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## CU Backers fighting for jobs

*By Patrick Ridgell*  
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BOULDER — If Colorado linebacker Shaun Mohler looks different this spring, it's because his head is no longer spinning.

Mohler's journey from Orange Coast College in California to CU forced him to complete eight courses from the time he committed to the Buffs, in December 2007, through last summer, when he finally enrolled. If Mohler felt burned out after completing such a rigorous task, he did not show it, linebacker coach Brian Cabral said.

Now he's trying to make it on the field, which isn't a given even though he finished second on the team with 97 tackles in 2008. Not having to recover from an academic marathon has made a "big difference" for Mohler, Cabral said.

"He had a very intense semester," Cabral said. "And then it got even more intense trying to learn our defense.

"So there was no break for him, no breathing room, no rest for him. He got thrown right into the fire, and everything he did was a first-time experience — every game was a first-time experience, everything we did defensively with him was a first-time experience.

"That's a lot of stress. That's an awful lot of stress."

Mohler, now a senior, said he set goals upon his arrival in Boulder. He wanted to be first-team all-Big 12 and earn a 3.0 grade point average. Despite completing a solid season, he didn't earn the football award. He said he compiled a 3.3, and plans to graduate next summer in sociology.

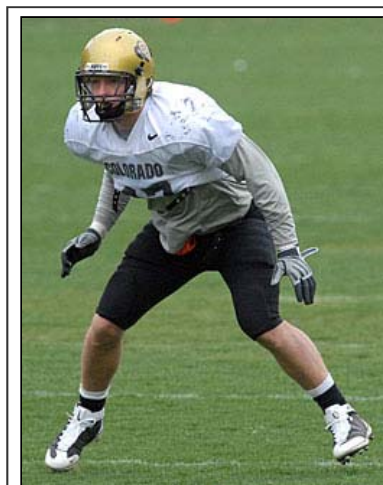
Was the whole thing as stressful as Cabral says? Not really, Mohler shrugs.

"I was kind of excited about it," Mohler said. "I had accomplished (the academic requirements) and, mentally, I felt good about it.

"Right now it's kind of stressful because classes are getting harder," Mohler said. "But right now it's less stressful than getting into school."

What's different in Mohler with that experience behind him is he has a baseline of understanding on which to build, Cabral said. He knows exactly what he needs to do, which, given the competition he faces just to see the field, is important.

Jeff Smart moved to what CU calls the Will linebacker spot this spring. He was the program's leading tackler with 118 in 2008. So CU's two leading returning tacklers are having to fight like heck to earn a spot.



Colorado linebacker Shaun Mohler had 98 tackles in 2008. He's fighting for a starting spot this spring, however. **Lewis Geyer/Times-Call**

At the Mike spot, junior Michael Sipili and senior Marcus Burton are pushing each other. At outside linebacker, junior B.J. Beatty was assumed to be the heir apparent to Brad Jones, who started there the past three seasons. But Beatty may not beat out redshirt freshman Doug Rippy, who's having a fine spring and earned public kudos from defensive coordinator Ron Collins following Friday's scrimmage.

Coaches should have the linebacker numbers necessary to run more 3-4 sets in the Big 12, if they choose to. A spring depth chart is expected to be released soon.

"If there's an opportunity (to start), I'm going to take it," Rippy said.

Cabral expects the competition to heighten when Jon Major and Brandon Gouin get healthy. Major tore his ACL last August, forcing the touted recruit who turned down Oklahoma and Wisconsin for CU to redshirt as a true freshman.

Cabral remembers 2007, when the Buffs traveled only one reserve linebacker for road games to back up all three spots. So he's loving what's unfolding this spring at his position, where the program has the kind of depth and senior experience it wants everywhere.

"Thank goodness the last two years the starters stayed healthy," Cabral said. "Our back-ups were walk-ons and guys that had never played before. ... You're holding your breath every week and if someone gets nicked, he's playing hurt that week."

For now, at least, Cabral has exhaled.

EXTRA POINTS: Head coach Dan Hawkins said the virus that hit his team last week lingered Monday. "It's still kind of creeping around," he said. "I don't know how long it'll take to work its way through them. ... Some guys are still down. Some are down more than others." ... Hawkins said punter Matt DiLallo has had a good spring, and added DiLallo might kickoff in the fall.

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## UPDATE: In word and deed, linebacker Rippy looking like potential CU starter

By B.G. Brooks  
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BOULDER – If some defenders at the University of Colorado wonder daily what it takes to stop elusive tailback Rodney "Speedy" Stewart, Doug Rippy has the answer.

Two words: "Hey, midget."

Rippy can get away with that, as he did Monday afternoon at the Dal Ward Athletics Center. Upon hearing those words, Stewart stopped, grinned broadly at his buddy, roommate and fellow Ohioan, and then went about his business.

Before suffering a broken leg three-fourths of the way through his freshman season, Stewart had established himself as one of the bright new faces of CU's 2008 recruiting class.

Rippy also was a member of that group. But his emergence as an outside linebacker has taken a bit longer, mainly due to him being a relative newcomer to the game he now appears to be grasping pretty well, indeed.

On anyone's spring list of CU newcomers ticketed to make an impact, Rippy should be among the top three.

"He's starting to (emerge), mostly because of experience and understanding of the position," linebacker coach Brian Cabral said. "He potentially could be a great pass rusher.

"He's got range and he can run. So as soon as he knows where he's running to, he's going to be pretty good . . . Right now, he's like a dog chasing tires – but at least he can chase."

In layman's terms, that means the 6-foot-2, 225-pound Rippy can run – a vital component for any defender near the line of scrimmage who has designs on getting to and bringing down the quarterback.

All along, that's how CU's defensive coaches have envisioned utilizing him, and Rippy's offseason and April progress is justifying their blueprint.

In last Friday's second scrimmage, Rippy and fellow SAM linebacker B.J. Beatty were singled out by defensive coordinator Ron Collins for their "pressure off the edge."

Rippy said it was pretty much left up to him to choose a stance – two-point (standing) or three-point (one hand on the ground) – in which he would be comfortable as a pass rusher.

He settled on the former and says that fits him perfectly: "I'm comfortable in it and I feel confident with it; it's the best thing for me."

He's also finding a comfort level within CU's defensive scheme, which is more apt to employ four linebackers this season as Collins & Co. push for more overall pressure.

Cabral says Rippy is "starting to apply the technique and play the position, so it's actually kind of fun to watch. He's still developing, but he's about where you'd expect a redshirt freshman to be. There's a lot of potential there, though."

If spring drills become the fall precursor that coaches expect, Rippy could be a redshirt freshman starter at a position littered with seniors. Beatty is a junior, but of the other linebackers most likely to share playing time, four are about to enter their final seasons (Marcus Burton, Shaun Mohler, Jeff Smart and Bryan Stengel).

Starting, of course, is Rippy's objective, but he's not obsessing over the prospect.

"All I can do is come out and keep working hard every day, pushing myself and being competitive," he said. "For me, it's just to learn and keep competing, keep backing them up or if the opportunity does come to start, that's the opportunity I'm going to take.

"Everybody has a role to play and I'm playing my role right now . . . that's how coach Collins said he wanted me to compete this spring. I'm doing what he asked me to."

Rippy and the diminutive Stewart (5-7, 175) enjoy a friendship that began at their rival Ohio high schools – Rippy was at Trotwood Madison, Stewart at Westerville Brookhaven.

In fact, it was Rippy who turned the Buffaloes onto Stewart – one of the better recruiting tips CU has received – when coaches were unsure whether tailback Darrell Scott was going to sign with CU or Texas.

They've been roomies since arriving in Boulder last August and have developed daily or weekly rituals to get one another game-ready – or in Rippy's case, sideline-ready last fall.

"He's always optimistic, always," Rippy said of Stewart. "Before every game, I'd get him pumped and he'd get me pumped even though I was going to be on the sidelines."

How?

"Talking smack to each other, like we usually do," Rippy said after his wee friend was out of earshot. "It's kind of a thing we've

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always had for each other. We talk it (smack) to each other before practice, before games. I don't think it'll ever stop."

If Rippy's improvement continues, no way it will stop; it could be "smack" between starters.

**BUFF BITS:** Receiver Scotty McKnight, who has been sidelined with a triceps injury, will miss Saturday's spring game (1 p.m., Folsom Field). . . . Receiver Josh Smith (sprained ankle) returned to drills on Monday. . . . Coach Dan Hawkins said the virus that was making the rounds among the Buffaloes last week has subsided — but not much. "We've still got several guys out," he said, adding that several more were practicing through the illness. . . . The Buffs have two practice days (Tuesday, Thursday) remaining before the spring game, and Hawkins said his team "will go hard" on both of those days. . . . The quarterback play, now down to incumbent starter Cody Hawkins and Tyler Hansen, has been "really good," Dan Hawkins said. He added the offensive staff will "let it play out," underscoring what offensive coordinator/quarterbacks coach Mark Helfrich indicated after Friday's second scrimmage — that naming a starter would not be done until August camp. . . . Former CU defensive back Deion Figures, a Thorpe Award winner, attended Monday's practice. . . . Dan Hawkins said punter Matt DiLallo has enjoyed a good spring punting as well as kicking off and could be in the mix to compete for the latter duty. Jameson Davis, the primary kickoff specialist last fall, has missed spring drills after off-season knee surgery



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# **Buffs wearing thin at WR: McKnight out**

## **Leading receiver McKnight out with partially torn triceps**

By Kyle Ringo  
Tuesday, April 21, 2009

BOULDER, Colo. — The leading receiver for the Colorado football team the past two years won't play in this Saturday's spring game and hasn't been participating in practices and scrimmages since the second week of spring ball.

Wide receiver Scotty McKnight suffered a partially torn right triceps 12 days ago and is not practicing as a precaution against tearing it further. If that happened, McKnight said he could require surgery and risk missing training camp and the early part of the season.

McKnight said he suffered the injury during practice but was able to finish the session. He underwent a magnetic resonance imaging test, which revealed the tear. He said while the injury is keeping him off the field in contact situations, it isn't preventing him from lifting weights.

"It's starting to feel a lot better, and I've done a lot of stuff in the weight room that I wasn't expecting to be able to do," McKnight said.

As he prepares for his junior season, McKnight is probably one of the most underrated receivers in the Big 12. He has 89 catches for 1,007 yards and nine touchdowns the past two years.

With McKnight out for the duration of spring ball and Josh Smith recovering from a sprained ankle, the only scholarship wide receiver participating fully in spring practices is sophomore Markques Simas, who has never played a down at the college level.

Smith could be back in action for the spring game, but if he is unable to go, fans will see an offense with walk-on players such as Jason Espinoza, Ryan Maxwell, Dustin Ebner and Kyle Cefalo at wide receiver on Saturday.

McKnight said there has been an upside to his injury in that it has allowed players like Smith and Simas to step into more of a leadership role among the wide receivers.

"I think that's important," he said. "It seems like just yesterday we were all coming in here thinking we were young, but me and Josh are going to be juniors next year and Markques is going to be a sophomore. It's pretty important to establish some leadership at your position and I think this has allowed that."

The program will add at least three scholarship players at the position in the fall, assuming all recruits at the position qualify academically. McKnight said those players are needed for a variety of reasons.

"Competition, you're always going to play at your best level when you have someone pushing you," he said. "I think we're all looking forward to them coming up here and being a part of the program and us trying to teach them so they can try and play as early as possible."

## **Bahr back**

Offensive lineman Matt Bahr began spring ball working primarily with the first-team offense. Then he suffered a shoulder injury that robbed him of nearly two weeks of practice time.

Bahr said he returned to practice last week and was able to participate in the second scrimmage of spring. He said his shoulder is not fully healed but will not require surgery as long as he follows the rehabilitation plan once spring football is over.

Bahr started eight games at right tackle last season after a broken leg ended Ryan Miller's season. That is the position where he feels most comfortable but he has spent the majority of this spring working at guard while redshirt freshman Bryce Givens works at tackle.

Bahr said before Miller was injured last season, he had spent the majority of his first 14 months in the program at guard. So he feels comfortable there.

"It's definitely a disadvantage not to be taking reps," Bahr said. "Luckily I'll be able to get back and put in a good week of practice and elevate myself up a little bit."

## **Notable**

The Buffs had a light practice Monday but Hawkins said today and Thursday will bring heavier workloads in advance of the spring game. ... Hawkins said the team has reached the point of spring where players are focused more on technique and not the big picture as much as earlier in camp. "Guys knowing what to do and then perfecting how to do it," he said. ... Former CU All-American defensive back and Thorpe Award winner Deion Figures attended Monday's practice.



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