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Longmont, Colorado  
Friday, April 10, 2009

Publish Date: 4/10/2009

## CU kickers aim high for 2009

*By Patrick Ridgell*  
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BOULDER — While Colorado kicker Aric Goodman and punter Matt DiLallo boom footballs into the sky with regularity this spring, coaches, teammates and fans must wonder this: What'll happen in the games?

Because the way they're working now, it seems, sometimes, as though last year didn't happen. It did, though, and Goodman and DiLallo are trying new things this spring that they hope spur improvement in 2009. Their main task, according to special teams coach Kent Riddle, is to approach every kick like the game depends on it.

"It has to be, 'this is for the game against Colorado State, this is for the game against Texas, this is for the game against Nebraska,'" Riddle said. "Every kick has to have something riding on it in their minds, because that's the closest we're going to get to it."

Goodman's 5-for-14 clip on field goals and DiLallo's 34.0 net average in 2008 require improvement. Both lost starting spots at some point last year. The program signed Denver East kicker/punter Zach Grossnickle in February with the hope that he'll compete for their jobs and, while doing so, make everyone better.

Kicker Jameson Davis could also figure come August, but he's out this spring due to knee surgery. Grossnickle's arrival will give CU four kickers/punters on scholarship.

Goodman and DiLallo are trying new techniques. And both say that over the winter, they restored their shaken confidence. Goodman's 5-for-5 effort Monday in simulated game conditions backed that assertion, especially when his last try split the uprights from what coach Dan Hawkins said was 57 yards away.

But, again, kicking in practice has never been the problem.

Riddle insists both have already restored their confidence through aggressive conditioning.

"They worked their butts off," Riddle said. "I'd love to tell you it was more than that, but both of those guys worked their tails off and studied a lot of film and kicked a lot. The other side of it is, I think they both realized this is their opportunity ... so they're making the best of it."

DiLallo said he's been told that in 2009, CU will occasionally use a rugby-style punt in which DiLallo rolls out before pooching the ball downfield, intending to make it roll. Colorado will also use the traditional punting style, as it has in the past. DiLallo said the rugby style will force defenses to rush. If they don't, he'll simply take off running behind blockers assigned to the backfield.

"I think it'll be interesting to see what happens during the season when we switch it up between normal and rugby," DiLallo said.



Colorado kicker Aric Goodman has shifted his kicking style after going 5-for-14 during the 2008 season.

Joshua Buck/Times-Call

Goodman said he has eliminated a step in his kicks, opting to use a two-step approach that leaves him with less room to make mistakes. Since so many of Goodman's misses were close enough to hit uprights in 2008, he didn't see a need for major change. He called this a small one that he hopes makes him more consistent.

Rattled kickers are never what a football team wants. Talks with DiLallo and Goodman indicate that's not the deal.

Both DiLallo and Goodman insist their winter's work has them feeling positive this spring. Asked how confident he is that he'll win the punting job, DiLallo answered, "99 percent, barring injury or something.

"It's more mental than anything, just confidence," DiLallo said. "I've pretty much worked on that pretty well this offseason.

"It started in the weight room. I got my weights where they should be. And I've pretty much told myself I can't accept failure."

Said Goodman: "Throughout the offseason, I've been working hard and kicking a bunch, and I've gotten real confident in what I'm doing now with the two-step thing. It's like a golfer — if they're not putting well or whatever, they just get a new putter ... or just change it up a little bit."

**FANS REMOVED:** Hawkins addressed Thursday's announcement about closing practice to fans.

"I think we try to be as fan-friendly and as media-friendly as we possibly can," he said. "Some people just cannot resist the temptation (to write about what happens at practice.)

"I've said before, with media, they're not supposed to talk about what's going on in practice. They talk about it because everyone else is talking about it and they feel like they're getting beat on a story. We're probably more generous than any team in the Big 12 in terms of access and what we try to do."

CU did not release the announcement until around 2 p.m. Thursday, two hours before practice. Athletic department staffers turned away some fans who showed up not knowing about the changes.

CU reported that "the combination of far too much information surfacing on the Internet, despite repeated requests of those in attendance not to communicate via cell phone technologies, and distractions they have caused led to the decision" in a release.

Saturday's scrimmage will be open to the public. Next Friday's might be. CU said that if cell-phone video of Saturday's scrimmage appears on the Internet, as has happened in the past, it'll close next Friday's scrimmage.

**EXTRA POINTS:** CU reported that running back Demetrius Sumler left the field in an ambulance following Thursday's practice as a precautionary measure due to neck pain. He was released from the hospital Thursday night. All tests were negative. It is unclear when he will return to practice. ... Offensive coordinator Mark Helfrich said the helmet cameras the quarterbacks are using are working well. "It gives the immediate feedback of good and bad," Helfrich said. "It's been an effective teaching tool, I think." ... Hawkins said that the team's plan is to hold Saturday's scrimmage in Folsom Field, weather and field conditions permitting. It'll involve between 90 and 100 plays, he said.

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**By B.G. Brooks**

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BOULDER – Viva la difference, viva la defensive line?

Things will be different in the Colorado Buffaloes' D-line this season, and whether that is a good or bad thing won't be determined until perhaps October or beyond.

But line coach Romeo Bandison already seems to be growing weary of hearing how difficult a task he faces in replacing three starters (tackles George Hypolite and Brandon Nicolas, end Maurice Lucas) with an essentially raw collection of linemen.

"These are all different guys (but) they're going to be good in their own right," Bandison predicts.

The key question: How long will that development take?

Bandison concedes he doesn't have an emerging Abraham Wright, the former Buffaloes end who registered 11.5 quarterback sacks in 2006 – Bandison's first season at CU.

But there are ways around that. He believes he has players emerging at other positions, namely tackle, and he predicts if those young players and their peers on the perimeter remain "disciplined, diligent and trust their eyes," the Buffs defense won't suffer in the D-line.

The replacement who might bear watching most closely is sophomore nose tackle Eugene Goree, who, for depth purposes only, was given a brief look last season in an injury ravaged offensive line.

Know this: Bandison had strong feelings about reclaiming Goree. Asked if the player's switch ever had a sense of permanency, Bandison said, "Never, ever. That was my first demand.

"You're talking about the potentially starting nose guard for next year. I'm all for him helping out and I want to win – and Eugene was the same way. But I don't think he really wanted to be an O-lineman; he had never played in the O-line.

"But you know what, if it helped the team, I'll do it, and he did. But he's going to be a major part of what we do (on defense), I'd expect."

Goree looks as much like a nose man as a bear does a predator. He's 6-foot-1 and 295 pounds – about 25 fewer than he packed a couple of months ago. Bandison wants Goree to play at whatever weight doesn't interfere with his mobility, and for now, they both concur that 5 fewer than 300 is the magic number.

"We never set a benchmark; I wanted him to be as heavy as he could be and be comfortable," Bandison said. "He can be 290 and really fast, or he could carry 330. . . . he has that kind of frame.

"But with the offenses we face in this league, you don't need those huge, huge guys anymore. . . . he's starting to look like what we projected."

Goree admits he "was a little heavy at winter break, and coach said my footwork was not as good as it could be." At 295, "I don't get tired as fast and am a lot quicker on my feet."

Now, it's time to concentrate on his hands, specifically how he uses them to shed blockers.

"He needs to use his hands consistently and get off blocks – don't let O-linemen get locked up on him," Bandison said. "You can see him just play sometimes, do what he does instinctively and use what he's taught – and he plays fast and does well.

"Then you see him look in the backfield and his feet stop (moving). But overall, you can see him getting better."

Offering a self-critique, Goree said his forte now is "speed and power . . . I know I've got a lot to learn. I'm watching the O-line, how they get off (the ball), how they use their hands, knowing the plays that can be run out of different formations."

Other tackles competing in Bandison's mix are Will Pericak, Taj Kaynor, Eric Lawson, Tyler Sale and Curtis Cunningham, although the latter's spring play is limited by offseason shoulder surgery.

"Eugene is emerging, but he's going to be nothing like Brandon (Nicolas)," Bandison said. "I think Will Pericak is starting to

show something, but he's going to be nothing like Abe or George (Hypolite). These are all different guys, but they're progressing."

At end, Bandison is hopeful of a breakthrough season from junior Marquez Herrod, and steady improvement from sophomores Conrad Obi and Lagrone Shields.

In a best-case scenario, touted recruits Nick Kasa (end) and Edward Nuckols (tackle) will report prepared to contribute.

Among the returning ends, Bandison acknowledges Herrod, 6-2 and 265 pounds, as the "most experienced, he's steady. But he's just like everybody else – he has a lot to work on.

"But he cares, he works hard, asks questions and watches film with me. He's doing all he can to get better . . . he knows the work never stops."

About 20-25 pounds heavier than Wright, Herrod is more of a power player than a speed rusher. But Bandison believes Herrod, who registered four quarterback sacks last season, can add at least three sacks to his seasonal total by being disciplined within the defense.

Said Bandison: "Where the guys who are not like Abe are going to make up ground is being disciplined, diligent and trusting their eyes . . . You can get at least three sacks by being disciplined" and not overrunning the quarterback.

He wants his ends to rush, stop at five yards, trust a teammate to flush the quarterback, "then they catch him coming back.

"If you can do that, that's three sacks right there. But he's got to be perfect (fundamentally). If he loses 'contain,' he's going to lose two or three sacks. That's where you've got to make up ground if you're going to compare him to a guy like Abe.

"If you're not as fast, you've got to be disciplined, trust the technique and do what we coach. Then you can steal a couple here and there."

The Buffs will take them anyway they can get them, and if the manner is different from past standards, so be it.

"We're not trying to reach their standards, we're trying to set ours above that," Goree said. "We're going to try to keep getting better."

**By B.G. Brooks**

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BOULDER – In a move being contemplated almost since drills opened on March 31, the University of Colorado announced Thursday it was closing the remainder of its spring football practices to the public and the media.

An exception is Saturday's first full spring scrimmage, scheduled for 10 a.m. and likely to be conducted at Folsom Field (weather permitting). The spring's second full scrimmage (April 17, 4 p.m.) also might remain open, contingent on several factors to be determined Saturday.

In a news release distributed Thursday, the school said the "combination of far too much information surfacing on the Internet, despite repeated requests of those in attendance not to communicate via cell phone technologies, and distractions they have caused led to the decision."

Coach Dan Hawkins and his staff were known to be unhappy over full practice reports being posted on the Internet, as well as video footage of practices taken on cell phones being posted last year. Hawkins said if that occurred after Saturday's scrimmage, the session on the 17th would be closed.

CU said its spring policy now fits more closely with those of other Big 12 Conference schools, which usually close all practices to the public after the first two weeks of August drills.

With the exception of work on Thursdays, Hawkins allowed the media to watch last fall's practices, but from an area restricted to one end of the practice field. It was unclear if that policy will be retained during the 2009 regular season.

The school did say, however, that "media policies will be strictly enforced with a few alterations."

CU's spring game (April, 25, 1 p.m., Folsom Field, remains open with no admission charge.

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cu football

## Hawkins closes Buffs' practices to fans

By Natalie Meisler  
The Denver Post

Posted: 04/09/2009 03:07:07 PM MDT

**BOULDER** — The signs at the entrance of Colorado's football practice facilities specifically ban cell phones and video recording devices. Those rules have been ignored, so now fans are banned from the rest of spring practice, except for scrimmages.

"The reality is we try to be fan friendly, as media friendly as we possibly can," CU coach Dan Hawkins said after Thursday's practice. "For some people, they can't resist the temptation (to post on the Internet). We're probably more generous than any team in the Big 12 as far as our access is concerned."

Hawkins went to athletic director Mike Bohn to request the change. Hawkins would have closed practice to credentialed media as well, but said longtime associate AD for sports information, Dave Plati, talked him out of it.

Bohn said Thursday that reports of new strategies and innovations circulating on the Internet "obviously infringe on our desire to open practice."

Blogosphere reports featuring specific information and the unauthorized filming of a scrimmage last spring led to the decision. Although CU personnel had repeatedly asked visitors not to use cell phones, cameras or post on the 'Net, Hawkins said, "It's like too much of a temptation. People think 'I have to see if I can get this on YouTube or whatever it is.' It's frustrating because we want the fans involved."

Hawkins added: "A part of the point is it says 'no cell phones, no video cameras,' all that. It's a blatant 'I'll see if I can get away with it' instead of 'It's great we can come to practice.' "

He pointed to some Big 12 schools that ban all media and spectators, except for the spring game, which is usually kept very vanilla.

Bohn said: "No question, one or a few people have ruined it for others."

CU practice was closed to media and the public during most of the Gary Barnett era and re-opened when Hawkins took over in 2006.

"We've progressed from that type of environment," said Bohn of Barnett's closed-door policy.

Weekday practices have been closed in the fall after the first two weeks of practice.

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While fan postings have irked coaches since the dawn of the Internet, cell-phone technology has accelerated the problem.

Hawkins said the team will scrimmage 90-to-100 plays Saturday at 10 a.m. at Folsom Stadium, weather permitting. A scrimmage on April 17 and the April 25 spring game will be open to the public.

"The spring game will probably not reveal the intricate elements of the program and experiments in practice," Bohn said.

## Sumler OK

Colorado tailback Demetrius Sumler was taken by ambulance after practice as a precautionary measure because of a suspected neck injury. All tests were negative and he was released from the hospital early Thursday evening.

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# Bufs' Ballenger taking backseat

## CU quarterbacks Hawkins, Hansen getting more reps

By Kyle Ringo  
Friday, April 10, 2009

BOULDER, Colo. — Four days into Colorado spring practices -- when sessions were still open to the public -- it became clear to most observers Cody Hawkins and Tyler Hansen were receiving more practice repetitions than Matt Ballenger at quarterback.

Offensive coordinator Mark Helfrich acknowledged the two signal-callers who received the bulk of the playing time last season had already taken a step ahead of Ballenger in the competition for the starting job. To some it might have seemed like an early point in spring ball to adjust the practice repetitions, but Helfrich said it was just the way it played out.

Ballenger cringed at the question Thursday when asked whether he believes he is getting a fair shake.

"I don't know that I'm at liberty to answer that," Ballenger said. "I don't want to cause anything between me and Helfrich. That's up to him and what he decides is what he decides. It's up to him and what he decides is obviously what is best for the team. I've just got to keep working hard."

Ballenger was the first to acknowledge that he has made plenty of mistakes in practices this spring, but he also said he does not believe his two teammates are significantly ahead of him. He said all three have different skill sets at which they excel, but he sees the competition as "pretty even."

Ballenger said he needs to focus on making the easy plays more often and that might help him get back into the mix for the starting job.

"I'm making all the right reads," he said. "I've just got to finish the play. I'm missing wide open curl routes. It's just stuff that is there and I'm seeing it, but I'm not finishing it."

Ballenger, who will be a third-year sophomore in the fall, is the least experienced quarterback of the three competing this spring. He has logged only minimal playing time in mop-up duty in his brief career. Cody Hawkins has played in all or part of every game over the past two seasons, and he split time with Hansen throughout much of the second half of last season when Hansen was a true freshman.

Helfrich said that while Hawkins and Hansen are receiving more practice repetitions, especially those with the first-team offense, Ballenger still has time to re-establish himself and make a case for the starting job. There are plenty of practices between now and the Sept. 5 season opener against Colorado State.

"I don't think out of the running is fair," Helfrich said. "Cody and Tyler have practiced well and they've created a little separation there and we've adjusted the reps accordingly in practice, but it's not a dead

horse by any stretch.”

Ballenger said it would be difficult to say how many repetitions he received with the first-team offense during the first three days of practice this spring. He estimated 15 plays per practice. He said he is now working with reserves in all his repetitions.

Helfrich said Ballenger still works with first-string players in drills and seven-on-seven and all that is as closely evaluated as 11-on-11 scrimmage situations.

“Any time somebody is taking a little bit more reps, that is frustrating,” Helfrich said. “Hopefully he takes that frustration and turns it into working harder and fixing those things. There is no door slammed shut at all.”

Ballenger will have his first significant opportunity to regain a little momentum Saturday morning when the team has its first scrimmage of the spring.

Coach Dan Hawkins said Saturday’s 10 a.m. scrimmage is scheduled to take place in Folsom Field, but it could move to the practice bubble if inclement weather arrives. The scrimmage will consist of 90 to 100 plays.



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# Hawkins closes spring football practices

## Bufs coach not happy with information overload on Internet

By Kyle Ringo  
Thursday, April 9, 2009

BOULDER, Colo. — The Colorado football program has been good for at least one or two surreal moments each year for the better part of this decade.

Another one arrived at the end of Thursday's practice, but perhaps it was more ironic.

Coach Dan Hawkins decided to close practices to the public beginning with Thursday's session because he said too much detailed information about schemes, players' roles and injuries was being published in blogs, on message boards and in the mainstream media through the first 10 days of practice.

"I'd love to have fans come," he said. "It's great. We want fans to come. We want fans to be a part of it and all that, but I don't think we should be scouted in the spring. I'm the kind of guy who is a trusting guy. Unfortunately that trust doesn't always go very far."

This Saturday's 10 a.m. scrimmage at Folsom Field remains open to the public as does the April 25 spring game. Hawkins said as long as there is not a repeat of an episode last spring in which an observer filmed part of a scrimmage with a cell phone and uploaded to the Internet, next week's Friday afternoon scrimmage also will be open to the public.

Hawkins said he was tempted to close practices to media members as well, but decided against it after a talk with longtime sports information director Dave Plati. During his post-practice meeting with reporters he emphasized that the media cannot report anything that happens in practice. Hawkins said it is the third time in his tenure he has told media members of this rule.

Sirens from a fire truck and ambulance wailed as Hawkins spoke. They were making their way closer to the practice fields where running back Demetrius Sumler awaited their care.

Sumler reported neck pain after a hit in practice and team medical personnel called the ambulance as a precaution only. Sumler was standing surrounded by a small group of teammates and medical personnel while waiting for his ride to the hospital to arrive.

It served as a perfect and timely example of why Hawkins believes it's best, at this point, to close the doors to the public.

"You've got an ambulance coming for a player," Plati said. "Do his parents know an ambulance is coming for him, or is somebody going to Twitter it out there and his parents find out that way? That's why it should be released through us," he said.

Plati later reported Sumler was released from the hospital by 9 p.m. and all tests were negative. Plati did not know when Sumler will return to practice.

Injury issues are just one part of why Hawkins made the decision to close the gates. Perhaps his primary concern is the valuable information opponents can gain from reading detailed reports produced by onlookers.

He also noted that fans bring a pressure to perform that can be a detriment for some players and inhibit learning.

“You’ve got to understand the nature of strategy and you’ve got to understand the nature of practice,” Hawkins said. “That’s the tough thing. You can’t really practice anything. You can’t really work on stuff because they want every practice to be a performance. They want it to be a game. They want it to be all that. It’s unfortunate but with the nature of technology it’s what you’ve got to do.”

Hawkins noted there are programs in the Big 12 where nobody gets invited to a practice or a scrimmage. He said he doesn’t want to get to that point, but he does want there to be more respect for the strategy involved in the game, part of which is not tipping your hand to your opponents six months before playing them by publishing what you’re practicing.

CU does not provide media credentials to bloggers or Web sites which host message boards where people are allowed to “post anonymous information and rumors,” according to its official credentialing policy.

In the case of a newspaper such as The Camera, which has a Web site that allows such posts, CU credentials reporters for the paper but does not supply credentials for online staff members.

Sites with message boards or comment boxes that wish to gain media credentials are required to make sure all posters are accurately identified and have accurate contact information. Plati said the only two sites that have qualified to this point are Scout.com and Rivals.com.

“The reality is, I think we try to be as fan friendly and as media friendly as we possibly can,” Hawkins said.

CU’s regular season practices are always closed to the public and media members have access only three days a week.



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