



## Hawk sees improvement on O-line

By Kyle Ringo

Wednesday, November 26, 2008

Continuity and consistency have escaped the Colorado offensive line much of this season, but coaches have seen some positive signs over the past three weeks that have them optimistic about how the unit might perform Friday at Nebraska.

Four of five starters have played every snap in the past three games and the other starter, redshirt freshman Blake Behrens, missed only five snaps in that span.

"I do think that they have grown up and started playing progressively better these last three weeks even though we lost at A&M," coach Dan Hawkins said. "I thought they started to play a little bit better obviously against Iowa State and did a nice job against an Oklahoma State team that I think is pretty good up front."

The two best days in terms of total yards from scrimmage for the CU offense have come in the past three games as well. CU eclipsed 400 yards of total offense just once in 11 games. That happened at home in a victory over Iowa State. The Buffs gained 392 total yards at Texas A&M, which is where the offense might have started to build a little confidence.

The Buffs were trailing by double-digits late in that game and had the ball on their 2-yard line. Freshman quarterback Tyler Hansen led the Buffs on a 98-yard scoring drive. The next week, the offense came together in the second half against ISU and sophomore quarterback Cody Hawkins threw four touchdown passes.

Those experiences have given the five linemen, Matt Bahr, Behrens, Daniel Sanders, Devin Head and Nate Solder something to build on.

"That is the hardest thing about playing O-line is that all five of you have to be on the same page because four of you can be doing awesome, and one of you is not, and it makes the whole group look bad," Hawkins said.

CU fans are familiar with the team's injury problems on the offensive line this season. Without those injuries, it's likely three of the current starters wouldn't be playing much, if at all, at this point. Hawkins said the fact that they are getting such significant experience will help the entire group next year when he hopes the injury bug will move on to another team.

"It'll be big, real big," Hawkins said. "Again, you look at how far this group has come, really since the middle of the season when they got the opportunities to play.

"Those guys will be way farther along than they would have and you get the healthy guys back in the mix and you have some great competition and some great experience and that is part of our equation here too, is, 'Hey you've got to show up every day and you've got to practice every day and you've got to

prove yourself every day because that guy behind you, he can play.' "

### **Bye-bye to the bye**

Colorado won't have a bye week before the Nebraska game in each of the next four years as a result of the NCAA adding a 12th game to the regular season schedule prior to the 2007 season.

The bye week will still occur on occasion, but it won't happen again until 2013. The Buffs will have a short week of preparation in each of the next four years, but that doesn't have Hawkins concerned.

The one downside to losing the bye Hawkins highlighted is the opportunity to get injured players healthy.

### **High marks**

Five CU players earned first team spots on the Academic All-Big 12 team announced Tuesday. A player must maintain at least a 3.2 grade-point average and have played in at least 60 percent of his team's games for first-team honors. The five Buffs are Jake Behrens, George Hypolite, Travis Sandersfeld, Devin Shanahan and Nate Solder.

Patrick Devenny was the lone CU representative on the second team, which requires a 3.0 GPA and at least 60-percent participation. A total of 137 players in the conference made the team, with 91 on the first team and 46 on the second team.

Texas boasts a league-most 22 members on the team, including 17 first-teamers. Freshmen and transfers are not eligible in their first years on the team.

### **Notable**

Hawkins said safety Ryan Walters is doubtful for the game because he hasn't been able to practice. Walters suffered a high-ankle sprain on the first play of the game against Oklahoma State 10 days ago. With Walters out and fellow senior safety D.J. Dykes' career over because of an undisclosed illness, the Buffs will be forced to use redshirt freshman Anthony Perkins, who has logged significant playing all year, at one safety spot. True freshman Patrick Mahnke will make his first start. He played most of the game against OSU with a broken rib. ... The Buffs practice today and depart for Lincoln, Neb., in the early afternoon on Thanksgiving. ... The team has brought out the red jerseys and white-taped helmets for the scout team the past two days.



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## Getting better, all the time

The gains made by CU's young O-line is a good sign for next year.

By Tom Kensler  
The Denver Post

Updated: 11/25/2008 11:21:09 PM MST



Colorado QB Cody Hawkins gets a hug from Daniel Sanders after the Buffaloes' win against Iowa State. Sanders, a team captain, is the only senior remaining on the offensive line. ( Kathryn Scott Osler, The Denver Post )

staff in February 2007.

But a bit of luck would have been nice.

Grimes had just six available offensive linemen for his first spring, and that included a walk-on. During the 2007 season, he had to start two true freshmen. This fall, CU lost two potential starters at guard — senior Erick Faatagi (academic ineligibility) and Mike Iltis (ACL tear) — before the first game.

Then a month into the 2008 schedule, Grimes lost his best overall lineman in sophomore right tackle Ryan Miller (fractured fibula) and a guard, Max Tuoti-Mariner (ACL), talented enough to earn a

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starting job as a true freshman.

BOULDER — Nobody promised Colorado offensive line coach Jeff Grimes a rose garden or Cotton Bowl when he left Brigham Young and joined the Buffaloes

The patchwork line has improved during recent weeks, and Grimes said he is focused only on Friday's game at Nebraska. But nobody could fault

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him for dreaming a bit about about 2009.

With injuries and attrition having force-fed so many young linemen into action, Grimes will return seven players who have starting experience. That does not include Ittis, or two towering freshman tackles — former Mullen blue-chipper Bryce Givens (6-feet-6, 260 pounds) and Ryan Dannewitz (6-6, 285) from California — who have impressed while redshirting.

The trials and tribulations of 2008, Grimes said, could turn out to be a blessing in disguise for the future.

"I hope, as a group, we're a whole lot better next year," Grimes said. "We'll have so many guys who have played, so many guys that are competing. We'll have more experience, although, as a whole, we'll still be a young group. And that's a good thing, because we should get better next year and then the year after that."

Getting the call against a veteran Nebraska defensive line are two redshirt freshmen, Blake Behrens and Matthew Bahr. Sophomore left tackle Nate Solder was a tight end until March. They are joined by senior captain Daniel Sanders at center and junior guard Devin Head.

Colorado's offensive line appeared overmatched in some games. Tailbacks found few holes. Quarterbacks lacked the time to set up.

Experience is a bigger factor for an offensive lineman than for any position on the field, except the quarterback, Grimes said. The responsibilities and techniques are complicated. Also, strength matters.

"Young guys on the O-line that go out there and play are often lost mentally," Grimes said. "That takes away from their aggression and learning who to

block, how to do it, understanding the schemes. You'd love to be in a position to be playing guys that are at least in their third year."

What is unique about the offensive line, CU coach Dan Hawkins said, "is four of the five guys can be doing awesome, but when one of them is not, it makes the whole group look bad."

Solder, whom Grimes believes has star potential, recalled how much he improved as a tight end because it was one of the deepest positions on the roster.

"It's great when a starter knows he has to play his best or the next guy will take his job," Solder said. "We'll have that on the O-line next year."

## Footnote.

Following Tuesday's practice, Hawkins said senior free safety Ryan Walters (high ankle sprain) is "very doubtful" for Friday's game because Walters has missed most practice drills. "We're not counting on him," the coach said.

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# Rocky Mountain News

## Repeat of 2007 CU-Nebraska shootout unlikely

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

Published November 25, 2008 at 9:38 p.m.

Photo by Charlie Riedel / Associated Press

CU cornerback Jimmy Smith, left, playing against Kansas this season, made an interception and returned it for a touchdown, igniting the Buffaloes' rally against Nebraska in 2007.

Here's the bad news.

Given the points-per-game pace of Colorado's offense in Big 12 Conference play (14.9), matching the 65 points scored in last season's shootout with Nebraska would require just more than four games for these Buffaloes.

Here's the good news: CU cornerback Jimmy Smith can't see another 116-point combined total Friday in Lincoln. That's mainly because he can't see him and his defensive mates being torched for 51 by the Cornhuskers.

"I don't see it being like that this year - not at all," Smith said Tuesday. "I don't think our defense is going to give up 51 points. . . . I would hope not, anyway."

Smith, at long last tapping into the potential

secondary coach Greg Brown has been touting the past two seasons, contributed the momentum-swinging play for the Buffs in last season's win.

A 31-yard interception return for a touchdown - both were career firsts for Smith - pulled CU within to 35-31 and initiated a 34-0 run.

Immediately after Smith's pick was one by Lionel Harris, then a blocked punt by Alonzo Harris - both of which CU capitalized on with scores.

"Then, it was like we got all the momentum back. Those three plays right there - they were key to us winning," recalled Smith, a sophomore who moved into the starting lineup this season against Iowa State.

Smith won the team's Hale Irwin Award in the spring, signifying the most improved defensive back. Still, Brown awaited the chance to bump him into the starting lineup, anticipating finally being able to utilize the size (6-foot-2, 195 pounds) that increases Smith's coverage potential and sometimes allows him to compensate for a lack of game experience.

Smith and fellow cornerback Cha'pelle Brown are likely to be joined by two relatively new safeties Friday. Senior Ryan Walters' status has been downgraded to doubtful - he has a high ankle sprain and knee ailment - and senior D.J. Dykes (health issues) is out.

Subbing for them will be true freshman Patrick Mahnke and redshirt freshman Anthony Perkins,

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and Smith believes the younger players will hold up nicely, calling Perkins "smart, like D.J., but maybe a little faster. And he doesn't get shaky in the least - he's just played this year, but he's played like a veteran."

Smith terms Mahnke "a great tackler" who is as instinctive as Perkins.

"And we've been coaching him up," Smith added. "They'll both have to strap it on, but so will me and Cha'pelle, who's kind of our collective voice right now. He's just a baller, really good."

Duplicating the turnovers Smith and the Buffs created last season against Nebraska has been re-emphasized by the coaching staff, as has been physical play against a team that appears to have taken on the persona of first-year coach Bo Pelini.

"But our coaches always stress that," Smith said. "We haven't had that many turnovers in the last couple of games, but it's really important in this one."

Pointing to CU's scout team appearing Monday in red jerseys and white helmets emblazoned with a red "N," Smith shrugged off suggestions the Buffs are in a "business as usual" mode.

"Our D-line was getting into it with the scouts (Monday)," Smith said. "That's good to see, them getting fired up. They were getting after it. Personally, I think it's definitely a rivalry game . . . hey, you can't wear red in here (Dal Ward Athletics Center), so that tells me it's a rivalry

game."

But as was the case last season, there's more to it than that. CU needs a sixth win to become bowl eligible, and Smith said he has no intention "to sit at home and watch everybody else play . . . it's do or die for us."

**ETC.:** If the Buffs become bowl eligible, freshman tailback **Rodney "Speedy" Stewart** hopes to join them in the postseason. He believes his broken fibula and surgically repaired ankle will be healed, but he must be cleared medically. Still, Stewart says, "I think I can go." . . . CU's roster features three players who initially committed to Nebraska but reneged after the coaching change - starting linebacker **Shaun Mohler** and redshirt freshmen **Doug Rippy** (linebacker) and **Bryce Givens** (guard).

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