



## CU offensive line embraces new coach

By Kyle Ringo  
Thursday, April 23, 2009

BOULDER, Colo. — The past four weeks have probably been tougher on new Colorado offensive line coach Denver Johnson than they have been on his players.

That's just how he wanted it.

Johnson made the decision entering spring drills to keep the terminology used by the line the same as last year.

He hoped to make the mental side of the game as easy for his group as possible because after watching film of the Buffs under former offensive line coach Jeff Grimes, he knew his approach would lead to some significant changes in technique and footwork.

There have been more than a few stumbles along the way for Johnson, who had to learn the terminology to make sure he was giving the correct instructions.

With 14 of the 15 practice sessions behind them and only Saturday's spring game remaining, Johnson and the players he coaches say the transition has gone as smoothly as anyone could have hoped. Johnson said he has seen players make significant strides in the final week.

"I couldn't be more pleased with the way they have embraced me," Johnson said. "I think they are excited about some of the things we're trying to accomplish."

Excited might be an understatement.

Under Grimes the past few years, the Buffs have been reactionary in some ways toward the defense. Moving backward and laterally, at times, has been the accepted method of getting the job done.

Players say Johnson brings a much more aggressive approach to the game. It's a style many of them believes fits better with the mentality of the group.

"I like his mentality and the way he coaches us," redshirt freshman tackle Bryce Givens said. "He makes things seem more possible than Grimes. Grimes was all about technique, all about being perfect every time, whereas coach Johnson is all about coming off the ball and whooping the other person's (butt).

"I love that. I think it's going to show during the season. Come Day One against CSU, we're going to put a whooping on them."

The Buffs have nine offensive linemen returning next fall. Six of those players have logged significant playing time. It should be a deep pool of talent with which Johnson can work, especially if one considers

Givens and center Mike Iltis aren't included in the previous numbers.

Givens and Iltis appear to have locked down starting jobs at right tackle and center respectively, barring a major stumble in fall camp. Neither has played in a game yet at the college level.

"We probably won't know until the week before the first game who the ultimate first five are going to be," Johnson said.

The competition at center appeared to be one of the hotspots entering spring ball, but Iltis began receiving the bulk of practice repetitions with the first team from Day One and never looked back. The third-year sophomore could be pushed harder in the fall when Blake Behrens returns from a shoulder injury that required surgery. Behrens has been held out of contact work all spring.

"I feel like everyone across the board has done really well with it," Iltis said of the transition between coaches. "I think it's a really good fit for the type of athletes we have on the line, the type of people. I think his philosophy has been really good for us."

Johnson said teaching players to use different footwork has been the biggest issue he and offensive technical intern Brad Bedell have faced in terms of teaching.

"They've been well trained in another pattern for some time," Johnson said. "It's kind of like me learning the terminology. They've kind of got to unlearn some muscle memory there and start creating some new. I think that has been maybe a little bit difficult for them."

Johnson said he sees promise in the Buffs. He said the line is a long way from playing at a level where it can lead the team to contention for a Big 12 championship, but he believes these players have it inside them to make that happen in coming months.

Johnson said he believes Givens and tackle Nate Solder and guard Ryan Miller are particularly well-suited to his aggressive style of play.

"We want to go capture ground and try and play on the defense's side of the ball," he said. "We want to go play on their grass and try and be a little more direct and a little more aggressive in some of our blocking schemes."

"I just feel very strongly about trying to attack the defense and go capture ground and carry the fight to them."

It's a popular new direction.



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# Buff QBs support Helfrich's decision to interview at Oregon

## Quarterbacks could have new coach in fall

By Kyle Ringo  
Friday, April 24, 2009

BOULDER, Colo. — Cody Hawkins and Tyler Hansen, you've nearly completed spring football at the University of Colorado locked in what everyone agrees is the program's most tightly contested quarterback competition in years.

Now comes the news offensive coordinator Mark Helfrich, who has been guiding and evaluating you, might take a job elsewhere, and when your competition resumes in August, someone new and unfamiliar could decide who starts and who sits.

Penny for your thoughts?

"I'm not going to lie, it sucks," Hansen said. "Losing a coach you love and have a good relationship with and you're used to his coaching style, it's hard. But I'm sure if he leaves it's going to be best for him and his family. I think you've got to support him through that. If we lose him, we'll get a guy just as good I think."

Cody?

"I don't know. I feel like I'm comfortable with it because it's always been kind of an entire staff decision," Hawkins said. "Regardless of who the offensive coordinator is, everyone is going to go with who they're most comfortable with. It's not a dictatorship around here."

Helfrich's approaching interview for the offensive coordinator job at Oregon and possible departure was the hot topic in interviews Thursday following what coach Dan Hawkins said was an impressive week of practices leading up to Saturday's spring game.

Dan Hawkins said he has a plan in place for the coaching staff if Helfrich does leave the program. He acknowledged the timing of the move if it occurs would be problematic so late in the year, but he said, "No one said life is fair. You deal with it."

Hawkins said all of his assistants get calls from other programs all the time and every one of them could have left CU at one time or another in the past.

"I think they've stayed for the right reasons and they leave for the right reasons," Hawkins said. "Hopefully he stays, but if he doesn't, he's a great coach and he's a great friend and you understand that. It's part of the business."

The program has never announced those other interviews on its Web site the way it did earlier this week when it posted news of Helfrich's pending interview with a program that has become one of Colorado's biggest rivals on the recruiting trail in the West the past three years.

Hawkins explained the team had been informed about the interview and posting the news on the site was his way of "just dealing with it."

Collins oversees outside linebackers

Colorado defensive coordinator Ron Collins has spent his first three years in Boulder overseeing the entire defense but not doing a lot of individual coaching with players.

That has changed this spring.

One of the great misconceptions about the Colorado program in recent years is that linebackers coach Brian Cabral coaches all the linebackers. For approximately the last decade, Cabral has been responsible for coaching the inside linebackers.

Former graduate assistant Andy Avalos coached the outside linebackers the past three seasons. He has moved on to an assistant coaching position at the Division II level and Collins has taken over the outside linebackers this year.

"I have totally missed the coaching aspect the last three years," Collins said. "So it's great to back in with a position and coach it up."

The philosophy at CU is to have two sets of eyes and ears coaching every position group at all times. Graduate assistant Brad Bedell assists offensive line coach Denver Johnson. Graduate assistant Paul Creighton assists defensive line coach Romeo Bendison.

Offensive technical intern Skyler Fulton works with wide receiver coach Eric Kiesau and defensive technical intern Ashley Ambrose assists secondary coach Greg Brown.

Collins and Cabral work together with the linebackers.

"The kids get better teaching, and then the techniques are just a little bit different on the outside than they are on the inside," Collins said.

Dan Hawkins helps coach the fullbacks and often provides the second set of eyes in drills involving the running backs coached by Darian Hagan and the tight ends and fullbacks coached by Kent Riddle.

Notable

Hawkins said his team has turned in several impressive days of practices this week. ...

About 120 former Colorado football players are expected to attend the spring game Saturday. An all-time best of approximately 350 returned to Boulder for the game last year. ...

Junior Corey Nabors said he has moved from running back to wide receiver this spring. He said he doesn't know if he will remain at the position in the fall when new wide receiver recruits arrive. ...

Josh Moten and Terdema Ussery, two members of the 2009 recruiting class, watched Thursday's practice.



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colorado football

## Quarterback decision will be call in the fall

By Tom Kensler  
The Denver Post

Posted: 04/24/2009 12:30:00 AM MDT



**Tyler Hansen**, who is more of a scrambler, made two starts for the Buffaloes last season. (The Denver Post)

BOULDER — Cody Hawkins and Tyler Hansen won't have to worry about every misfire Saturday afternoon during Colorado's spring game. The quarterbacks already have been informed their battle for the starting job will continue into August.

As it stands, the competition is too close to call, offensive coordinator Mark Helfrich said.

"Considering the body of work and the number of practices we've had this spring, it will be a fall

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camp decision for sure," Helfrich said. "There's no way there can be enough separation to make a call, no matter what happens on Saturday."

How wide is the difference? Razor thin.

Under Helfrich's evaluation formula, Hawkins edged Hansen by 1 percent in the first scrimmage (April 11) and again

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in the second scrimmage (April 17).

In addition to recording the number of completions, Helfrich grades a quarterback's performance using nonstatistical evaluations, including intangibles such as how confidently the quarterback called the play. Major points are deducted for turnovers or mental mistakes.

Hawkins, who will be a fourth-year junior this fall, and the sophomore-to-be Hansen stand nearly even.

"I think this has been great for me, it's great for

this program," Hawkins said. "You always want to push yourself and try to be better, and competition keeps you on your toes. Regardless of who gets to start, we're both going to come out better for it."

Cody, son of head coach Dan Hawkins, struggled in 2008 behind an injury-depleted offensive line and was replaced by Hansen during the first half of the Oct. 18 game against Kansas State. For the remainder of the season, Hawkins started three games and Hansen, a quick-footed scrambler, made two starts.

CU coaches have said rotating quarterbacks is again a possibility. That would not be anybody's preference, however.

"I think this team needs 'a guy,' " Hansen said. "Last year we experimented with (a dual-quarterback system), so we have some experience with that. It could be all right. But I think overall this team needs a solid starter."

Helfrich, may not be around to see the QB battle be resolved. A native of Medford, Ore., he is scheduled to interview for the University of Oregon's offensive coordinator position next week.

"It's rough," Hansen said. "You go to bed at night and wonder if the coach that recruited you, the guy who was one of the reasons I came here (is going to be gone). . . . I'm sure it's best for him and his family, but it's hard."

Regardless of what happens with his job

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situation, Helfrich believes both quarterbacks are making progress.

"Tyler has got to keep building his confidence in the playbook," Helfrich said. "He's miles ahead of where



Cody Hawkins believes he and Tyler Hansen will improve because of the Buffs' competition at quarterback. (Associated Press file photo)

"I'm going to be happy with either choice," Miller said. "The coach is going to put the best guy back there. I just know that I have to protect them."

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he has been. He just needs to take that extra little step in being confident to execute a play."

As for Cody Hawkins, "He's just got to be himself. Where Cody runs into trouble is when he tries to be a little cute with a play here or there, kind of tooling things a little too much rather than just making the play."

Offensive lineman Ryan Miller said the quarterbacks have "stepped up" their games.

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cu football

## Buff's' QBs await word on Helfrich

By Tom Kensler  
The Denver Post

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if the coach that recruited you, the guy who was one of the reasons I came here (is going to be gone). I'm sure it's best for him and his family, but it's hard."

Junior quarterback Cody Hawkins said he would miss Helfrich, but if it happens "we'll bring another guy in here that's another good coach, and we'll have to work our butts off whoever it is."

Coach Dan Hawkins said he's not sure if he will soon be in the market for a new offensive coordinator.

"We'll see what happens," Dan Hawkins said. "Hopefully he stays. But if he doesn't, he's (still) a great coach and a great friend. You understand. It's part of the business. I always have a plan (if assistants need to be replaced)."

BOULDER — Following a crisp workout Thursday, Colorado offensive coordinator Mark Helfrich reiterated he hopes his plan to interview next week with Oregon does not become a distraction for the team Saturday in the spring game. It has to be on the minds of some players, however.

"It's rough," sophomore quarterback Tyler Hansen said. "You go to bed at night and wonder

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## Buff's girding for another goodbye

CU braces for possible exit of offensive coordinator

By Patrick Ridgell  
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BOULDER — The Colorado football program will hold its spring game Saturday — and then prepare for finals and summer conditioning and point forward to what it hopes will be the first winning season in coach Dan Hawkins' tenure.

There's one more thing on the agenda.

The Buffs are bracing for the possible loss of offensive coordinator Mark Helfrich, who, CU has reported, will interview next week for Oregon's vacant offensive coordinator job. Following Thursday's practice, the 14th of spring, Helfrich said he did not want to discuss his pending interview.

He did offer something about its timing.

"The timing of it is good and bad," he said. "It's good in a way we can finish out here, and today we had a great practice. Yesterday we had a great practice. That's the focus."

Focus may be wavering. While Cody Hawkins said he hasn't "even thought about" Helfrich's possible departure and added that "it's not a big deal," Tyler Hansen's take was a bit different.

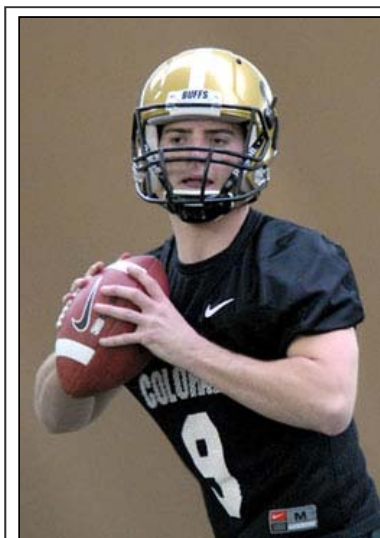
"You can't help but think every time you see him that he might not be here next week," Hansen said. "You go into meetings, and he's critiquing your play and he's a great coach and you want to listen to him. But in the back of your head you're thinking, 'OK, this guy, he might be leaving.' I love the guy. He's awesome."

Helfrich and tight ends/special teams coach Kent Riddle were primarily responsible for Hansen's recruitment, Hansen said.

Helfrich told the quarterbacks of his plans with Oregon on Monday, then the offense Tuesday, Hansen said. Dan Hawkins said the reason CU reported the interview on its Web site as opposed to keeping it quiet, as it did when former offensive line coach Jeff Grimes talked last winter with Auburn, was because the program just wanted to "deal with it." Hawkins said he has a plan in place in case Helfrich leaves, but wouldn't elaborate. He called the timing "never necessarily good."

"A lot of it is dependent on where they're at right now," Hawkins said. "Nobody said life was fair. You deal with it."

CU could promote passing game coordinator and wide receivers coach Eric Kiesau into Helfrich's vacant spot if Helfrich leaves. Depending on how coaching responsibilities would be assigned, that move could leave the program without a quarterbacks coach.



Quarterback Tyler Hansen looks to pass during a spring practice session at the University of Colorado in March. Hansen expressed disappointment Thursday over news that offensive coordinator Mark Helfrich will interview for a job at Oregon. Hansen said Helfrich was a key factor in Hansen's recruitment to CU. **Morgan Varon/Times-Call**

Helfrich reiterated Thursday that a starting quarterback will not be named this spring. If Helfrich leaves, his successor as quarterback coach would play a big role in choosing the 2009 starter, yet won't get to coach that player until August. Hansen said he did not think changes among the assistant coaches would prompt yet another change to the offense.

"We've been through a whole spring with this offense," Hansen said. "I think it'd be too late to start something new."

Hansen said he had no hunch of whether Helfrich will return. Cody Hawkins said he was "not at liberty to say" when asked if he had one.

Former Oregon coach Mike Bellotti contacted Helfrich in 2007 about that program's offensive coordinator position, according to the Eugene (Ore.) Register-Guard. Bellotti eventually hired Chip Kelly instead, and Oregon's offenses set program records in 2007 and 2008. Kelly succeeded Bellotti as head coach last month, when Bellotti became athletic director.

Former NFL head coach Jon Gruden has already turned down an offer to succeed Kelly as Oregon's offensive coordinator.

Helfrich, 35, grew up in Oregon and has family ties to the state.

Dan Hawkins said his staff gets calls all the time about other jobs, and "almost every one of them could have left several times." He called Helfrich a great coach and a great friend whose departure would be something he'd understand.

The quarterbacks had a similar take.

"It was definitely a bummer," Hansen said about hearing Helfrich's intentions. "I was a little disappointed. You're recruited by the guy and then you play for him, and having that idea that he might leave is rough. It plays with your emotions a little bit.

"If he leaves, I'm going to miss the guy. I hope he stays."

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