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Receiver surprises CU coaches

Freshman says he's leaving to go back home

By Patrick Ridgell
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BOULDER — When Chance Blackmon walked into the Colorado football offices Monday, he had quite a surprise.

Blackmon, who would have been a redshirt freshman in 2009, informed CU wide receivers coach Eric Kiesau he's leaving the program to return to his Tatum, Texas, home. Blackmon's departure leaves CU with only three receivers on scholarship this spring. But Kiesau on Tuesday said he wasn't too concerned with that.

"I was shocked," Kiesau said about Blackmon's revelation. "It just kind of came out of the blue.

"He has a very unfortunate circumstance going on at home, and my heart's broken for him. I'm more worried about him as a person than us as a football team, to be honest. He'll be fine. It's just a very unfortunate deal. I'm sick to my stomach because Chance is a good kid and he has some family issues he has to take care of."

Blackmon said Tuesday he plans to transfer to another school, but he's not sure which one.

"I just need to be closer to home," Blackmon said. "I got released (from his scholarship), so I'm going to transfer." Asked why he needs to be closer to home, Blackmon answered, "Family problems."

Kiesau said based on his development, Blackmon's chances of contributing to the program were better in future seasons than they were for 2009. Kiesau said where the departure hurts the Buffs is with wide receiver depth.

The receivers on scholarship include juniors Scotty McKnight, CU's leader in 2008 with 46 catches, and Josh Smith. The other is Markques Simas, the talented sophomore who redshirted in 2007 and was academically ineligible in 2008. Kiesau said Simas has all Bs or better in his classes this semester, and he's expected to be fine for the fall.

There are questions regarding the three receivers CU signed in February. Andre Simmons has lots of coursework to complete at Independence Community College before he can enroll at CU. Kiesau said he speaks with Simmons weekly, and Simmons' school counselor every other day. Kiesau said Simmons is doing well.

"We need Andre Simmons, so when the need's there, we have to make sure we dot our Is and cross our Ts and take care of all the details and make sure they get in here," Kiesau said.

Jarrold Darden, of Keller, Texas, and Terdema Ussery, of Dallas, were CU's other receiver recruits. Darden broke his fibula on Aug. 24 playing on a practice muddy field and missed his senior season. Kiesau said Darden has begun to run at full speed again, and he's expected to be 100 percent in August.

Ussery had problems with a concussion during his senior season. Kiesau said he expects Ussery to be OK in August.

CU's change to a power, run-oriented offense takes pressure off its receivers. Kiesau said CU has "four or five solid" receivers, which should be enough.

Kiesau said it's unlikely another player will switch to receiver this spring. That leaves about seven walk-ons in practice vying for a spot in the rotation.

Of those seven, sophomores Ryan Maxwell and Jason Espinoza are the two who have a chance to play, Kiesau said. Maxwell redshirted last year after transferring from UC-Davis. Espinoza appeared to earn the job as CU's punt returner with his work last spring. But he broke his collarbone twice last season, keeping him on the sideline all year.

Kiesau has told Maxwell and Espinoza if they're competing for a spot, who stays the healthiest will win.

McKnight, a former walk-on, said the depth at receiver is not enough. But he added he will never think there's enough depth.

"We just have to stick together and keep getting better as a group," McKnight said.

"If we can get some of these other guys stepping up, we'll be fine."

EXTRA POINTS: CU held its first practice of the spring outside on Tuesday. ... The first spring scrimmage is scheduled for Saturday at 10 a.m. Head coach Dan Hawkins said he is not sure if it'll be in Folsom Field or on the practice fields. It is open to the public. ... Offensive linemen Ryan Miller (wrist) and Matt Bahr (shoulder) were held out of Tuesday's practice. ... Tight end Riar Geer (shoulder) and guard Devin Head (shoulder) are expected to have their practice work increased next week, Hawkins said. ... CU has yet to replace Mark Nolan, who left this winter to take the head coaching job at Regis High. Nolan was CU's director of recruiting and an assistant director of football operations. Hawkins said former CU and Denver Broncos linebacker Jashon Sykes received a raise and extra responsibility, but has not been moved to Nolan's spot.



Blackmon stuns Kiesau with decision to leave CU

Bufs wide receiver wants to be closer to home for family

By Kyle Ringo
Wednesday, April 8, 2009

BOULDER, Colo. — Colorado wide receivers coach Eric Kiesau said he was caught completely off guard when redshirt freshman Chance Blackmon walked into his office earlier this week and said he planned to transfer to a school closer to home.

Kiesau said Blackmon was adamant about the move, which the school announced on its Web site Monday night. Kiesau said he will do whatever he can to help Blackmon land on his feet elsewhere.

Coach Dan Hawkins said Blackmon was leaving for personal reasons. Kiesau was more forthcoming saying the 6-foot-1, 185-pound product of Tatum, Texas, was having family problems and believed he needed to be close to home to help solve them.

"It's just an unfortunate family situation where he feels like he's got to go home and fix it," Kiesau said. "My heart is broken for him. ... It was an absolute shock. He just walked into our office and was like, 'Boom.' It was an absolute bombshell.

"That's what's hard about it. He made this rash decision and you try to talk them through it, but sometimes they don't have the maturity to or the experience in life to see the bigger picture."

Blackmon was not expected to be a huge factor in the offense next fall because he is still raw as a wide receiver at the collegiate level. Kiesau started spring ball hoping to spend plenty of time working on technique issues with Blackmon.

The departure combined with CU missing out on 2009 recruits Diante Jackson (Oregon) and Emory Blake (Auburn) leaves an already thin group at wide receiver even more depleted.

Colorado is actively looking to add another wide receiver recruit to its 2009 class. One possibility is Stanley Jean-Baptiste, a product of Miami, who attended North Carolina Tech prep school last fall to improve his test scores.

The Buffs have three receivers joining the program this summer. Kiesau said Terdema Ussery and Jarrod Darden, two prep prospects from the Dallas area, and Andre Simmons, a junior college transfer, are well ahead of where Blackmon was when he decided to leave.

Notable

Former CU linebacker Jashon Sykes has been given more responsibility in the program and a raise, according to Hawkins, but Sykes is not taking over the position vacated by Mark Nolan, who was hired as head football coach at Regis High School in February. ... Hawkins said the team hopes to conduct Saturday's scrimmage in Folsom Field but that hasn't been finalized yet. ... Redshirt freshman Jon Major practiced without a blue jersey for the first time on Tuesday. Players wear blue jerseys when they are injured. ... Hawkins said Riar Geer, Devin Head and Blake Behrens are all expected to be cleared for full participation next week. Some of those players have been less optimistic about their chances of full participation this spring. ... Place-kicker Aric Goodman went 5-for-8 in field goal attempts near the end of practice. One was blocked by Jimmy Smith and the wind affected each of the kicks. ... Centaurus offensive lineman Austin Scheufele attended practice. He is the second junior to visit practice this week. More are expected Thursday and Junior Day is Saturday.



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Two pull away in Buffs' QB battle

Apr. 7, 2009 No Comment [Email This Story](#)

By B.G. Brooks

BOULDER — Hours, days and weeks (maybe months) remain before a starting quarterback is identified at the University of Colorado, but after only four spring practices there is movement on that front.

Mark Helfrich, CU's offensive coordinator/quarterbacks coach, told INDenverTimes that junior Cody Hawkins, the incumbent starter, and sophomore Tyler Hansen, who played in five 2008 games as a true freshman, have pushed ahead of sophomore Matt Ballenger.

"Those two have been practicing better than Matt, they've separated themselves a little bit," Helfrich said. "(Ballenger) will continue to battle, and he's certainly not out of it by any stretch, but the other guys have created a little separation."

Helfrich's analysis of each player:

– Hawkins: "Cody has practiced fine, he just needs to continue. Sometimes he's reaching to make a play instead of just making the solid play that's there. But he's doing a nice job of running things."

– Hansen: "He's done lot of good things. He's made plays with his feet, which is definitely his 'X' factor — and hopefully it'll continue to be. He's also made strides in the passing game, just growing and maturing in the system."

– Ballenger: "Matt just needs to make some more routine plays. The frustrating part for Matt is that he's making great decisions, he's just not quite closing the deal. That's been frustrating for him."

The Buffaloes' first scrimmage is scheduled for Saturday, but Helfrich said that work won't necessarily be more telling for the quarterback competition than any daily work.

"Everything matters," he said. "So many things come up in practices that don't come up in a scrimmage. . . . It all matters — in one-on-ones, seven-on-

seven, as far as the decision-making process the guys are going through. We'll continue to evaluate everything."

In a best-case scenario, coach Dan Hawkins has said the competition would be settled by the conclusion of spring drills, allowing a No. 1 quarterback to lead the offense through voluntary summer work.

Still, Helfrich said there is no "rush to make a decision. But certainly, ideally you have one guy that completely separates himself. Between Tyler and Cody right now, I don't necessarily see that happening.

"But the timing of this decision is not what's on our minds right now. It's just improving the play of the offense, which both of those guys need to play a part of."

Hansen, viewed as the most athletic of the upwardly mobile pair, characterized his first three practices as "great" but added he was "a little off on the fourth day. Some new stuff was put in (Monday) and it was a little more complicated.

"Overall, I think I'm doing good. I think I've got my head into things."

Hansen's winter was devoted to tape study, delving further into the playbook and spending time with Helfrich — all pursuits he hopes will make him more familiar with defenses the Buffs will face this fall.

"Defenses are so different from high school to college, players are so much smarter . . . as a true freshman playing, I wasn't used to that stuff," he said.

Helfrich said Hansen might think he has pushed himself hard in offseason study, but he simply wasn't yet aware of how much more he could do.

"He'll get better," Helfrich said. "All those young guys think whatever they do is the most possible in the history of football, but there's always something more. There's the legendary Payton Manning stories of preparation . . .

We always talk about preparation and the confidence it gives when it's really happening in a game. He'll keep developing that, for sure. He hasn't pressed that envelope yet — and I don't mean that in a negative way."

All three quarterbacks entered spring practice believing they were on equal footing, with the starting job very much undecided. Hansen said he was recruited by Helfrich under that premise: "He said every day we would compete. And right now, we're all working hard for the (No. 1) spot."

Among Hansen's spring goals is exerting more leadership and showing his teammates "that they can trust me," he said. "Last year, I know I had the trust of most of the players, but there are certain things I knew they were probably thinking, 'A true freshman can't do that.'

"I'm trying to show them now that I can do that. I'm not a true freshman anymore. I think it's getting better; every day I prove something. I worked hard in the weight room and got stronger, and I think I got a little more respect there.

"So far, in the practices we've had, I think I've done well enough to show my teammates I can play out here."

Once his redshirt was discarded last season, Hansen conceded he would have liked to have played more. But duty in five games, he said, "will help me in the long run. There's no better way to learn than from experience."

NOT A CHANCE: Redshirt freshman receiver Chance Blackmon, of Tatum, Texas, has left the team, according to the school's athletic department Web site, CUBuffs.com.

"We wish Chance the best in his future endeavors," Dan Hawkins said. "He has decided to leave (CU) to pursue other opportunities closer to his family."

Blackmon's departure further thins a receiving corps now left with only three scholarship players. And it further heightens the importance of CU's three incoming scholarship freshmen (junior college prospect Andre Simmons, Terrell Ussery and Jarrod Darden) to be prepared to play.

Even before Blackmon's exit, position coach Eric Kiesau said there was the possibility of adding another receiver. Now, that seems mandatory.

Kiesau told INDenverTimes before spring drills began that his "No. 1 priority" in April was to develop Blackmon, who added 22 pounds in the offseason and hardly resembled the 168-pounder who reported last August.

"I haven't had a chance to put my arms around him and teach him technique," Kiesau said. "I've got to see how far I can push him, what his limit is — if he's ready to play or if he needs another year to learn. I've got to find that out."

Blackmon had opened drills behind junior Scotty McKnight at the Z spot.

BUFF BITS: Dan Hawkins said after Tuesday's practice no roster moves would be necessitated by Blackmon's departure. The coach also reiterated that Blackmon left the squad for personal reasons and that "we've still got our eye out for a (receiver)." . . . Saturday's scrimmage could be held at Folsom Field, weather permitting. Saturday also is Junior Day, designated as such for high school juniors who are prospective recruits to unofficially visit campus. . . . The team practiced outdoors Tuesday for the first time this spring, working in "shells" (shorts, helmets, shoulder pads) Tuesday. Dan Hawkins said that attire could be the uniform of the day in upcoming drills. "We'll see," he said, noting he liked the tempo of the first five days of work. "We'll be judicious about how we practice." . . . Mark Nolan's former position of assistant director/football operations has not been filled, but Dan Hawkins said assistant director of on-campus recruiting Jashon Sykes has received a raise and added responsibilities. Nolan recently left CU to become Regis High School's head football coach.



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