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Back to work

CU's Lockridge rested after sitting out 2008 season

By Patrick Ridgell
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BOULDER — The Colorado running back whom coaches call the Energizer Bunny spent the past year sitting and watching way more football than he played. This was a good thing.

Sophomore Brian Lockridge has returned to CU's backfield after spending 2008 redshirting and recovering from surgery to repair a sports hernia. He claims to feel better than ever, a marked contrast from last spring, when he tried to hide an injury that demanded immediate attention. He also claims the experience he gained over the past year will serve him well in 2009.

"I was rebelling," Lockridge said. "I wanted to be out there. I wanted to be able to play with the team. I thought I was going to be able to do that. Physically I wasn't able to. Mentally I could have done it. Physically there was no way."

Lockridge began suffering sharp, constant pain in his lower abdomen in November, 2007, right after the Buffs lost at Iowa State. It worsened to where it kept him up nights. He waited to tell coaches because he thought it was just sore, and he didn't want anyone thinking he was soft.

He had surgery to repair it last April with the intention of returning for August drills and the 2008 season. When August rolled around, CU had a glut of running backs and Lockridge still wasn't the Lockridge of old. So running back coach Darian Hagan had to convince him a year recovering would be good. It wasn't easy.

"He didn't want to be down," Hagan said. "I really had to talk him into redshirting."

Hagan's pitch convinced Lockridge a year redshirting, during which he could return to full health and watch and learn at the same time, would be better for the running back's future. Lockridge said that's true, and believes things are turning out the best for him.

"I needed more experience anyways," Lockridge said.

Head coach Dan Hawkins said Lockridge has shown this spring more savvy and much more awareness about the game of football.

"His first year, he hadn't played that much football and he was going on his God-given ability," Hawkins said.

"He has speed and experience and we'd like to use him wherever we can to make the most of that."

Lockridge's biography on CU's web site said he lettered three years at Mission Viejo High in Trabuco Canyon, Calif. Lockridge said he didn't start playing football until his junior year. That was not necessarily by his choice. Lockridge



Colorado running back Brian Lockridge is looking forward to the 2009 season after sitting out last year to recover from a sports hernia. **Courtesy University of Colorado**

said there's a story behind that.

When he was entering his freshman year, he signed up for the program's summer camp thinking it was exactly what it claimed to be — a summer camp. He went to Wal-Mart before it started and bought a sleeping bag and other camping gear. He showed up the day camp started and learned the hard way it was really a football camp. He heard an earful.

"I got made fun of, and they just made me a water boy," Lockridge said.

That former water boy developed into an all-league running back who won MVP honors as a senior in 2006 and averaged 9.2 yards per carry. His team's wins came by an average of more than 33 points, limiting Lockridge's chances for more numbers. As a freshman at CU in 2007, he averaged 5.6 yards per carry prior to the hernia.

Hawkins met with coaches in recent weeks to stress how he wants every player finishing every run, throw, play and drill this spring as strong as possible. Hagan said that'll be easy for his group because he has Lockridge to set the example. Later, in private, Hagan told Lockridge it's not realistic to expect everybody to finish drills as Lockridge does.

"He's still the same old guy," Hagan said.

With only four receivers on scholarship, there's talk Lockridge could play some receiver. He said right now he remains mostly at running back, the position he's always played. He said there are plays where he might be in the slot, and he's willing to if the offense needs him there. For now, "running back is good," he said.

Lockridge said he was occasionally punished by high school coaches for doing things "too fast." He'd sprint when he was supposed to jog. That old habit reared itself again last spring when he tried to hide his injury in order to keep playing. Lockridge said he's learned his lesson. We'll see.

"I have to be patient," he said. "That's one thing I really have to learn. I need to be patient."

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Tuioti-Mariner vows to return

By Patrick Ridgell
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BOULDER — Colorado's Max Tuioti-Mariner returned to the Dal Ward Center on Monday, receiving hellos and encouragement as he begins his trek back from a third ACL tear in about two years. He said he'll be back.

"I'm still happy, I'm still staying positive because I know things are going to work out well," he said.

Tuioti-Mariner earned a starting job at guard on CU's offensive line by the third game of his true freshman season in 2008. He tore his right ACL during a non-contact drill in practice on Sept. 23.

That ACL was beginning to come around in March when Tuioti-Mariner tore his left one doing another non-contract drill, running an L drill through cones in winter conditioning. He first tore his left ACL during the spring of his junior year of high school in Corona, Calif. It cost him his senior season.

Surgeons repaired the left one, again, last Tuesday. He hobbled around the Dal Ward on crutches Monday.

Three torn ACLs in two years? No big deal, Tuioti-Mariner said.

"I tell people, those three torn ACLs are probably a blessing," he said. "Because, basically, it keeps me, like, more hungry for football. More humble and more hungry."

Said head coach Dan Hawkins: "I think going through his other one makes him more optimistic on this one."

Hawkins said he expects Tuioti-Mariner to be back by September, though the level at which he could contribute is unclear.

"Whatever the coach said, that's what I'm going to go with," Tuioti-Mariner said.

EXTRA POINTS

Kicker Aric Goodman made five straight field goals with coaches simulating game pressure at the end of Monday's practice. The last one came from 57 yards, Hawkins said. ... Receiver Markques Simas isn't going to surprise anyone this spring, no matter how well he plays. "We've always seen the same things out of him. The guy can play," Hawkins said. Simas has "as good of hands on our team as anybody we have," Hawkins added. Simas redshirted in 2007 and sat out last season due to academics. ... Asked who has the best hands, Hawkins named defensive backs Jimmy Smith and Cha'pelle Brown, receivers Scotty McKnight and Jason Espinoza, and said the tight ends "have mitts." ... Hawkins said Espinoza has "a chance to do some things" as the punt returner this year. The coach wants to develop depth at kick returner. He said running backs Brian Lockridge and Darrell Scott will get chances, in addition to receiver Josh Smith.

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CU defense getting aggressive already

Collins has squad focused on 3-4 scheme

By Kyle Ringo
Tuesday, April 7, 2009

BOULDER, Colo. — Colorado quarterbacks might have been tempted once or twice to check the calendar through the first week of spring practices.

While it's definitely early April, some of the defenses they're seeing usually aren't rolled out until well into fall camp and the football season. Defensive coordinator Ron Collins has been using many more 3-4 looks in practice than the team has in the past, and he is blitzing on a regular basis keeping Cody Hawkins, Tyler Hansen and Matt Ballenger on their toes.

The CU defense has taken on a much more aggressive look this spring, even though much of what is being done has been used in the past, just in smaller doses.

"Our guys are flying around a little bit better than they ever have," Collins said. "That's another thing that is going on out there. Guys are competing. We've got a lot of jobs that are open so they're playing hard."

Collins is beginning his fourth season directing the Colorado defense, and he believes there are more players than ever before in his tenure who can handle whatever is thrown at them. So he is taking advantage of that experience.

Colorado has used the 3-4 scheme in the past at times. In fact, the Buffs used it quite a bit last season, especially in passing situations and against teams that pass a lot. But if the early going this spring is any indication, it could become the more frequent approach this season as opposed to going with the four-linemen-three linebacker look that has been prevalent for years in Boulder.

CU has a lack of experience on the defensive line this year while its strength on defense is the secondary and a solid group of linebackers. Those facts might have coaches leaning toward the 3-4 more now with the hope that the defensive line comes around in the fall.

"We're determined that we get the right guys on the field at the right times, but they're going to be the best 11 that we can get out there," Collins said. "Right now the 3-4 look, we've been running with that quite a bit and I think it's been looking pretty good."

Linebacker Marcus Burton said at times in the past when the Buffs have used the 3-4, they have given up some big plays, which he said influenced coaches to get out of it. Burton said he believes coaches are determined to stick with it more this year and practicing it more often will better prepare players when games roll around.

Senior linebacker Jeff Smart said the 3-4 can be difficult for offenses because it allows the defense to give so many looks and keep them guessing.

"Basically, there are just a lot of different things that we can do out of it," Smart said. "We can rush guys from different spaces or we can drop guys. We can confuse the offense. They don't know who is going to rush or who is going to blitz or if anyone is going to blitz or if everyone is going to blitz."

Notable

CU coach Dan Hawkins recently began using Twitter.com. You can access his updates at <http://twitter.com/coachhawk>. ... Cornerback Cha'pelle Brown is working his way back to full participation after dealing with a virus during the first week of practice. ... Place-kicker Aric Goodman ended Monday's practice by making five consecutive field goals, the final kick covered 57 yards. ... The program is expecting between 20-25 juniors to visit the program on junior day Saturday. The first scrimmage of spring will take place that day at 10 a.m. ... Hawkins was asked after Monday's practice if wide receiver Markques Simas has the best hands of the team. Hawkins said Simas, Scotty McKnight, Jason Espinoza, Jimmy Smith and Cha'pelle Brown would all be in the running. Brown and Smith are defensive backs, dispelling, somewhat, the adage that defensive backs can't catch.



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CU's speedy Lockridge learning on the run

Apr. 6, 2009 No Comment [Email This Story](#)

By B.G. Brooks

BOULDER – Darian Hagan will tell you that Brian Lockridge is fairly new to football, but that doesn't tell you how much of a newbie Lockridge really is. Lockridge's tale is far more telling.

Don't get the idea that he's greener than the grass about to come to life on the University of Colorado's practice fields. Given Hagan's tutelage (he's CU's running backs coach) and this particular pupil's innate ability and incomparable drive, Lockridge – he's "B-Lock" to his teammates – is getting ready to contribute in large and multiple ways come September.

Still, he chuckles at an introduction to football that doesn't seem so long ago.

Told as a middle-schooler that summer football camp was approaching and he should prepare himself, Lockridge and his mom got him "ready for a camping trip – a sleeping bag and all that.

"I went to practice and I'm all happy waiting for the bus. Guys are out there with cleats on, and I was so embarrassed."

Told he needed a pair of gloves that might help him as a receiver, he produced a pair of snow mittens.

"Just shows I was inexperienced," said Lockridge, of Trabuco Canyon, Calif. "They kind of made me the water boy . . . for my first two years."

More education was forthcoming. Usually among the fastest players on the field, he was asked about playing running back.

His response: "Is that defense or offense?"

To which his coach replied: "We hand you the ball and you run."

"Ever since, it's been mostly easy," Lockridge said. "I like that play."

Hagan and the Buffaloes do, too. After sitting out his sophomore season (he redshirted) due to a slow-to-heal sports hernia surgery, a hungry Lockridge is full-go this spring and fully charged – but then, when hasn't he been?

At various times, coach Dan Hawkins has likened him to the Energizer Bunny for his non-stop, full-tilt style. Even as a freshman, Lockridge never had to be told to “finish” a play; not only did he continue running at full speed, he returned to the huddle at the same pace.

Full speed is his only speed, and it's been that way “all my life,” he said. “I had to do a lot of up-downs (at Mission Viejo High School) because I was going too fast. But to me, I'd rather get penalized for going too fast than get penalized for jogging or going through the motions.

“So I'd rather just go 100 percent all the time. But I have to be patient – that's really one thing I have to learn.”

Hagan likens Lockridge, a finely tuned 5-foot-7, 175-pounder, to a \$100,000 sports car: “You drive it fast all the time and nobody sees you. You pay that much and you want everybody to see you.

“You want to cruise, then when it's time to put your foot on the gas, do that. I tell all my guys to save a gear; don't show (top speed) all the time.”

So Lockridge's learning continues, and it's not limited to gearing down. CU's offensive coaches plan to utilize him in numerous ways this season. He'll line up outside as a receiver, be used in motion, or sometimes as a single back.

“We talk all the time about him being in a multi-dimensional role,” Hagan said. “He's the guy who comes by my office, just to check in and talk. He's dynamite; he wants to do well.”

Lockridge, though, isn't Hagan's only hypermotivated or supremely gifted back. Of his six top tailbacks, he contends four (Lockridge, Rodney Stewart, Demetrius Sumler and Darrell Scott) “could go anywhere in the country and start. The other two (Kevin Moyd and Corey Nabors) could contribute as role players.

“I'm really happy with my group.”

Of the top quartet, Hagan characterizes Lockridge, Stewart and Sumler as “wiggle guys,” meaning they run with enough of an elusive style to make tacklers miss. What about Scott, CU's prized 2008 recruit?

“He's going to be a guy who's straight-up power,” Hagan said. “He doesn't have any wiggle . . . no wiggle.”

The Buffs were somewhat surprised at that last fall, but in hindsight, Hagan said, it should have been apparent when watching Scott's high school highlight tapes: “When you go back and look . . . he ran over or away from people.

“You can't teach (wiggle). If you don't have any moves, you can't teach them. You just make sure you hone up his game, get him to be explosive and make the right cuts. Get him to use his hands, run behind his pads, run through tackles.”

Scott, said Hagan, appears to be latching on to what's being taught him, has toned himself during winter conditioning and “looks explosive.”

Among the other top backs, Sumler, a junior, has the most experience and should benefit from a strong 2008 finish. And Stewart is showing no after-effects of the broken leg that derailed what was looking like a 1,000-yard freshman season.

Then there's Lockridge, who still is learning as he goes but is light years from the kid who showed up for football camp lugging a sleeping bag. Whatever the coaches have planned in the way of being multi-dimensional suits him, but he'll continue to meet with the running backs.

Said Hagan: “He'll never go into (receiver) meetings . . . I told him he'll play multiple roles, so he thinks, ‘I've got to go to their meetings.’ Nah. He can learn his routes in our meetings. It's not that hard.”

Thus, Lockridge will learn on the fly – which probably suits a guy stuck in overdrive.

“I'll pick up things as I go,” he said. “I'm really inexperienced, but whatever the coaches say, I'll do. I'm going to go 100 percent all the time – even if I don't know what I'm doing, I'll go 100 percent until I get it right.”

BUFF BITS: Denver East kicker/punter Zach Grossnickle, a 2009 CU signee, attended Monday's practice and watched current Buffs kicker Aric Goodman hit a handful of lengthy field goal attempts — one from 57 yards — to conclude the afternoon's work . . . Coach Dan Hawkins believes the second knee injury suffered by guard Max Tuioti-Mariner might not pose the mental difficulty brought on by the first, which kept the player out of most of the 2008 season. Hawkins surmised that already having been through knee rehabilitation might aid Tuioti-Mariner this time around. Hawkins remains hopeful Tuioti-Mariner can be available in September . . . Who has the team's best hands? Quarterback Cody Hawkins mentioned receiver Markques Simas the other day, but Dan Hawkins rattled off a list that included most of Simas' position mates, a couple of defensive backs and the tight ends. Take your pick . . . The Buffs' first full scrimmage is set for Saturday (10 a.m., site to be determined).