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## Buffaloes returning to power football

By Patrick Ridgell  
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BOULDER — They're throwing the "P-word" around during Colorado's spring football drills.

While many wonder who'll win the starting quarterback position in a battle that coaches say is open, the bigger story could be the return to power offensive football that's unfolding. It's a style that's reminiscent of what led the program to a Big 12 title in 2001 and Big 8 titles in the late 1980s and early 1990s. It's a change from last year's no-huddle plan to one that's designed to maximize strengths, which CU believes will be a talented array of tailbacks running behind a big offensive line.

They'll run out of the I-formation. Quarterbacks will be under center more often — much more often.

It's not that the quarterback battle isn't important. It's just that offensive coordinator Mark Helfrich knows running the football could work out really well for everybody, especially the quarterbacks.

"Anytime you can run the football, your quarterback is going to be better," Helfrich said Thursday. "If you can run the ball, you can do anything."

Last season, the Buffs finished last in the Big 12 in scoring (20.2 points per game) and yards (318.5 per). Their 124.5 rushing yards a game were 10th in the conference and the fewest the program has averaged since 118.1 in 2005. The no-huddle is still an option, just not the first.

"I'm excited about it," tailback Demetrius Sumler said. "Coach (Dan) Hawkins and everybody here believes that winning games starts with the running game. If we have that good downhill power running offense, it'll definitely help us, especially in the Big 12.

"We're basically running the same plays; we're just in a lot different formations."

Said quarterback Matt Ballenger: "We definitely can still do the same tempo, but we're huddling, using two-back sets. We can pound the ball. We have four awesome running backs right now. Everybody at that position right now can get after it. That's going to open up the passing game."

Rodney Stewart, Demetrius Sumler, Darrell Scott and Brian Lockridge are the four backs to which Ballenger referred. Lockridge redshirted in 2008 to recover from hernia surgery. Stewart is coming off a broken fibula, and Scott battled knee and ankle injuries last year. Both say they're healthy now. Scott, who got his weight down to 202 last November, is listed at 200 pounds now and appears lean.

Running back coach Darian Hagan saw members of CU's sports information department issuing rosters Tuesday, the first day of spring drills. He asked if there was a depth chart and was glad to hear there was not.



Matt Ballenger runs through drills at the practice bubble at the University of Colorado at Boulder on Tuesday. Ballenger is challenging Cody Hawkins and Tyler Hansen to be the Buffs' starting quarterback. **Morgan**

**Varon/Times-Call**

“We don’t have one,” Hagan said.

He said some sets will include two of the aforementioned backs in the same backfield so the offense can have its best players on the field. He added that each tailback will be graded on everything he does. But what the coach mainly seeks is simple.

“Who’s going to let it go?” Hagan said.

The offensive line is far from set, but as head coach Dan Hawkins said Tuesday, left tackle Nate Solder is about as sure a thing as the Buffs have there right now. Among those working on the same line with Solder when he played Thursday were Matt Bahr and Ryan Miller at the guards, Mike Iltis at center and Bryce Givens at the other tackle.

At quarterback, Cody Hawkins’ 23 career starts dwarf the number made by Ballenger (none) and Tyler Hansen (two). Helfrich said whichever quarterback is the most efficient and gets the team in the end zone will be the one who wins the starting job.

Keep a couple of things in mind as this battle evolves: Helfrich said Hansen and Ballenger, both sophomores, will not be asked to run the same plays on offense as will Cody Hawkins, a fourth-year junior, due to Hawkins’ experience.

Secondly, Ballenger said he needs to improve on being more assertive, and Hansen said he needs to understand what defenses are trying to do. Asked what he needs to improve, Cody Hawkins said “manipulating” the opposing defenses, which includes changing plays at the line of scrimmage and other nuances that make veteran quarterbacks so valuable.

“We’re going to be a team that wants to pound the ball and throw it deep,” Cody Hawkins said.

**EXTRA POINTS:** Dan Hawkins said about 70 coaches are attending CU’s coaching clinic, which concludes today. Among those on hand Thursday to speak at it were former San Diego State head coach Tom Craft and former Buffs Dave Logan and Ty Gregorak, the linebackers coach at Montana for the past six seasons. ... The Buffs will don full pads and hit today for the first time this spring. Things were spirited Thursday. A few scuffles broke out. “I loved it; I thought it was great,” Hawkins said. ... Lockridge and receiver Josh Smith collided at full speed while running fly patterns from opposite ends of the field during one drill. Smith took the worst of it, getting the air knocked out of him. He later returned to practice. “It wasn’t as bad as the cement wall he hit in the stadium,” Hawkins said, referring to the time Smith ran into a wall during a scrimmage in Folsom Field and hurt a kidney.

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# Bufs' Sipili beginning to regain form of freshman season

By Kyle Ringo  
Friday, April 3, 2009

BOULDER, Colo. — Seven games, 127 plays, 19 tackles.

Those numbers are a far cry from the season Colorado linebacker Michael Sipili hoped to put together last fall after returning from a one-year absence from the playing field.

The hard-nosed middle linebacker from Hawaii struggled with a variety of issues that kept him on the sidelines more often than in the fray, regardless of whether it was Saturday's big game or a Tuesday afternoon practice.

His back first tightened up on him in fall camp and the problem persisted through much of the rest of the season. Sipili also struggled to focus on school work, which led to coaches taking football away at times so he would have to apply himself to his studies.

Sipili has participated fully in each of the first two practices this spring and is beginning to resemble the player who burst into the lineup as a true freshman in 2006, stealing playing time away from senior Thaddaeus Washington that year.

"I'm feeling good. I feel great," he said Thursday in the Dal Ward Center. "Right now there is not much to worry about. I'm just trying to focus on school and trying to get these grades up so I don't have to worry about anything else."

Longtime linebackers coach Brian Cabral is excited to see the change in Sipili, and he believes he now understands more fully much of what has held his hardest-hitting player back. Some might call it culture shock.

"There is a little bit of a language barrier, which has taken me three years to figure that out," Cabral said. "Understanding English and speaking English is good, but English is a second language to him. Samoan is his first language. Most of the Polynesian kids, most of everything they respond to is, 'Yes coach.' Whether or not they understand it, 'Yes coach.' I've found out that even in my coaching him during the games, that he doesn't always understand. We both came to the conclusion that he needs to communicate more, and I need to communicate better. We need to close the gap."

Sipili said he is not going to get too far ahead of himself in talking about next season. He admits he still has work to do to make sure he is academically eligible in the fall, but he seems confident he will get there.

"If he keeps going the way he's going, not only will we see him, but we'll need him," Cabral said.

Sipili said the offseason conditioning program has helped him drop a few pounds and become more fit for the field. He has been working with the second team defense through the first two practices as the backup at middle linebacker to senior Marcus Burton.

"Mike is a different guy," Cabral said. "He faded at the end of last season and at the end of last semester, but now he's a different guy. He's always got a smile on his face, and he's really trying to work to improve. He's trying to do everything and more that we're asking him to do."

## Helmet cams

### a success

Coach Dan Hawkins said the experiment with the team's three quarterbacks wearing helmet cameras this spring is a success because the footage being recorded will actually be a useful teaching tool. Hawkins and his assistants were able to watch film of Tuesday's first practice, including film from the helmet cameras, which were the brainchild of director of sports video Jamie Guy.

The helmet-cam video is synchronized with traditional video so coaches can see exactly what quarterbacks were looking at at select points during each play.

"We like it," Hawkins said. "I think it's actually going to get better when we get outside and lighting is a little bit better.

"I think it provides an interesting prospective for those guys, and sometimes it's good too for the receivers because they see what the quarterback is looking at and they see what the quarterback sees in terms of their route and what they're doing in getting open."

## Notable

The first two days of practice have been some of the most spirited sessions of Hawkins' tenure at CU. "I think they're very energized and they're playing with a lot of passion," Hawkins said. ... The Bufs have been showing a lot of 3-4 defensive looks in 11-on-11 work at this early stage in spring, with the starting linebackers being Burton, Jeff Smart, B.J. Beatty and Doug Rippy. ... CU is hosting a two-day coaches clinic that ends today with at least 70 high school and small college coaches attending. One of the featured speakers is former San Diego State head coach Tom Craft, who attended practice Thursday. ... Former Bufs Ty Gregorak and Elton Toray Davis roamed the sidelines Thursday as well.



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# Bufs need Simmons to come through

## JC receiver has work to do before transferring

By Kyle Ringo  
Friday, April 3, 2009

BOULDER, Colo. — Two spring practices are complete for the Colorado football team and the Buffs' lack of depth at wide receiver remains a problem area.

If something were to happen to Markques Simas, Scotty McKnight or Josh Smith, the offense would be handicapped to say the least. That nightmare scenario nearly unfolded Thursday when Smith and running back Brian Lockridge ran into each other at full speed while each was participating in passing drills that began at opposite ends of the field and finished in the middle where the collision occurred.

Both players were wearing only shorts, jerseys and helmets. They laid on the turf for a moment as athletic trainers sprinted to make sure they were all right. Smith remained on the ground a little longer but eventually rejoined practice.

"The earth stands still for a couple minutes, but he's tough," coach Dan Hawkins said of Smith, who spent time in the hospital two years ago in training camp after running into a cement wall during a scrimmage in Folsom Field.

CU signed three wide receivers on national signing day in February, and one of them is a sure bet to provide immediate help as long as he qualifies academically. It's a big if.

Andre Simmons is working his tail off this semester at Independence Community College in Kansas. He is taking seven classes this semester in hopes of completing all that he needs to to qualify at CU. He will follow up this summer with two more classes.

Simmons chose this route knowing what was in store. He could have opted to take any one of numerous other scholarship offers, including one to Kansas State, where the entrance requirements are much easier.

"I feel like I was needed more at Colorado than I was at other places," Simmons said. "I feel like I fit in more like a family at Colorado. So that was my choice to go that way."

Simmons said he is working with numerous tutors and spends at least six hours a day on school. He has an optimistic outlook about his chances for playing at CU next fall. He said he's "positive" it will happen.

This is the second year in row the Buffs have signed one junior college player in recruiting and that player has had to climb a mountain to qualify academically. Linebacker Shaun Mohler did it last spring and summer, completing 25 credit hours to qualify.

"It's the exact same situation," wide receivers coach Eric Kiesau said. "He's in the same ballpark. Every day I'm talking to (director of academics) Kris (Livingston) and we're always referring to how Shaun did it.

"The one thing I will say with Andre is that guy is extremely motivated. I think a lot of his motivation comes from he could have gone other places and taken the easy road, but now he's kind of feeling like I think that it's kind of his burning desire to say, 'Hey, I said no to a lot of these schools. I turned down an opportunity to play in our conference but I wanted to go to Colorado.' He's actually doing very well -- today."

Mohler said coaches recently asked him to call Simmons and talk about the situation and offer some advice and encouragement. Mohler made the most of his work last fall by earning plenty of playing time and becoming one of the better players on the Buffs' defense by the end of the season.

Mohler said he will offer this advice to Simmons when he speaks to him: "Keep plugging away and keep your priorities straight. Time management is the biggest thing. You've got to have dreams, and my dream was coming here. That's what drove me to do all that work."

Mohler said being so focused on school for more than seven months prepared him well for the workload once he arrived in Boulder.

If Simmons doesn't qualify, CU will have to play next season with fingers crossed that its mainstays at wide receiver remain injury free and that they get some contributions from younger players, which is never a sure thing.



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## Rush is on for CU defense

Apr. 2, 2009 No Comment [Email This Story](#)  
By B.G. Brooks

BOULDER — Call it an April mandate or a renewed emphasis on the obvious, but the Colorado Buffaloes launched spring football practice this week with a common defensive goal: Turn up the overall pressure, especially on the quarterback.

To say the Buffs have been lacking in this area for the past two seasons is akin to saying AIG bonuses have put the populace on edge.

“We’re definitely going to be a lot more aggressive (in 2009),” junior outside linebacker B.J. Beatty said. “Coach (Ron) Collins is going to try and bring it from everywhere and anywhere he can. The scheme is definitely going to be a lot more aggressive.”

The last time CU had a dependable, bona fide pass rush? Try 2006, when senior end Abraham Wright accounted for 11.5 sacks in coach Dan Hawkins’ first season in Boulder.

Since then, the Buffs have had difficulty unleashing any player who came close to duplicating Wright’s sacks total. Senior outside linebacker Brad Jones accounted for seven sacks last season, marking the highest individual total in the post-Wright era.

Averaging 1.92 sacks a game in 2008, the Buffs ranked seventh in the Big 12 Conference. But Collins, CU’s defensive coordinator, isn’t into spouting sack totals and league rankings; he’d rather be certain that quarterbacks who face CU will come away knowing they’ve been harassed for four quarters.

How to accomplish that?

“We’ve got to be more creative in our pressure package,” Collins said. “You can do that a lot of ways. We’ve always had an OK package, but we’ve got to get to the point where we can identify (this spring) the guys who can get to the quarterback and make those guys our keys to success. ...

“Whoever it is, whether it’s a safety, a corner, a ‘backer or a defensive lineman doesn’t matter. A couple of years ago, we had Abe Wright, then

(linebacker) Jordon Dizon. Both created a lot of pressure. We've just got to identify the guys who can get there, and I think we've got a good nucleus of players who can do that."

The list is well-stocked and includes returning starters Jeff Smart (a team-best 118 tackles last season) and Shaun Mohler (four tackles for loss), and veterans Marcus Burton and Michael Sipili (all linebackers); end Marquez Herrod (four sacks); corners Cha'pelle Brown (one sack, five tackles for loss) and Jimmy Smith; and safeties Patrick Mahnke and Anthony Perkins.

Linebacker Jon Major's spring participation is limited after last season's knee surgery. Collins mentioned linebacker Doug Rippy as a possible contributor but added Rippy still is learning the game. And among the incoming freshman to watch is touted end Nick Kasa.

But CU's list of pressure providers might start with Beatty, an aggressive Hawaiian who sports a flowing red mane and appeared ready to make his mark as a sophomore before being slowed by a leg injury.

Still, Beatty, who now is working at a stand-up outside spot as well as at the line of scrimmage with his hand on the ground, got enough experience to prove to himself and his coaches that he's no stranger to the game.

"It helped me a lot," he said. "I got put into situations where they were kind of dependent on me coming up with the big play. It was really rewarding because (now) I don't get as nervous, things don't build up and I don't stress out. It (experience) helps me just relax just a little more."

Although he has developed a reputation as a playmaker, he downplays that: "I just go out and play. People can call me whatever they want; I just see myself as another guy on the defense. I'm just trying to help and do my job — help the team and help the defense."

Counting Beatty, Smart and Mohler, and the handful of other talented returnees such as Burton and Sipili, position coach Brian Cabral's linebacker corps is more well-stocked than in recent seasons.

That, coupled with a dearth of experience in the defensive line (three starters graduated), will make Collins, Cabral & Co. frequently utilize four linebackers.

Said Collins: "We'll explore whatever we have to explore to get the best players on the field. We've got a good nucleus of guys (and) the door's wide open for them to compete this spring."

The four-linebacker look, added Beatty, "might become a staple ... we definitely have the numbers."

But in addition to having the linebacker numbers conducive to the 3-4, coaches want the entire defense to develop more of "an attack mentality," Beatty said. "We've got to get after the ballcarrier — get what coach Collins calls that 'slobbering dog mentality.'"

In his limited playing time last season, Beatty showed he could run, hit, salivate at the sight of a ballcarrier or do whatever was required, registering one sack and four tackles for loss. Cabral liked what he saw in Beatty, but said of the overall picture, "We need more pressure, no question. But we're capable of getting it."

**BUFFS BITS:** After two days of what Hawkins called "spirited" practices in shorts and helmets, the Buffs will put on full pads Friday for the first time this spring. ... Hawkins said he "loved the intensity" his players are showing after two days of work. "It's all good," he said. ... About 75 coaches were registered for a clinic that began Thursday, with a number still expected to walk up and register before the sessions began. ... Among the visiting coaches was former CU linebacker Ty Gregorak, now an assistant at Montana. His boss is former Buffs assistant Bobby Hauck. ... A near-calamitous collision occurred during a passing drill Thursday. Running back Brian Lockridge and receiver Josh Smith met head-on and went down hard, but both were able to resume practicing. ... Quarterback Tyler Hansen showed up well in passing work Thursday.