



CU's Polk moves to safety

Four-star tailback played defensive back often in high school

By Kyle Ringo

Thursday, February 12, 2009

BOULDER, Colo. — Ray Polk earned a college scholarship as a running back, but defense is in his blood.

The Colorado freshman from Scottsdale, Ariz., came to Boulder last summer as a four-star tailback with boundless potential. That promise is still there, but now it will be realized on the other side of the football.

After talking with his parents and CU coaches, Polk decided last week to change positions, going from tailback to safety.

He is following in his father's footsteps to some degree in trying to stop running backs instead of being one.

Polk's father, Raymond, played cornerback for Oklahoma State in the early 1980s and was drafted by the Oakland Raiders in the 12th round of the 1985 draft. Defense won't be anything new to Polk. He actually spent the majority of his high school career at cornerback.

"I used to play defense and I kind of missed it," Polk said. "I felt with my body type, No. 1, and I knew I could play defense, I really thought it would be a good switch and good option.

"Also, with a couple of our safeties leaving, I figured I could probably, hopefully help the team there and fill that void."

Ryan Walters and D.J. Dykes received the majority of playing time at safety the past two seasons at CU, but both were seniors in 2008.

Redshirt freshman Anthony Perkins and true freshman Patrick Mahnke each earned plenty of playing time last fall, but will have to fight with players such as Polk, Vince Ewing, Travis Sandersfeld and Paul Vigo for playing time next season.

Polk might be able to participate on a limited basis in spring practices, which begin March 31, but he won't truly be able to prove himself at the position until training camp in August because he is coming off two shoulder surgeries.

In November he suffered a season-ending injury and underwent surgery to repair a torn labrum in his right shoulder. Last month he had the same procedure done on his left shoulder, which had been bothering him for years.

"It's kind of unfortunate, but I'm happy I'm getting it fixed now because it's been bugging me since sophomore year of high school," Polk said.

Polk began his high school career at cornerback at Brophy Prep. He was beginning to garner respect from teammates and opponents at the position late in his sophomore season after moving up to varsity.

Prior to his junior season, the team's starting running back was injured and his coaches asked him to move to running back, where he excelled and grabbed the attention of plenty of college coaches.

He started his senior season at running back. A teammate who had been at cornerback left the school and coaches again asked Polk to play defense. Polk said he has been wrestling with which side of the ball fits him best through much of his first year in Boulder.

"Senior year I just kind of hopped back into it and it felt pretty natural and that's kind of one of the reasons I was thinking I could just come back to it," he said. "I'm pretty excited about it."

The idea of Polk switching from offense to defense is nothing new within the program.

Polk said coaches teased him about moving to defense and making an impact at times throughout his first season. He said when he approached coaches last week with the idea of making the move, they told him they had been considering asking him to try it.

"Coach (Dan Hawkins) was like, 'Oh, you want to switch? We've been thinking you'd be a great safety all this time,'" Polk said.

Polk said he had a long talk about the position change with his mother when she visited him for his most recent surgery and the discussion made him feel comfortable he was making the right choice. He has already started learning the defense.

"It's started a little bit already, but obviously I've got a long way to go," Polk said. "We've got a pretty intricate defense and a great coach. I think I'm a fast learner and I'll pick it up pretty well. "I mean, shoot, I've played DB before. So I kind of have the gist of what to do."



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