

sports

# Bufs are loaded with linebackers

**Cabral likes the competition**

**By Patrick Saunders**  
*The Denver Post*

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CU's Jeff Smart, a former walk-on, could become the "quarterback" of the defense. (Karl Gehring, The Denver Post )

BOULDER — It would be ridiculous to suggest Colorado won't miss linebacker Jordon Dizon. His passion, smarts and 160 tackles made him the heart, soul and guts of the 2007 defense.

Dizon, a consensus All-American who was voted the Big 12 defensive player of the year by conference coaches, now stalks ball carriers for the Detroit Lions. But Colorado's 2008 linebacking corps has a legitimate chance to be something special — and they aren't shy about saying so.

"This has a chance to be the best group I've ever played with," senior outside linebacker Brad Jones said. "We just want to knock heads, we want to

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smash people, we want to win games. It's a good feeling being a part of this."

Linebackers coach Brian Cabral is

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optimistic, but a bit more sedate, when discussing the Dizon-less unit. Dizon was the Buffs' leading tackler the past two seasons, averaging 12.4 a game.

Dizon's 440 career tackles rank fourth on the Buffs' all-time list. He never missed a game after stepping onto campus as a freshman in 2004, playing in 51 consecutive games and starting 48.

"We lost a great player, but we've gained other, very experienced players," Cabral said. "Most important, we have depth this year, which we didn't have at all last year."

Two experienced players — Marcus Burton and Michael Sipili, who had to sit out 2007 — are back, but the Buffs' depth suffered a major blow last week when freshman Jon Major, a star at Ponderosa High School and one of the state's top recruits last year, tore the anterior cruciate ligament in his left knee Wednesday. Major, out for the season, was slated at inside linebacker, Dizon's former position.

Jeff Smart, a former walk-on from Boulder High School, has to emerge as a sturdy anchor in the middle of the defense. As a junior, he already has assumed a leadership role.

Smart's 80 tackles last season lead the returning linebackers. The only others to register tackles were Jones with 72 and sophomore B.J. Beatty, who had one.

"Jordon was obviously a phenomenal player, but we really lacked the depth and experience," Smart said of 2007. "We only had a couple guys that played, and Jordon really made up for that with his outstanding play. I probably have the most experience out of the inside guys now, so I definitely try to show the young guys things that I've learned from being out there."

Cabral is quick to point out the Buffs are entering the third year of a revamped defensive scheme. A more thorough understanding of the defense, Cabral said, creates a comfort zone.

"I think we'll play with more confidence throughout," Cabral said, "whereas last year we had one guy who set the tone for everybody."

Through the first two weeks of camp, competition at linebacker has been fierce. Cabral thinks that's a good thing, and a reflection of CU's depth.

Jones, a two-year starter, is being pushed at strongside by Beatty. There is good stock on the inside, too. Burton returns after missing 2007 because of academics, and junior college transfer Shaun Mohler will be in the mix. Now a junior, Burton played as a freshman in 2005, including a 99-yard interception return for a touchdown against Oklahoma State, and started to come on as a sophomore but then fractured his tibia and missed the last three games.

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Sipili is back from last fall's suspension for an off-campus fight. Sipili — who played in 10 games as a freshman in 2006, including starts against Missouri and Nebraska — knows Dizon is gone but his influence remains.

Sipili's last game before the suspension was the 37-14 loss at Nebraska. As the starting middle linebacker, Sipili had a career-high seven tackles and watched as Dizon ran the field for 19 tackles.

"I think we learned a lot from him about making plays and playing with controlled aggression," Sipili said.

Mohler, who starred for two seasons at California Orange Coast College in Costa Mesa, Calif., was the Buffs' only juco player in the 2008 recruiting class. Mohler had to complete 25 hours of course work at Orange Coast in six months in order to become academically eligible at CU.

Mohler, who was the Pirates' MVP both seasons and a first-team juco All-American, was recruited to replace Dizon. Though he never played with Dizon and has been with CU's program for just a month, he's impressed with what he's seen on the practice field.

"Everybody likes to hit and everybody likes to go to the ball. I saw that right away," the 6-foot-3, 225-pound Mohler said. "I think everybody is very aggressive."

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## 'Backers of the Buffs

The cast of linebackers set to anchor CU's 2008 defense:

**Jeff Smart:** The Buffs expect the junior to emerge as "quarterback" of the defense. He is slotted as the starting "Mike" (inside) linebacker.

**Marcus Burton:** Junior entered camp as the starter at "Will" (inside) linebacker after missing the 2007 season because he was academically ineligible.

**Brad Jones:** Quick to the ball and energetic, the senior envisions himself as a playmaker from the "Sam" (outside) linebacker spot. He had 72 tackles last season.

**Shaun Mohler:** Transfer from California Orange Coast College, where he was the Pirates' MVP both seasons and a first-team juco All-American, is pushing for playing time.

**Michael Sipili:** Fired-up sophomore returns from a suspension for fighting. In 2006, he played 10 games as a freshman, including starts against Missouri and Nebraska.

**B.J. Beatty:** The sophomore is pushing Jones at outside linebacker. Beatty had a terrific spring camp, with 10 tackles (eight solo, three for losses with a sack) in the three main spring scrimmages.

*Patrick Saunders, The Denver Post*

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# Nike tweaks CU's uniform

By Kyle Ringo

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A year after introducing new uniforms designed by Nike Inc., the Colorado football team is adding another tweak to its jerseys and pants this fall.

Tiny gold raised resin dots in rectangle patterns are visible on the shoulders of the team's black jerseys and on the upper-inseam of its black pants. The dots are not visible on the white jerseys or the gold pants because they match those colors.

NCAA rules prohibit teams from modifying uniforms in any way to make them more slippery or difficult to grab, but CU director of equipment J.T. Galloway said Nike designed the resin dots to have "deflective properties."

Nike and CU have been partners since 1995. The world's largest shoe manufacturer has used CU on multiple occasions as a test school for new products it hopes to introduce to all its clients. It also uses Oregon in the same way.

Galloway said the resin-dotted uniforms are another example of that relationship.

"It took coach Hawkins about point-5 seconds to agree to it," Galloway said.

Galloway said he kept the new uniforms hidden from players all summer but finally revealed them a week ago on media day. He said players love the subtle change in look. He's not ready to say the resin dots provide any advantage for the Buffs.

"It just can't be slick to where a guy can't grab you," he said.

Super fan

Paul Foley of Louisville would be a solid beat writer.

The longtime Buffs fan and season-ticket holder since the 1970s has been at all but one practice so far in camp. The only reason he missed a practice is because the schedule was changed that day at the last minute because of weather.

Foley's dedication to the Buffs is made even more impressive by the fact that he stands through each practice leaning on one crutch. He underwent hip-replacement surgery on July 2 and is nearing the point where he will have his life back to normal.

"The doctor said I needed a lot of standing around therapy, and this is a good place to stand around," Foley said.

Notable

Freshman offensive lineman Bryce Givens left Saturday evening's practice with team athletic trainers after suffering what was thought to be a minor injury. ...

Running backs coach Darian Hagan kept star freshman running back Darrell Scott after the evening session for extra running. ...

Cornerback Jimmy Smith is not expected to participate in today's scrimmage because he continues to nurse a sore back. ...

Coach Dan Hawkins said today's scrimmage will be similar to the first one of camp last Monday. It will feature about 110 plays and will take place on the practice fields north of Folsom Field (4-6:30 p.m.). It will be the final practice open to the public.



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# Bufs weather the storms

By Kyle Ringo

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Training camp is supposed to be hot and miserable with players making eyes at the water coolers throughout practices.

The first two weeks of camp have been conducted in unseasonably mild conditions for Boulder in August. In fact, the past few days have resembled life in Seattle more than the foothills of the Rocky Mountains.

Rain has fallen during all or part of the past four practices and a steady downpour made each handoff and pass an adventure during the morning session Saturday during another day of two-a-days.

Not only has it been wet this month for the Bufs, forcing them off mucky grass fields and onto the field turf, it has been downright cold at times.

As coach Dan Hawkins answered questions from bundled up reporters following the Friday evening practice, you could see his breath. Snow was falling at about the same time just a few miles up the road into the mountains.

Sure doesn't seem like the middle of August.

"Normally it's very hot here and even if it's not hot it's very sunny," said quarterback Cody Hawkins, who is in his third fall camp in Boulder after growing up in the northwest. "I was telling some guys this is probably the longest overcast stretch I've had, especially during the football season and August. I can't remember the last time this happened in the summer."

The bad weather is an added burden to director of equipment J.T. Galloway and his staff.

During the first week of training camp, his student assistants logged 70 hours. Dryers were working overtime in the basement of the Dal Ward Center between practices Saturday as the staff attempted to provide everyone something dry and warm to wear to round two in the evening.

Galloway had a portable fan blowing on dozens of wet footballs in a storage room near his office Saturday hoping to get them dry as well.

"The biggest challenge is trying to keep the footballs dry and in decent shape," Galloway said. "We'll lose some footballs, there is no question, because of the weather."

The strange weather underscores the need at CU for a permanent indoor practice facility, not just for football, but for all outdoor sports teams.

The Bufs have the benefit of a practice bubble for six months each year, but the \$2.9 million shelter must be taken down in late spring and summer because the practice fields are located in a flood plain about 100 yards from Boulder

Creek.

Dan Hawkins said longtime linebackers coach Brain Cabral told him he couldn't remember another training camp as damp and cool as this one. Cabral is beginning his 20th season in Boulder as a coach. He also played four years in Boulder.

Hawkins said the weather has had a minimal effect on what coaches have wanted to get done in recent practices, but they have taken some one-on-one drills out of the plans.

"You'd love to have it to work in, but, hey, that's life," Hawkins said of a permanent indoor facility. "Sometimes you've got to play some games in this kind of weather. Sometimes it's hot. Sometimes it rains. The good thing about it is no one is making any excuses. No one is complaining. We're just getting down here and going."

Senior safety D.J. Dykes grew up in Southern California but spent his first two years in college at the University of Idaho. He said he can't remember stranger weather during any training camp in which he has taken part.

"I didn't know it could rain like this in August," Dykes said. "But that said, we're football players. We play outside. We'll probably have to play in worse conditions. We come out and deal with it."



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