



CU defense earns redemption

By Kyle Ringo
Saturday, April 18, 2009

BOULDER, Colo. — Fired up defensive coordinator Ron Collins challenged his players Friday afternoon to bring some intensity to the second scrimmage of spring ball six days after the group had been torched for 11 touchdowns and more than 600 yards in total offense.

Two things should be noted right here. The defense was significantly shorthanded the first time around, but made it up for it Friday against a depleted offense with only one scholarship wide receiver available.

The defense gave up only three touchdowns Friday in a much shorter scrimmage that focused almost entirely on specific game situations. But at least defenders could walk out of the practice bubble into a driving snowstorm with heads held high afterward.

With wide receivers Scotty McKnight, Josh Smith and Ryan Maxwell all out with injuries or illness, the leading receiver was first-year walk-on Kyle Cefalo, who made four catches for 66 yards.

"The offense has been giving it to us the past three practices and in the first scrimmage, so we had to kind of redeem ourselves," said cornerback Jimmy Smith, who recorded one of two quarterback sacks. "It was a day where either you bust your butt or you sit on the sidelines because he wants players in there who are going to compete. The last scrimmage we didn't compete how we should have."

The Buffs finally got a turnover from the offense when Brandon Gouin recovered a fumble on the 146th play from scrimmage this spring, and they stopped the run for the second week, allowing 102 yards on 29 carries.

The first score of the day came when linebacker Michael Sipili tackled tailback Darrell Scott in the end zone for a safety. Safety Patrick Mahnke led the way with six total tackles. Four other players recorded four stops each.

"To me there are ups and downs in every part of these scrimmages," Collins said. "There are positives and negatives. Certainly there were some good things about today and some things we've got to learn from."

Close call

Coach Dan Hawkins said the battle for the starting quarterback job is a close one between Cody Hawkins and Tyler Hansen with one week of spring ball remaining.

Coaches have said they would like to have a starter identified going into the summer so that player can take the lead in organizing summer throwing sessions and seven-on-seven work. It might not work out that way.

Offensive coordinator Mark Helfrich said he doesn't believe the lack of depth this spring at wide receiver has affected the coaching staff's ability to judge the quarterbacks. Dan Hawkins said it has been a factor.

"Getting familiarity with your posse is a big part of being a quarterback and knowing where a guy is going to be," Hawkins said.

Cody Hawkins was on the field for 36 plays Friday and led the team to 190 yards and a touchdown, completing 14 of 23 passes for 146 yards and a score. Hansen took 30 snaps from scrimmage, leading the team to 105 yards and two touchdowns. He completed nine of 11 passes for 64 yards and a touchdown.

Flu crew

Coach Hawkins said the team has been plagued this spring by a flu bug that has touched players and coaches. Players such as Ryan Maxwell and Eric Lawson were too sick to play Friday. After predicting that at least one member of the media would also get the bug, Hawkins credited his players for showing some heart by playing sick.

"I've got to give some of the guys credit," he said. "They've just been visiting the trash can and walking back out and playing."



Bufs don't lack depth at TE

Competition among players strong during spring drills

By Kyle Ringo
Saturday, April 18, 2009

BOULDER, Colo. — Whether they're blocking in the running game or compensating for a severe lack of depth at wide receiver, Colorado's six tight ends have put together a solid spring and will be relied upon heavily in the fall.

They had another respectable day Friday during the Bufs' second of three scrimmages this spring, combining to make 10 catches for 83 yards and a touchdown. The final scrimmage comes in the form of the spring game a week from today at Folsom Field.

"I've been really pleased," coach Dan Hawkins said of the tight end play. "I think they've all done a nice job and played well."

There are only two players on the roster this spring who were recruited to the program after playing tight end in high school. Both sophomore Ryan Deehan and redshirt freshman Ryan Wallace should be in the mix for playing time this fall.

Deehan led the group with three catches Friday and Wallace had one grab for seven yards. They both figure to play quite a bit in the fall considering many of the looks CU has used this spring have featured two tight ends.

Not only is there competition for playing time at the position, there is competition for the best feel-good story. Take your pick between seniors Devin Shanahan, who is in his fifth year in the program without ever logging a down of action on offense and has overcome a torn knee ligament. There is Luke Walters trying to come back from a broken leg twice and Patrick Devenny has become a go-to guy after switching positions from quarterback.

Shanahan said he weighed 195 pounds when he joined the program and he's now at 255. He said he would have been lucky to bench press 225 pounds one time as a freshman. He recently put up 345 pounds.

Shanahan, along with Devenny and a handful of others, is one of the last links to the Gary Barnett era in Boulder. He joined the program as a walk-on in 2005 and redshirted. The following year he suffered a torn anterior cruciate ligament during fall camp. His only playing time has come with the field goal team.

"I just kept working hard and knew eventually it would pay off," said Shanahan, who caught the long pass of the day Friday for 38 yards. "That's why I stayed with it."

Spring ball just seems to agree with Devenny, who was recruited to Boulder as a quarterback but has become a solid performer catching passes. He finished last spring atop the depth chart at the position and led the Buffs in the three scrimmages with 12 catches for 244 yards and three touchdowns.

He is on his way to matching those totals this year. He made one catch for 6 yards Friday, and now has five catches for 144 yards and two scores this spring. His performance last spring led to some playing time during the 2008 season, which gave him the confidence he had been lacking during the first two years after changing positions.

"I'm feeling more comfortable and feeling like I can kind of just go out there and have fun with it, and try to let it be more natural as opposed to thinking about it so much," Devenny said.

The most experienced player of the bunch is Riar Geer, who has been limited this spring as he recovers from shoulder surgery and a case of shingles.

It is the second year in a row Geer hasn't been able to get the full benefit of spring practices. He missed the entire spring in 2008 after being suspended for involvement in an off-the-field fistfight.

At least this spring he is able to be around his teammates and coaches on the practice field, which allows him to learn what he will be asked to do in the fall. He has been able to participate in non-contact work as well. Geer said he does his best to help younger and less experienced players during practices.

"For me it has been interesting because I am out here not doing anything so all the other players come up to me and asked what they're doing wrong," Geer said. "I've kind of been able to coach 'em up a little bit and that's been kind of fun."

Senior Luke Walters has looked solid this spring in his bid to return from a broken leg and surgery for the second time in his career. He has been taking on a lighter workload in every third practice to reduce stress on the leg. Walters is an underrated and overlooked guy, who, much like Devenny, could prove people wrong in the fall.

He caught one of only three touchdowns scored in the scrimmage Friday. He has four catches this spring for 50 yards.

"It's very tough to watch, especially with all the success that the tight ends have had," Geer said. "They're catching balls all over the place. That's the hardest part for me is to watch all the other guys go out there and succeed and I can't go out there prove myself."

Spring scrimmage No. 2

RUSHING -- Scott 11-43; Lockridge 7-22; Espinoza 1-17; Hansen 5-14; Sumler 1-5, Moyd 1-2, Stewart 3- minus-1.

PASSING -- Hawkins 14-23-0, 146 yards, 1 TD; Hansen 9-11-0, 64 yards, 1 TD

RECEIVING -- Cefalo 4-66, Espinoza 4-21, Simas 4-32, one TD; Deehan 3-11, Walters 2-21, one TD; Shanahan 1-38, Scott 1-8, Wallace 1-7, 1; Devenny 1-6; Ebner 1-2; Lockridge 1-minus-2

FIELD GOALS -- Goodman 4-6. Made from 38, 42, 38, 33; Missed from 38, 33

TACKLE LEADERS -- Mahnke 6, Burton 4, Sipili 4, J. Smith 4, Mohler 4 Beatty 3, Sandersfeld 3, C. Brown 3, Stengel 3, Ewing 3..

TACKLES FOR LOSS -- Sipili 2, Jimmy Smith 2, Mahnke 1, Mohler 1, Beatty 1, Stengel 1, Smart 1

QB COMPARISON: Hawkins 36 plays, 190 yards, 11 first downs, 10-16 third down; Hansen 30 plays, 105 yards, 10 first downs, 7-11 third downs.

SCORING

Safety, Michael Sipili tackled Darrell Scott in end zone

Aric Goodman 38 yard FG

Goodman 42 yard FG & t;EP Simas 2 pass from Cody Hawkkins (Goodman kick)

Tyler Hansen 1 run (PAT no good)

Goodman 38 yard FG

Walters 8 pass from Hansen (PAT no good)

Goodman 33 yard FG



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Woelk: QB race even, but here's early Hansen vote

By Neill Woelk
Saturday, April 18, 2009

BOULDER, Colo. — Dead even.

To the untrained eye, at least, that's the way the Colorado quarterback race appears to be shaping up. With two spring scrimmages now in the books and one week of drills remaining -- to be capped by next Saturday's spring game -- neither Tyler Hansen nor Cody Hawkins has made enough plays to be declared the clear leader.

Don't be surprised if head coach Dan Hawkins doesn't name a starter -- or even a favorite -- after the spring game. Rather, it would be a surprise if he did. While Hawk is a coach who usually likes to hit fall camp with a starter in place, there are just too many variables in this equation for a clear-cut decision to be made.

What is clear thus far is that Hansen, the true sophomore who shed his redshirt at midseason last year to help lead the Buffs to a win over Kansas State, is having a very good spring. While he's still behind Hawkins in the nuances of the position -- reading defenses, making the right decision, seeing the little things that make a big difference -- he's nevertheless made great strides.

"He's progressed a ton (in those areas)," offensive coordinator Mark Helfrich said after Friday's scrimmage.

One of the plusses, Helfrich noted, has been that CU's quarterbacks are "contact limited." It means that Hansen doesn't have to worry quite as much about getting crunched by a blind-side defender -- and in turn, he can spend a little more time looking at his receiver progression and studying the subtleties of the defense.

"It's good for him because he can play more with his eyes up," Helfrich said. "It gives him the chance to take an extra peek downfield."

In terms of pure athleticism -- particularly on the run -- Hansen has a clear edge over Hawkins. But as a true freshman last fall, Hansen too often leaned on that athleticism at the expense of staying patient and waiting for a receiver to break open. While that tendency still pops up from time to time, Hansen is clearly learning to rein it in.

Hawkins, though, still has the edge in reading defenses and knowing how to react when the opponent throws a new look his way. Meanwhile, the erratic arm that seemed to plague Hawkins last season seems to have disappeared. He is more accurate this spring, and the tendency to force throws has also greatly diminished.

So what's a coach to do?

It's far too early for any definitive answer.

But it's never too early to speculate, and given that opening, I'll take it and run with it this morning (with the codicil, of course, that I have free rein to change my mind by next September).

Make me the coach for a day and I'd pick Hansen to be my starter on Sept. 5 when the Buffs open against Colorado State.

In the long run, I believe Hansen offers the biggest upside. He's a threat on the run, his arm strength is equal to Hawkins' and he can make plays while avoiding the rush, something that Hawkins has struggled to do on occasion. Give him enough time, and he should also be able to pick up the subtleties that currently escape him.

That being said, I also believe Hawkins offers the Buffs a slightly better chance to win early. His knowledge of the offense, his experience and his game-day savvy make him the "safer" bet coming out of the gate. If the Buffs were opening against a Florida State or West Virginia, I'd lean toward Hawkins.

But the Buffs are opening with three games they should be able to win without the quarterback making the difference -- Colorado State, Wyoming and Toledo. When the two quarterbacks are as evenly matched as Hawkins and Hansen, the safe avenue is not a dire necessity.

That's why I'd start Hansen and get as much experience under his belt as possible. Give him the chance to make a few mistakes early, get his confidence up and raise his experience level. Then, by the time the Buffs need a quarterback who can make plays with his legs, who can make something out of nothing (hello Big 12), they'll have one who isn't so green he blends in with the grass. Give Hansen time to grow, and I believe he could be a difference-maker down the stretch run.

Meanwhile, I'd keep Hawkins on the "ready-ready," and make sure he gets some quality time in every game. Even if things are going swimmingly for Hansen, I'd get Hawkins in for some significant series in every game -- for two reasons.

One, such a strategy would keep the backup fresh. With just two quarterbacks on the roster who have ever taken a college snap next fall, keeping both as game-ready as possible will be key. Two, it should be something that keeps defenses on their toes. Hawkins' critics say defenses can rest when he's on the field because he isn't the same type of threat on the run -- but results last year (Iowa State, Nebraska) suggest otherwise. And, there are still offensive packages that Hawkins runs efficiently that Hansen isn't yet ready to cleanly execute.

And, there's this: if you have to choose one of CU's quarterbacks to be a backup, Hawkins is clearly the best choice. He's an extra coach on the sidelines. He'll always be prepared, and he'll never lose focus during a game. More than once, he's reminded me of former Bronco quarterback Gary Kubiak, the man who made a career of being John Elway's backup. Always ready, a student of the game and more than capable of stepping in and being an effective quarterback in any circumstance.

Perfect plan? Of course not. I certainly would not bet on anything close to such a scenario playing out next fall.

But spring is the perfect time for speculation. The serious stuff is still 4½ months away.

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cu football

No clear winner in latest scrimmage

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

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Running back Darrell Scott, who ran for 43 yards on 17 carries, tries to make his way past Tony Poremba during Friday's scrimmage. (Mark Leffingwell, Boulder Daily Camera)

BOULDER — Neither the offense nor the defense performed spectacularly Friday during Colorado's second scrimmage of spring drills.

That's not necessarily a bad thing, coaches say. What's worse is if either side of the ball continually dominates.

"It's been a good back-and-forth this spring, offensively and defensively," CU offensive coordinator Mark Helfrich said after the controlled scrimmage that included 65 plays plus some special-teams work. "We've had some good days (on offense), and they've had some good days."

The defense might have had the upper hand more often Friday, but that was understandable. Colorado has only three wide receivers on scholarship, and Josh Smith (sore ankle) and Scotty McKnight (strained triceps) were held out. That left sophomore Markques Simas to carry the load, along with a bevy of walk-ons.

Simas, a redshirt in 2007 and academically ineligible last season, responded with four catches for 32 yards and a touchdown. Much of the scrimmage involved "situational" work in the red zone. Most pass patterns were relatively short.

Even so, Simas (6-feet-2 and 200 pounds) used his lanky frame to shield off cornerbacks and was tough to defend.

"Markques is a player, I'm telling you," sophomore quarterback Tyler Hansen said. "He's going to be a force to be reckoned with in the Big 12. We've just been waiting for him to come out. Finally, he's stepping up in the classroom, and he's showing that he can make plays."

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Simas took some licks but bounced up each time.

"The defense came out ready to play," Simas said. "We kind of got them a little bit in the first scrimmage, so this was their chance to get back at us. With Scotty and Josh out, they had an opportunity to single up on some guys."

Hansen completed 9-for-11 passes for 64 yards. Cody Hawkins went 14-for-23 for 146 yards. Both threw for a touchdown. Coach Dan Hawkins said the quarterback battle remains just that.

"They're very close," Dan Hawkins said. "Both bring something different to the table. Both have done a nice job."

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Storm cuts CU's 2nd scrimmage short

Still, standouts start to emerge; QB competition will continue

By Patrick Ridgell
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BOULDER — A nasty virus is making its way through the Colorado football team, and as coach Dan Hawkins put it, “Some guys have the version of just the vomit, and some guys have the version of both ends.”

It's unclear whether Friday's scrimmage made anyone feel any better.

The Buffs' second spring scrimmage went inside because of Friday's storm, forcing it to be situational and short. The Buffs worked on red zone offense and defense. They had series during which the offense was backed up on its goal line. They had a series in which the offense had to burn 4 minutes of game time to protect a lead.

The resulting statistics might not be of much use to coaches, who nonetheless said they were mostly pleased with what they saw.

“I liked all these situations,” defensive coordinator Ron Collins said. “Going into the season, these guys need to know how to handle them. So I thought (Friday's) scrimmage, in that respect, was really good.”

There were still a few revelations, though.

Offensive coordinator Mark Helfrich said the quarterback battle between incumbent starter Cody Hawkins and challenger Tyler Hansen will not be decided by the end of spring. Coaches said last month that it was possible a starter could be named by next Saturday's spring game. That won't happen.

“We're not going to call anything until the fall,” Helfrich said. “There won't be enough separation.”

Helfrich said both are playing well, though he said Cody Hawkins found himself in a couple of situations Friday in which he should have thrown the football and did not. He said Hansen is benefiting from limited quarterback contact in practices because it coaxes him to look downfield more, rendering him more of “a passer first, runner second.”

“We know the guy can make a lot of plays with his feet,” Helfrich said. “He's going to continue to be able to do that, but it forces him, just for a second, to take that extra peek downfield.”

Running back coach Darian Hagan said that if the team were to play a game today, his starter would probably be junior Demetrius Sumler because Sumler is the most assignment-sound back he has. Darrell Scott, Rodney Stewart and Brian Lockridge may be flashier, but that's not what Hagan wants right now.

Hagan said he's not down on his players but added that it's his job as a coach to make them better.

SCRIMMAGE STATISTICS

Results from Friday's Colorado football scrimmage:

RUSHING

Scott 11-43, Lockridge 7-26, Hansen 5-14, Espinoza 1-17, Stewart 3-(minus)-1, Sumler 1-5 Moyd 1-2.

PASSING

Hawkins 14-23, 146, 1 TD; Hansen 9-11, 64 yards, 1 TD.

RECEIVING

Simas 4-32 1 TD, Espinoza 4-21, Cefalo 4-66, Deehan 3-11, Walters 2-21 1 TD, Shanahan 1-38, Wallace 1-7, Devenny 1-6, Scott 1-8, Ebner 1-2.

CU sports information

"I trust that guy," Hagan said about Sumler. "The other guys are so topsy-turvy. They are so inconsistent. You don't know what you're going to get from one play to the other."

"Darrell has done a really good job of getting better and understanding his assignments. But today he took a back seat, Speedy (Stewart) took a back seat, Brian took a back seat. ... It's up to me to make sure when the lights come on, they can't get afraid."

CU's thin receiving corps has become anorexic. Josh Smith, who Dan Hawkins said injured an ankle Wednesday "horsing around" in the recreation center; and Scotty McKnight, who said last week he has a triceps strain, did not play with the offense. McKnight held on to kicks.

Walk-on Ryan Maxwell, who is fighting for a spot in the rotation, also sat out due to being banged up and sick, Dan Hawkins said.

Receivers who played Friday were Markques Simas, who could be the offense's most indispensable player in 2009; and walk-ons Jason Espinoza, Kyle Cefalo and Dustin Ebner.

"It's bad right now," Hansen said when asked about having only four receivers available.

After forcing no turnovers in the first scrimmage last Saturday, the defense came up with one midway through Friday's. Hansen missed a snap from center, and a defender fell on top of the fumble. It was on the 146th scrimmage play of the spring, a total including the first scrimmage.

Collins cited as positives the enthusiasm and physicality with which the defense played. Asked to name names, he listed redshirt freshman linebacker Doug Rippey, junior B.J. Beatty and senior Marcus Burton.

EXTRA POINTS: Bob Foster, Dan Hawkins' coach when he played at UC-Davis, addressed the team Friday. Hawkins said only "coach stuff" when asked what Foster told the Buffs. ... There were 65 plays from scrimmage Friday, plus 20 punts. Kicker Aric Goodman hit four of seven field goals. ... Practices resume Monday and remain closed to the public. The spring game will be open to fans and is scheduled for next Saturday at Folsom Field.

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