



# CU tight end Walters faces key test on injured leg

## Another injury this spring could end his career

By Kyle Ringo  
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BOULDER, Colo. — Most of the football players who take the field for Colorado spring practices next week will be trying to catch the eye of coaches and position themselves for playing time in the fall.

Some have already conquered those hurdles.

Tight end Luke Walters is in an entirely different frame of mind. He just hopes to survive the 15 sessions over the next four weeks without suffering another setback with his chronically injured right leg.

This spring could be the final chapter in Walters' story on the gridiron, or it could be the point at which he is rewarded for all the agony and hassle he has endured.

How much does he love the game?

On two separate occasions in the past four years, Walters has allowed doctors to cut open his leg at the knee, expose one end of his tibia (shin) bone, drill down the middle and hammer a long steel tube through the opening to shore up a weak spot that has fractured twice. Then they screwed it in place, put him back together and wrote up the prescriptions for pain killers.

They did it twice because it didn't work the first time. Walters is about to find out how it went the second time around.

"I've been running on it for about six weeks now, and as far as I can tell, it's as good as it can be and I've got nothing to worry about," Walters said. "No pain. It just feels awkward because it doesn't feel exactly the same as my other leg with all the scar tissue. It feels a little weird, but the pain is just a sore. It's not the sharp pain I used to get that comes with having a fracture."

Walters had a modest prep career at ThunderRidge High School in Highlands Ranch and was lightly recruited. He accepted a scholarship offer to New Mexico in 2005.

While playing in a basketball game during his senior year, he was kicked hard in the shin. The ache lingered for weeks and then months, but he was afraid to say anything for fear of losing his scholarship.

When he reported to New Mexico in the summer of 2005 and began fall camp, coaches and trainers noticed right away that something was definitely wrong. Walters was slow and tentative because what

had started as a hairline fracture had become a deep, full crack in his bone.

He underwent surgery for the first time in September 2005 and received his first tibial rod.

Walters missed his freshman season. He returned as a redshirt freshman after a long rehabilitation and played in nine games in 2006 for the Lobos mostly on special teams. He caught one pass for 14 yards against the Aggies of New Mexico State. It remains the only catch of his career.

Walters decided to transfer for Colorado before his sophomore year and walk-on. CU had made a coaching change and it was where he always wanted to be. He practiced all year at tight end in 2007 and began to get noticed last spring when he made six catches for 36 yards in the three scrimmages.

Last summer he began to feel pain again in the same area. He took things slowly on the advice of CU head athletic trainer Miguel Rueda. After missing most of the first three weeks of fall camp, he decided to take a shot before practice and get back in the fray.

He leaped for a pass at one point during practice and landed awkwardly. He felt shooting pain through his entire leg. The bone had cracked again in the exact same place. He knew almost immediately he had another date with doctors, drills and hammers. Walters underwent surgery in early September and has been working his way back since.

"I honestly believe I can help this team get to where it wants to go," Walters said. "If I didn't truly believe that I had an opportunity to make this a better team, I probably would have packed it in.

"I know a lot of guys come and go here, but I just don't feel like it's my time to give up on it. There is still a lot left in the tank to give to this team."

No matter what happens with his leg this time around, Walters' story will have a positive ending. He is closing in on his degree in geography. After the spring semester, he will need only six more hours, which means he should graduate in December.

If he gets through the spring and fall camps unscathed and is able to play, Walters said he plans to file paperwork with the NCAA asking for a sixth season of eligibility because he has missed two full years due to injury. As it stands now, he is one of four senior tight ends on the roster, including Riar Geer, Patrick Devenny and Devin Shanahan.

"This next month is huge for me," he said. "Spring ball could be the determining factor. If I go out there and something happens again or it feels like it's going to give out, that would probably be a sign for me to say it's time to move on.

"But I feel like I can probably go out there and compete with them as good as I have before. I'm pretty excited about it."



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