



Brown's football career likely over

Special teams captain has suffered at least 9 concussions

By Kyle Ringo

Saturday, December 15, 2007

The past few weeks have been bittersweet times for Colorado linebacker and special teams captain R.J. Brown.

Watching his teammates beat arch-rival Nebraska and begin preparations for a bowl game has left him filled with pride but also hollow inside because he hasn't been in uniform to be a part of it.

And Brown now knows it's extremely unlikely he will be allowed to put on his Colorado uniform ever again.

The fourth-year junior from Honolulu suffered the sixth concussion of his college career in the third game of the season against Florida State in September. He has been held out of competition since. At the very least, it was the ninth concussion Brown has suffered while playing football. He said he knows of at least three during his high school career.

Team doctors told Brown this week they don't believe it's safe for him to continue playing the game he loves, meaning his career is likely over.

"The doctors feel that if I were to come back, even if I didn't play spring ball, if I came back next August, it's their opinion that I would get another concussion," Brown said. "They couldn't tell me that I would recover from another one to the point that I am now.

"They think the symptoms next time would be a lot worse."

Brown was hardly able to get out of bed or leave his house for nearly a week after the Florida State game because his final concussion was so severe. The normal lights and sounds of everyday life caused his head to pound with pain.

It is that memory and the thought of suffering permanent damage that makes the news a little more bearable for Brown, whose best friend on the team is All-American linebacker Jordon Dizon.

He wants badly to be able to play football again. His reasons are perfectly understandable. The final concussion came at a time when Brown was coming into his own on the field.

He had earned his teammates' respect to the point that they voted him a team captain last winter. He earned the Dick Anderson award in spring practices as the player who showed "outstanding toughness." He also earned a starting job at linebacker in training camp, at least in part because of the suspension of sophomore Michael Sipili.

Brown proved he his worth in the 2½ games he was able to play, leading the team with 12 special teams points. To put those 12 points in perspective, he was still the team's special teams points leader two-thirds of the way through the season.

Brown said he has talked with coach Dan Hawkins, who has told him his scholarship will be honored through his senior season. Brown is a journalism major and is hoping to make a career working in sports broadcasting or as a sports writer.

The scholarship probably won't count toward the team's official total of 85 under NCAA rules once Brown signs paperwork for a medical retirement.

Brown said until he signs the papers, he will continue to hold out hope something somehow changes.

"It's obviously a hard thing to swallow," Brown said. "What's important right now is just kind of doing what I've been doing all season, which is trying to be there for some of the linebackers and coach up in whatever way I can.

"I think after the season it will hit me, but right now I'm trying not to think about it."

Brown said he wants to remain part of the program for as long as coaches will allow. He said he would like to work and learn as a student-coach in the spring and next fall.

Brown's situation, coupled with the departure of Dizon and the lack of depth in the linebacker corps, makes it likely at least one and maybe two freshmen could earn significant playing time at linebacker in 2008. CU coaches have three oral commitments from highly rated linebacker prospects.



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CB Wheatley returns to practice

By Kyle Ringo

Saturday, December 15, 2007

Colorado cornerback Terrence Wheatley returned to practice Friday as the Buffs resumed bowl practices in preparation for their meeting with Alabama on Dec. 30 in Shreveport, La., in the Independence Bowl.

Wheatley, a senior and two-time, first-team All-Big 12 Conference selection, missed the final two regular season games with a broken bone in his foot. He was forced to miss the final meeting of his career with rival Nebraska not knowing ahead of time if it would also be the final game of his career.

The Buffs won and became bowl eligible and now Wheatley knows he will get one more chance to play, barring some unforeseen setback.

Wheatley said he felt no pain on Friday but he admitted he is a little out of shape after not being able to run for the past month since being injured in a Nov. 3 game against Missouri.

"It was nothing to write home about," Wheatley said of his return to practice. "I just wanted to see how I feel."

Wheatley will be a nice addition to a defense that struggled to stop the pass over the final month of the season. Alabama features a more balanced attack than some of the teams that burned the Buffs, but the Crimson Tide threw for nearly 2,700 yards and 16 touchdowns this season.

Coach Dan Hawkins was happy to see Wheatley finally back in pads and carrying a helmet off the field.

"Totally, the guy is a good player," Hawkins said. "He's a good player and a good leader."

Suspension nearly over

CU sophomore Michael Sipili could be reinstated to the program as early as next week, Hawkins said.

The school's Judicial Affairs committee suspended the linebacker from campus prior to the season for his role in an offseason street brawl that led to facial surgery for the man Sipili fought. Sipili plead guilty in September to misdemeanor charges stemming from the incident and is completing community service work and is on probation.

He has been allowed to workout at the Dal Ward Center with strength and conditioning coaches at scheduled times this fall and he found a job. Hawkins and linebackers coach Brian Cabral have remained in steady contact with Sipili.

"He's been good and Brian has done a good job with him," Hawkins said. "He's been around."

Notable

Hawkins said there are always concerns at this time of year about how his players performed in the classroom. "I mean, I'm expecting we'll be okay, but it's 110 guys. So ..." Hawkins said every eligible member of the team will travel to the bowl game. Four-year transfers and players who have been ruled academically ineligible are not allowed to make the trip. ... Hawkins said the program is hosting seven recruits for official visits this weekend. The Buffs practice today from 7:30 to 9 a.m. and Sunday from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. They won't have another official team practice again until next Friday.



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Woelk: Now is time for extension for Hawkins

By Neill Woelk

Saturday, December 15, 2007

Anybody paying attention to how much trouble Michigan is having finding a new football coach these days?

Did you catch the lengths to which Arkansas went to find its coach — and the chances the Razorbacks took with their pick?

Have you noticed that there are still a half-dozen jobs open in Division I, and the list of candidates is getting awfully slim?

The reason is simple: Good, young head coaches who cannot only survive but thrive in today's Div. I climate are at a premium. If you don't have one, sooner or later you'll need one. If you do have one, you'd better keep him.

And this, of course, brings us to today's topic: Officials at Colorado need to make sure they have Dan Hawkins settled in with a contract extension as soon as possible.

Yes, we can already hear the screams and howls from the naysayers (the same bunch who knew Hawkins couldn't recruit in the Big 12). Hawk is just finishing up the second year of a five-year deal. In two years at CU, he's just 8-16. If he doesn't beat Alabama in the Dec. 30 Independence Bowl, he'll have two seasons without a winning record in Boulder. That's no reason for an extension.

But those who know the game know that college football is now a 12-month season — and those same folks have been paying close attention to Hawk's recruiting.

They know that CU's coaching staff is putting together what will almost undoubtedly be a top-20 class. They know there's a good chance of it being a top-10 bunch when the letters are finally signed in February.

And they know that coaches who assemble that kind of talent are the coaches who win.

Not that there's any danger of Hawkins leaving today, tomorrow, this month or before next season. This is a guy who doesn't like to leave a job unfinished, whether it's rebuilding a shelf at home or rebuilding a football program.

But know this much: If the Buffs continue to show the kind of improvement they displayed in 2007 — which they will — Hawkins will be a hot commodity a year from now. When athletic directors around the nation see what kind of recruiting class Hawk and his staff have produced, they'll take note.

And in December 2008, the high-profile jobs that come open — there always are a few — will have Hawkins' name attached as a possible candidate. When the next Michigan, Arkansas, UCLA, Ole Miss

or Washington State needs a coach, or when the next up-and-coming program wants to make a splash, they'll turn an eye toward Boulder and wonder if Hawkins might be ready to move.

Of course, there's no guarantee an extension would prevent Hawkins from leaving. But it would send a signal to him, his staff and the next group of recruits that Colorado is serious about keeping their guy. It would be clear sign that CU is determined to become a contender again, and do it with a coach who believes in doing things the right way.

Will it take more money? Of course. The price of coaches keeps going up — but it won't have to be the type of money Hawkins will command if another BCS school comes calling.

Instead, it will have to be enough to convince Hawkins that CU is serious, that it's not just empty chatter when it comes to talking about winning. It will take more commitment to facilities, to budgets, to assistant coaches' salaries.

Simply, it will take CU officials proving that they are willing to do what's necessary to win.

Does Hawkins want to leave? Just the opposite. He took this job with the goal of playing for a national title. As long as he believes the commitment from the administration matches his resolve, he'll keep working toward that goal.

And that's why a contract extension makes sense. Such a move would make it very clear that Colorado is indeed serious about becoming a contender — and doing it the right way with the right guy at the helm.



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Wheatley's return 'certain'

By Brian Howell

Longmont Times-Call

BOULDER — Alabama isn't going to be lucky enough to avoid Terrence Wheatley.

The University of Colorado senior cornerback hasn't played since breaking his foot on Nov. 3, but when the Buffaloes play the Crimson Tide in the Independence Bowl on Dec. 30, Wheatley said, "it's for certain" he will play.

Friday was certainly a good sign. For the first time since sustaining a hairline fracture while returning a kick against Missouri, Wheatley put on full pads for CU's practice.

"A little bit of drills, nothing serious," he said of his action during Friday's workout. "I just wanted to see how it feels. It feels fine. It doesn't hurt. I'm a little bit out of shape, but that's about it."

Head coach Dan Hawkins said the cornerback "ran around a bit, but not much."

Wheatley added that he expects to do a little more when the Buffaloes practice this morning.

"At this point in the season, there's no point in rushing it," he said.

As for being his old self when the Buffs play the Crimson Tide, Wheatley said: "I guess I won't know that until the game."

What he does know, however, is that his time in Boulder is quickly drawing to a close. The economics major will take a final in an aviation meteorology class this morning and will graduate next week. Shortly after the Independence Bowl, Wheatley said, he'll go to Florida to work out and prepare for the NFL Draft in April. On the Web site nfldraftscout.com, he is projected as a fourth-round selection.

"After the 23rd, I'm pretty much gone for good," he said.

TAKING IT EASY: Junior defensive tackle George Hypolite also is recovering. He suffered what is believed to be a hamstring injury to his left leg, although on Friday, he would only say, "I just hurt something in my leg."

Whatever the injury, Hypolite said he'll be joining Wheatley on the field in Shreveport, La.

"I'm definitely going to go," he said. "I don't miss games. As long as I can be close to 75-80 percent, I'm on the field."

Hypolite was not in pads Friday.

"It's a process," he said. "I'm coming back off an injury, and it takes a little time to heal. It's just a precaution right now, just trying to get back as close to 100 percent as I can before I get on the field so I don't re-injure anything."

Hypolite does expect to practice this weekend, though.

"I'll probably be out here at practice (today), back to my usual schedule," he said.

WEEKEND WARRIORS: For the second week in a row, the Buffaloes took Monday through Thursday off and will practice Friday through Sunday.

Hawkins said that schedule is similar to the one he used when he was preparing for bowl games at Boise State.

"They get to focus on school during the week," he said of his players. "They get their bodies and their minds and their health back. We just found it to be a good combination. It's still like a normal week; you really practice hard three days. You're just kind of moving it to when coaches are back off the road and you have recruits in and your coaches are back in and your players are in.

"I guess everybody has their own formula, but the way we've done it has always kept them fresh, thinking about their grades and their health and their minds."

EXTRA POINTS: With players taking finals, academic eligibility could be an issue for the bowl game. "There's always grade concern," Hawkins said. "I'm expecting it'll be OK, but it's 110 guys." ... Hawkins said seven recruits are in town visiting the campus this weekend. ... Linebacker Michael Sipili, who was suspended from school for the semester after an off-the-field incident in the summer, has been working out on campus and could be cleared to return to school soon, Hawkins said.



Unsold Buffs tickets bound for charities

Bohn envisions cheering section in Shreveport

By B.G. Brooks

Saturday, December 15, 2007

The University of Colorado won't sell the bulk of its 12,000 allotted tickets to the Independence Bowl, but that doesn't mean the unsold tickets will go unused - or the Buffaloes won't have a sizable cheering section for their postseason game against Alabama.

CU athletic director Mike Bohn said the school "is in a serious collaborative effort" with bowl officials to aid several charities in Shreveport, La., and the surrounding area by making donated tickets available for the Dec. 30 game.

Nonprofit groups involved, Bohn said, could include Special Olympics, organizations supporting victims of Hurricane Katrina and area fire and police departments.

"We're working to have those groups be our guests at the game and cheer for the Buffs," Bohn said, adding he is hopeful 8,000 to 10,000 people could attend with donated tickets and be given gold pompoms to help form a CU cheering section.

"That would mean a lot to our coaches and players," Bohn said.

As of Wednesday, he said, CU had sold about 2,000 tickets to the game; Alabama had sold 7,200 of its allotment by Tuesday, according to bowl media relations director Patrick Meehan.

In years past, Meehan said, area merchants and boosters have bought unsold tickets and donated them to local YMCA and boys and girls clubs for use in a designated "kids' corner" at the bowl game, which pays each team about \$1.1 million.

Meehan also said Bohn "seemed very community oriented" in his attempts to move CU's unsold tickets and help fill the 49,182-seat stadium. Five of the past six Independence Bowls have drawn at least 45,000, with the 1997 matchup of Louisiana State and Notre Dame attracting a record 50,459.

Bohn said CU boosters not planning to make the trip can go to CUBuffs.com or call 1-800-49-BUFFS (28337) and purchase tickets to be donated.

Meanwhile, CU's assistant coaches are expected to receive three to five weeks of pay as a bowl bonus.

"We're in the process of postseason evaluations" to determine the amount, Bohn said.

Coach Dan Hawkins' contract rewards him with \$50,000 in additional pay if the Buffs participate in a non-BCS bowl.

Also under evaluation is CU picking up travel expenses for the assistant coaches' families, which wasn't done for the Buffs' most recent bowl trip, the 2005 Champs Sports Bowl in Orlando, Fla.

Bohn said "significant progress" has been made on that front, and he expects a decision soon that will "produce a viable and enjoyable bowl experience" for the assistants and their families, as well as the school's traveling party and CU fans attending the game.

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