a model for us to tell kids who come here with some of the same academic issues, 'Here's a guy who busted it to get where he wanted to go. You can do the same if you work.'"

Something to prove

When Mohler arrived at CU, Hawkins immediately saw the young man's daily approach reflect what was required to make the trip.

"You could just tell," Hawkins said. "The way he sat in the meeting room, the way he had his notebook (organized), how he took notes, how he made eye contact . . . this guy was here to prove something.

"No question, he had to throw the coal on the fire to get going. But those kinds of people in life are hard to deny. He's a good inspiration for everybody else."

Said Mohler: "There was a lot of pressure to get here. . . . I put higher expectations on myself and it was pretty hard, but I wanted to get here."

He did, and then, in the third quarter of Game 2, Mohler lowered his shoulder and took on Eastern Washington's fullback, after which one of them - Mohler - trotted to the sideline with his arm dangling like a ribbon.

But a further examination that night at a hospital revealed a severely bruised shoulder instead of a broken collarbone. A relieved Mohler regrouped, was fitted with extra padding under his shoulder pads and was cleared to play last week against West Virginia.

Equally relieved was Cabral, who initially said he was "in shock" about the prospect of being minus Mohler for the season.

"We can't lose him," Cabral said later.

Mohler, a high school quarterback at Corona del Mar as well as a linebacker, earned a starting spot in preseason camp and appears difficult to dislodge because of his speed and tenacity. CU was replacing 2007 leading tackler Jordon Dizon, the Butkus Award runner-up, and Mohler almost instantly joined the mix.

"We knew we needed him and some other guys to step up," junior inside linebacker Jeff Smart said. "When I saw him, I thought he could be a contributor for sure, and then in practice, it became clear."

Striving for more

Taylor tells of Mohler practicing for a California all-star game and his coaches having to "tone him down" in work against his teammates.

"He just goes 100 miles an hour and doesn't hold back," Taylor said. "But that's what makes him special. He's one of the better players we've had here."

It's too early for Cabral to echo that statement, and that's more a testament to the linebackers CU has produced under Cabral than a question of Mohler's potential and abilities. Mohler, though, admits he's still learning, still acclimating, still reaching.

He already has impacted CU's defense but believes, "I can do a lot better than I'm doing right now. That's just me, personally. I'm always striving to do better. Yeah, I'm an overachiever. Big time. I always want the next biggest thing."

"I just want to make the most of it, and I only have two years to do it. I feel honored to be here. I've been through a lot, and I don't want to mess it up."

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CU report: Buffs battling the unknown

By B.G. Brooks

Thursday, September 25, 2008

Florida State gets four defensive players back from suspension for Saturday's game, and their return is the source of some concern for the Buffaloes.

CU left tackle **Nate Solder** said the players in the defensive front Florida State utilized in last week's 12-3 loss against Wake Forest were "very athletic guys who played very hard. They really got to the quarterback. That's my challenge this week - to not let that happen."

Solder called CU's overtime win against West Virginia "a real confidence builder" for him and his linemates.

"It was a case of a lot of hard work paying off for us," Solder said.

To recruit or not

CU maintains an interest in recruiting Florida, but the Buffs never will target the Sunshine State as heavily as California or Texas.

With six of his roster players having Florida roots, CU coach **Dan Hawkins** reiterated that "finding the right guy, the right fit" - no matter the state - is his recruiting priority.

"Sometimes you find the guy who wants a change, he wants to do something different, he wants to get out of the box, wants to see another part of the world," Hawkins said. "Every kid is different. Some definitely want to stay home, they like it or there's family there, or comfort level, whatever it is."

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Bufs get into Sunshine State of mind

For six Colo. players, Florida was home first

*By Patrick Ridgell
Longmont Times-Call*

BOULDER — For a few Colorado Buffaloes, the 1,488-mile trip they're making to Jacksonville, Fla., this weekend is something to cherish.

Saturday's date against Florida State in Jacksonville (1:30 p.m., ABC) marks what's probably the one time in their collegiate playing careers that friends and family back home can flock to a CU game with relative ease — compared to making the trek west to Colorado or the Midwest. Unless CU plays in a Florida bowl, this is it.

Guard Mike Iltis won't make the trip due to the season-ending injury he suffered in August. But punter Matt DiLallo, linebacker Josh Hartigan and running back Kevin Moyd are expected to play Saturday. Moyd, a junior, even said that he thinks he'll make his first carry of the season, based on how coaches are using him in practice this week.

"It looks like I'll get in, and when I get in, I'll just do the best I can," Moyd said.

In addition to those four Buffs, who each came directly to CU from Florida high schools, receiver Josh Smith and running back Darrell Scott spent years of their childhood in Florida. That's six with roots in the Sunshine State. Meanwhile, only five Buffs hail from Texas high schools.

Exactly what that means is unclear, and even though Florida is rich in talent, it's not necessarily a good thing, considering what Texas produces. Texas coach Mack Brown said 22 of the starting 119 Division I quarterbacks in 2008 are from the Longhorns' state.

But it at least appears CU has found success in convincing some Floridians it doesn't snow every day in Boulder. Coach Dan Hawkins said CU will continue to recruit in Florida.

"It's always just trying to find the right guy, the right fit," he said.

"Sometimes you're looking for a guy that wants a change. He wants to do something different, he wants to get out of the box, he wants to see a different part of the world. Every kid is different."

Sometimes, though, it isn't so much what CU does or says to lure a Florida kid clear to Boulder.

"Growing up, I never liked Florida State," Iltis said. "I thought it was a disgusting place. I never thought it was that special.

"Then when I went there on an unofficial (visit) that the coaches invited me come to, it just didn't feel like it was worth my time. I felt like I wasted my whole day."

Iltis, who was expected to contend for a starting spot prior to his injury, said he did not take an official visit to Florida State. He said he chose CU after considering South Florida, Florida, Missouri, North Carolina State and Michigan State.

Iltis said he sees why it's tough to convince Florida athletes Colorado is worth their while.

Bufs who graduated from Florida high schools:

Punter Matt DiLallo: Wellington, Fla.

Linebacker Josh Hartigan: Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

Guard Mike Iltis: Sarasota, Fla.

Running back Kevin Moyd: Miami, Fla.

“Knowing a lot of people that I played with in Florida and played against, a lot of them love to be in that area because Florida is a beautiful place,” Itlis said. “They have beaches and the warmth and the programs down there are amazing for football, so a lot of them want to stay in the southeast, if not in Florida.”

Moyd said he was not recruited by many colleges during his time at Northwestern High in Dade County. He and his mother assembled highlight DVDs and sent them all around the country. CU showed interest, which then prompted Mississippi to start recruiting Moyd. He stuck with CU.

“When you’re going down (to Florida to recruit), you have to sound like you’re interested,” Moyd said. “A lot of times, a lot of guys from down there are scared to come here because it’s so far and they don’t see a lot of guys from their area over here. So it’s kind of like scary.

“In my situation, we just went with the best team that was looking at me.”

CU was able to get Hartigan because coaches told him he could ease into college football. That’s what Hartigan wanted to hear.

“It’s all basically how they come and approach you and talk to you and let you know ... what they want to do with the program,” said Hartigan, whose father, Sterling Palmer, played at Florida State from 1989-1992.

“They told me I’d be able to come into the program and do a lot of things. They told me I’d be able to work on special teams and be able to play and work my way up, and that’s kind of really what I wanted to do.”

DiLallo said he’ll have as many as 30-40 old friends from his high school who now attend Florida State at Saturday’s game. He realized CU was where he wanted to go on his recruiting trip, when a cold, rainy day cleared and he saw the mountains.

“It’s just something different,” he said.

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