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Walters born to be a Buff

Ryan Walters' earliest memories centered on CU, Folsom Field

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

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The joy of recovering a fumble against Florida State runs a little deeper for Ryan Walters, a second-generation Colorado Buffaloes player. (Denver Post file photo)

BOULDER — Ryan Walters must have been 2 years old, maybe 3, and probably squeezing a black-and-gold Nerf football when he first noticed an outline of goalposts against the walls of the University of Colorado family housing units.

"Growing up in the shadow of" has become an overused cliché, but in this case, there's no hyperbole. When rays of a setting sun align just right, shadows from goalposts are cast toward apartment buildings east of the CU practice fields. Those university residences are reserved for couples and their children.

Little Ryan's dad, Marc Walters, was down on those practice fields. Ryan was born in Los Angeles just days before Marc, a quarterback, took a winter recruiting trip to Colorado in 1986 and was

Colorado Football

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offered a scholarship by Bill McCartney.

The young Walters family lived in those family housing units while Marc was in school. The apartments remain in use today.

"You'll hear people say, 'I was born to be a Buff.' But Ryan was really born a Buff," CU defensive backs coach Greg Brown said.

Walters grew to be a 6-foot, 205-pound team captain playing free safety. Along with his fellow seniors, he will be playing in his final game

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Saturday at Folsom Field when Colorado faces No. 11 Oklahoma State. Walters might shed a tear during pregame introductions, but everyone agrees that his mother, Nicole, will be bawling her eyes out.

There to escort Ryan on the field will be his wife, Tara, along with his parents.

"It's a weird feeling, knowing it's about to end," Walters said. "I'm trying not to think about it too much, just trying to focus on the opponent. But it's a trip, man. Last game at Folsom Field. All my life, I wanted to play for the Buffs."

Walters said his earliest memories included sitting in his mother's lap during home games while Marc quarterbacked the Buffaloes. The family remained in the university family housing while Marc attended CU law school. When Marc needed to study and couldn't attend games,



Ryan Walters, left, follows in the footsteps of his father, Marc, a CU quarterback. Ryan was a standout at Grandview High School before enrolling at CU. (Cyrus McCrimmon, Denver Post file photo)

they would turn on the TV or radio broadcast and

open the balcony door. Young Ryan wanted to at least hear the roars from the stadium.

"I feel like I've always been a part of the program in some way," Ryan said.

With the goal of following in his father's footsteps, Ryan became a star quarterback at Grandview High in Aurora. It is unclear how highly recruited he might have become. He never allowed other schools a chance. Walters gave an oral commitment to then-Colorado coach Gary Barnett the spring before his senior season at Grandview.

"Before that, I wanted to test him to make sure he really wanted to go to CU," said Marc Walters, an attorney for Sun Microsystems. "We were in L.A. visiting family and I drove near the Westwood area. I told Ryan that we should stop and check out the UCLA football program. He told me, 'No, Dad. I'm not interested.'"

Looking back on his son's accomplishments, Marc is most proud of how Ryan has matured as a leader with his team and as a role model off the field. Ryan has been challenged by adversity countless times.

He fractured a thumb while redshirting during his first season in 2004. He had to learn how to be a defensive back after requesting a move from quarterback as a freshman. Regarded as the hardest hitter on the team, Walters banged up his shoulder dozens of times while making a tackle and even knocked himself out — suffering a concussion last year against Missouri before returning to play against Nebraska and in the Independence Bowl against Alabama.

Nothing, however, could prepare him for April 14. Late in Tara's eighth month of pregnancy, Audrey Lynn Walters was stillborn. Ryan and Tara held their daughter at the hospital. Players and coaches

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attended the funeral. Later, Ryan had a tattoo of one of her tiny footprints put on his chest. Next to the footprint are angel wings.

"Sad deal," CU coach Dan Hawkins said. "I think his family was a huge benefit to him, and his faith, and the kind of kid he is. Ryan and Tara had a big support group here. But that's tough on anyone."

Ryan said Tara's inner strength helped him get through it. Tara said the same about Ryan.

"He has always had the personality that can help people when they have problems," Tara said. "A lot of players on the team come to Ryan for advice."

If pro football doesn't work out, Walters has a job waiting for him. Dan Hawkins wants Walters to become a graduate assistant, believing he has what it takes to become an outstanding coach.

"There was a young kid playing outside the fence (of the CU practice fields) the other day," Hawkins said. "Ryan looked at the kid and said, 'Coach Hawk. That was me, right there.'"

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The Lowdown

By Tom Kensler, The Denver Post

NO. 11 OKLA. ST. (8-2, 4-2 Big 12)

Player to watch: WR Dez Bryant.

The 6-foot-2, 210-pound sophomore might be the nation's best wide receiver not named Michael Crabtree. Bryant leads the Big 12 and ranks second nationally with 114 receiving yards per game. He has 15 TD catches. That's right, 15.

Key for the Cowboys: Force CU into mistakes.

Oklahoma State's offense gets most of the ink, but the Cowboys' defense leads the conference in takeaways in conference games with 16, an even split between interceptions (eight) and fumbles gained (eight). In conference play, OSU (plus-6) ranks behind only Oklahoma in turnover margin. That's especially important in road games.

COLORADO (5-5, 2-4)

Player to watch: QB Cody Hawkins.

The 5-foot-11, 190-pound sophomore gets the start after coming off the bench in the second half and throwing for a career-best four TDs against Iowa State. CU needs a hot start from Hawkins, so rotating in freshman QB Tyler Hansen will be a strategy move rather than an act of desperation.

Key for the Buffaloes: Stop the run.

It's a lot to ask, but CU's defense must keep sophomore tailback Kendall Hunter in check and not let QB Zac Robinson scramble from containment. Hunter (5-8, 190) leads the Big 12 in rushing (1,332 yards). OSU has a terrific passing game, but CU has to take a chance that Robinson might be nervous in returning to his home state.

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Longmont, Colorado
Friday, November 14, 2008

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Center a bright spot for 5-5 CU

By Justin Williams
Longmont Times-Call

BOULDER — There haven't been too many bright spots on the offensive line at Colorado this season.

Various injuries, eligibility issues and a rash of inexperience have caused some uneasy moments up front for CU at times.

But without center Daniel Sanders, who knows where the 5-5 Buffs would be heading into Saturday's tilt with No. 11 Oklahoma State?

"It's been great to have that rock," offensive line coach Jeff Grimes said, "particularly at his position, as the center, so much of what we do in terms of protection is all on him."

Sanders — known as "Girthy" to his teammates — makes all the protection calls for the Buffaloes, including those of the tight ends, running backs and fullbacks.

Grimes said Sanders has really stepped into a leadership role this season, something that was sorely needed on the line in particular. Sanders is the only senior on a patchwork offensive line, which includes two freshmen and a converted tight end.

The typically soft-spoken Sanders even led team meetings before last week's game against Iowa State, at coach Dan Hawkins' suggestion.

"He's a great leader, almost like a father figure for those players," quarterback Cody Hawkins said. "He knows exactly what to do, and he's a tough guy that works very hard."

Sanders and Cody Hawkins had some on-field issues of their own that needed ironing out this season. Bad snaps between the two neared an epidemic last year. But all seems to be fixed.

"He takes so many reps and takes it so personally," Cody Hawkins said. "Last year, people slammed on him because of all the snaps. But he's a guy that if something's wrong, he's going to get it right."

"He did an awesome job this offseason, and we really haven't had any problems this year."

It's not the only area in which Sanders has improved in his final college season. Technically, Grimes said, Sanders has continued to improve.

He's become so good, in fact, that Grimes said Sanders should get some looks from the NFL.

"I told him he needs to be a guy that really sticks out when (scouts) watch the film," Grimes said, "not just a guy that does his job, but a guy that does the extra things — finishes blocks downfield, drives guys into the ground, plays physically, nasty and aggressive — and he did a good job of that in the last game in particular."

Grimes compared Sanders to Tyler Polumbus and Edwin Harrison, who both graduated last year. Neither was drafted, but both have found homes on NFL teams — Polumbus made the Broncos' roster, and Harrison is on the Chiefs' practice squad.

"With the offensive line, so much of it comes down to being the right kind of guy," Grimes said. "If a guy is smart, and if he'll be technically sound and be a hard worker and be a tough guy, then he'll have an opportunity. Girty fits into that role, I think."

GOODMAN REMAINS CONFIDENT: Aric Goodman is just looking for a couple of breaks these days.

The sophomore kicker hasn't made a kick since his game-winner against West Virginia on Sept. 18. Overall, the Buffs are 4-for-14 this season.

Jameson Davis, who missed two tries against Iowa State, still is battling a bad knee and isn't likely to try another field goal this season.

That means the job is Goodman's once again, and he continues to profess that his confidence hasn't wavered.

"Even in the games and the misses that I've had, they've all been close, so I'm still kicking good," Goodman said. "I think I'm setting the world record right now on uprights hit.

"There's just been couple times when I haven't gotten that break here or there."

How about the mounting pressure caused by every miss?

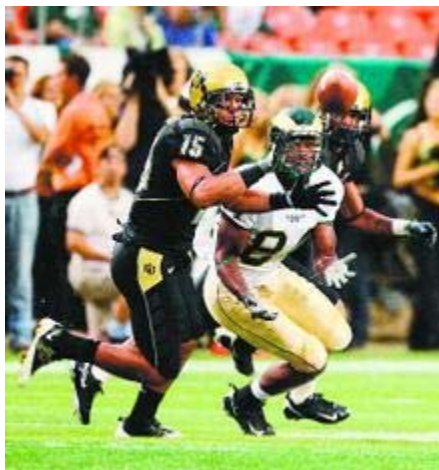
"Obviously it's there, and I know it's there," Goodman said. "But mentally, as a kicker, that's not something you can't really think about."

Rocky Mountain News

CU seniors want 'memorable' last game at Folsom

By **B.G. Brooks**, Rocky Mountain News ([Contact](#))

Published November 13, 2008 at 1:13 p.m.



Darin McGregor / The Rocky

CU's Ryan Walters breaks up a pass intended for CSU's Rashaun Greer earlier this season at Invesco Field at Mile High.

Once September arrives, a football season sprouts wings. Blink once, and it's November. Blink twice and offseason conditioning is under way.

Same with a college career, contends Ryan Walters, one of 15 University of Colorado seniors

set to make their final appearances at Folsom Field on Saturday against No. 11 Oklahoma State.

"Time flies, it really does," Walters, a three-year starter at safety, said. "It's crazy; I try not to think about it too much. But it's a special feeling being the last hurrah at Folsom Field."

"I try not to think of it like that, but it's in my head," added outside linebacker Brad Jones, also a three-year starter. "I just want to make it a good one, make it memorable."

Upsetting the Cowboys, who are 16 1/2-point favorites, and becoming bowl eligible with a sixth victory would meet Jones' specifications. And it might even elicit an uncommonly loud celebration from this senior class, one that coach Dan Hawkins says seems to cherish its collective silence.

While vocal upperclassmen have a role, Hawkins said no team needs "a bunch of screaming Mimis" - and those are blissfully absent from this CU team. On the flip side, many in this senior class have gone platinum with the "silence is golden" line.

"Many of them, to some degree, are like Brandon (Nicolas)," Hawkins said, referring to the defensive tackle who seems to have made word economy a second major. "Patrick Williams - the same thing; (he) shows up every day, doesn't say a whole lot and does whatever it takes.

"In any organization, consistency is a big, big deal. So many of those guys are like that."

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Rocky Mountain News

But the class also has a few ever-ready quote merchants (see: defensive tackle George Hypolite) and a handful of appealing stories that have slipped under the headlines.

* A love of football plucked safety Joel Adams from racing downhill with the Buffaloes ski team (he was a two-year letterman and member of CU's 2006 NCAA championship team) and put him on scout team duty during the week and some special teams work on weekends. Adams is the first athlete in school history to letter in skiing and football.

* Punter Tom Suazo transferred to CU from Arizona State in 2005, then spent the next two seasons kicking around (literally) in practice. He kept working, finally entering the lineup three games ago, mainly for his directional punting ability.

* Receiver Cody Crawford, a walk-on in 2004, has been described by physically unimposing offensive coordinator/quarterbacks coach Mark Helfrich like this: "He looks like me. Actually, I'm taller." But Crawford came up big last week in the win against Iowa State, catching eight passes for 79 yards and the decisive touchdown with 1:30 to play.

* After playing football and baseball in youth leagues, high school and junior college (Saddleback College in California), quarterback Nick Nelson decided to put down bat, spikes and glove and turn toward football. He has played sparingly at CU (three games in 2007, none this season), but Helfrich lauds Nelson for "staying in

it."

These 15 seniors, Hawkins said, "have had pretty good resolve the whole time" he has coached them.

Hawkins said in Walters, whose father, Marc, played quarterback at CU in the mid-1980s, and fullback Maurice Cantrell, "You know what you're getting every day. Those guys are just very consistent . . . and that's a group that's come off some issues as well (in 2004 and 2005).

"Because they've had some of those experiences, they've been able to assert themselves a little bit more as leaders. In terms of the program, they've done a good job of that."

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Rocky Mountain News

CU report: Preparing for Dez

By **Paul Willis**, Rocky Mountain News ([Contact](#))

Published November 13, 2008 at 9:46 p.m.



Photo by Associated Press / 2006

Associated Press / 2006

Smith will have his hands full.



Photo by Brody Schmidt / Associated Press

Brody Schmidt / Associated Press

Oklahoma State receiver Dez Bryant has 15 touchdown catches.

Against a team replete with upper-echelon weapons, **Jimmy Smith** will be in charge of shutting down perhaps the biggest one.

Because of his size, the 6-foot-2, 195-pound Smith will be matched up against Oklahoma State receiver **Dez Bryant** on Saturday when the Buffaloes play the No. 11 Cowboys.

Bryant, a 6-2, 210-pound sophomore, has corralled 64 catches for 1,140 yards and 15 touchdowns this season.

"He's got size, hands and he loves the jump ball," Smith said. "But I think I can match up with him

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because I'm about his size and I can jump as well."

Smith, a sophomore, generally is considered to have the most upside of any of CU's cornerbacks and could morph into an NFL prospect.

For now, Smith's concern is not only Bryant, but Oklahoma State's entire offense, which among others, features quarterback **Zac Robinson** and running back **Kendall Hunter**.

"Bryant's a big playmaker, but if you take him out of the picture it kind of restricts their passing game," Smith said. "We just don't want any explosion plays."

He said it

"Nobody is perfect in college football. That is why we are amateurs. We just had an off day. We're going to bounce back."

Deron Fontenot, Oklahoma State linebacker, on the Cowboys giving up 56 points to Texas Tech.

Numbers game

3 ranking in the Football Bowl Subdivision for Robinson in passer efficiency with a 181.01 rating. He trails only **David Johnson** of Tulsa (198.2) and **Sam Bradford** of Oklahoma (188.9). CU's **Cody Hawkins** ranks 72nd at 119.4.

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