



Woelk: Espinoza catching on for Buffaloes

By Neill Woelk

Sunday, April 12, 2009

BOULDER, Colo. — Friday afternoon, as Colorado coach Dan Hawkins walked through the CU locker area, he expected to see an empty room.

After all, there was no practice Friday, most classes were done for the day and it was a nice spring afternoon in Boulder.

That's the kind of equation that usually adds up to an empty room.

But when Hawk turned a corner, there sat wide receiver Jason Espinoza, lacing up his cleats.

"So I say, 'Jason, what are you doing? There's no practice,' " Hawkins recounted.

"He looks up at me like I'm crazy. He says, 'I'm going to go throw.' Kind of like, what else would he be doing on a day off?"

Yep. On a nice day on a beautiful college campus with all the distractions said campus has to offer, Espinoza was headed out to catch some footballs. Run some routes. Do anything to make himself just a little better, anything to improve his chances of getting some playing time next fall.

"I had an old coach tell me one time that you win with achievers and lose with potential," Hawkins said. "To win, you have to have that burning passion.

"Espy's got it."

Espinoza certainly had it in Saturday morning's scrimmage, the first of the spring. The 5-8, 175-pounder hauled in a team-high seven catches for 154 yards and three touchdowns -- and he didn't do it against the third-team defense. He did it against some of CU's best defenders.

"He can play," Hawkins said. "If he keeps working the way he's working, if he keeps doing the things he's doing, he can be one of the mainstays for us." Espinoza's chances are enhanced by the fact that he plays a position at which the Buffs are no doubt lacking in depth.

After Espinoza, the next-leading receiver in Saturday's scrimmage was tight end Patrick Devenny, who finished with four catches for 138 yards. Then came wide receiver Markques Simas (three catches), followed by two more tight ends and a running back with three apiece.

Get the picture? Of the top six receivers in the scrimmage, only one -- Simas -- is a scholarship wideout.

Simas, a sophomore, is expected to play a major role next fall, as are juniors Josh Smith and Scotty

McKnight. But after that, the competition is wide open.

Espinoza plans to be squarely in that mix -- and maybe, just maybe, earn a scholarship along the way.

"That's my goal," Espinoza said. "I'm working toward it.

"But the thing is, you have to be consistent. I want to be able to do it every day, in every practice, in every scrimmage."

Espinoza came to Boulder from Alamosa, where he played running back, defensive back and wide receiver in high school. CU assistant Greg Brown invited Espinoza to walk on as a defensive back, but soon after his arrival, he migrated to the offensive side of the ball.

After a solid fall camp a year ago, he was expected to see some time, at least as a punt returner. But a broken collarbone sidelined those plans.

Now he's back -- with a metal plate and six screws protecting his collarbone -- and he plans on making it impossible for coaches to ignore him.

"I never had a doubt that I could compete, but when I first got here, I wasn't really assertive or aggressive," Espinoza said. "Now that I've learned the offense and am a little more comfortable, I've gained some confidence. I know I can contribute."

If Saturday is any indication, he will contribute. His longest reception was a 40-yard touchdown, the second-longest catch of the day. He seems to have a knack for getting open and catching the eye of the quarterback -- whether it be Tyler Hansen or Cody Hawkins.

"This day is over," Espinoza said after the scrimmage. "I have to come back and do it again and again and again. Consistency. I'm getting there, but I have to keep working."

Even if it means putting in a little time on his day off.



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Rotating Hansen, Hawkins a viable option for Buffs

Both quarterbacks play well in scrimmage

By Kyle Ringo
Sunday, April 12, 2009

BOULDER, Colo. — The morning after Colorado third-string quarterback Matt Ballenger announced his decision to transfer to another school to play either football or basketball, the two quarterbacks ahead of him on the depth chart proved they belong there in the first scrimmage of spring drills.

Junior Cody Hawkins and sophomore Tyler Hansen combined to throw for more than 500 yards and 10 touchdowns in a 125-play scrimmage at Folsom Field. They led the offense to a total of 11 touchdowns without committing a turnover.

Flash back to spring 2006, the first of Hawkins' tenure, when the team scored a total of eight offensive touchdowns in three spring scrimmages and 11 offensive touchdowns in three scrimmages in fall camp.

With the first two weeks of spring ball in the books, it's obvious Colorado will have two decent options at quarterback in the fall regardless of who ultimately wins the starting job. It's also possible, maybe even probable, that both will see significant playing time once again in a timeshare system similar to how the team finished the 2008 campaign.

Both quarterbacks and coach Dan Hawkins said they would be comfortable if that arrangement once again proved to be best for the team, but they also see value in establishing a clear No. 1.

"I think we want to end up having a starting quarterback, but that doesn't mean that you couldn't do some other funky stuff," Dan Hawkins said. "There is always a role to work things out in there."

Hansen was more of a running threat last season as a true freshman and that ability gave the CU offense more flexibility. Hansen appears to be much more competent in the passing game this spring. If he continues to progress in that area, his dual-threat ability could eliminate any need to rotate with Cody Hawkins.

"That could work," Hansen said of the possibility of sharing time once again. "That could happen. Last year we experimented with that a little bit. With two more years of experience, I think that would be an all right situation, but I think our team as a whole wants a stability guy. I think if that is Cody or me our team is going to benefit from just one guy. I think they will be more comfortable with that."

Hansen started the first two series of the scrimmage and connected with tight end Patrick Devenny on the first play for a 70-yard touchdown pass, bringing a little energy to a crowd of about 500 on a cool morning.

He later connected with Devenny again on a 25-yard score and finished the day with a 12-yard touchdown pass to redshirt freshman tight end Ryan Wallace. Hansen completed 13 of 23 passes for 207 yards. He also ran twice for 10 yards.

Hawkins, meanwhile, finished the day with a 64 percent completion rate and four more touchdowns than Hansen. CU's two-year starter under center completed 18 of 28 passes for 328 yards and seven scores to five different receivers.

Hawkins was on the field for 47 plays and led the team to 19 first downs and went 6-for-6 in the red zone. Hansen was on the field for 43 plays and produced 14 first downs and a 1-for-3 success rate in the red zone.

"They played pretty efficient," coach Dan Hawkins said. "We'll have to grade them out, but they didn't turn the ball over. For the most part they moved the club."

The Buffs are determined to establish a downhill running game this spring and summer in preparation for the fall, but they aren't there yet.

Running backs Darrell Scott, Rodney Stewart and Brian Lockridge combined for 93 yards rushing on 30 carries with Stewart scoring the lone touchdown among the group. Lockridge was the only one to average more than 3.5 yards per carry.

"We're probably not where we want to be running the football," Dan Hawkins said.

One of the big concerns for the team this offseason is finding some depth at wide receiver, where only three scholarship players reside on the spring roster. There was good news on that front with walk-ons Jason Espinoza and Ryan Maxwell making plays and scoring points.

Espinoza led all receivers with seven catches for 154 yards and three touchdowns. His second score is under review. Sports information director Dave Plati left the 40-yard pass from Cody Hawkins in the final stats even though it was called back by officials because Hawkins appeared to cross the line of scrimmage before throwing. Plati said an in-season replay would have allowed the play.

Devenny also had a big day beyond the first play. The senior tight end finished with four catches for 138 yards. Devenny led the Buffs in receiving last spring.

Scrimmage statistics

RUSHING -- Stewart 13-43, 1 TD; Lockridge 8-29; Scott 9-21; Hansen 2-10; J. Smith 1-5.

PASSING -- Hawkins 18-28-0, 328 yards, 7 TDs; Hansen 13-23-0, 207 yards, 2 TDs

RECEIVING -- Espinoza 7-154, 3 TDs; Devenny 4-138, 2; Simas 3-47, 2; Shanahan 3-30; Wallace 3-27, 1; Scott 3-25; Stewart 2-36; Walters 2-29, 1; Maxwell 2-23, 1; Lockridge 1-21; Behrens 1-5

FIELD GOALS -- Goodman 7-9. Made from 37, 30, 40, 35, 26, 48, 42; Missed from 35, 38 (blocked)

TACKLE LEADERS -- Burton 9, Mahnke 5, Sipili 5, Smart 4, Jaffee 4, Smith 3, Rippey 3, Sandersfeld 3, Ewing 3, Farley 2, J. Hawkins 2, Pericak 2, Ahles 2, Beatty 2, Lawson 2, Mohler 2, Sale 2.

TACKLES FOR LOSS -- Sipili 2, Mahnke 1, Smart 1, Farley 1, Lawson 1, J. Smith 1

QB COMPARISON: Hawkins 47 plays, 348 yards, 19 first downs, 11-21 third down; Hansen 43 plays, 258 yards, 14 first downs, 9-21 third downs.

TOUCHDOWNS

Devenny 70 pass from Hansen

Maxwell 2 pass from Hawkins

Devenny 25 pass from Hansen

Stewart 1 run

Walters 9 pass from Hawkins

Simas 24 pass from Hawkins

Espinoza 38 pass from Hawkins

Espinoza 40 pass from Hawkins

Espinoza 13 pass from Hawkins

Simas 12 pass from Hawkins

Wallace 12 pass from Hansen



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Ex-Buff QB Ballenger likely to play basketball after transfer

By Kyle Ringo
Sunday, April 12, 2009

BOULDER, Colo. — Matt Ballenger will likely play basketball at the next stop in his collegiate career, but he is not closing the door on the possibility of continuing to play football as well, his father, Dr. Joe Ballenger, said Saturday.

The younger Ballenger surprised his teammates and coaches by announcing his decision to leave the CU football program late Friday night. He is the second player to leave the program this spring, following wide receiver Chance Blackmon, who decided he needed to be closer to home in Texas to deal with family problems.

Ballenger was frustrated with where he stood in the quarterback pecking order -- third string -- with the Buffs after two weeks of spring drills.

Joe Ballenger said his son is in the preliminary stages of identifying schools he would like to attend. He said he will probably choose a program in the Northwest, closer to the family home in Nampa, Idaho.

Whether Matt Ballenger chooses to play basketball or football he will have to sit out a year in accordance with NCAA rules. After sitting out, he will have two years of eligibility remaining.

Joe Ballenger said CU coach Dan Hawkins promised to do whatever he could to help his son.

"He said he loved Matt," Joe Ballenger said.

Matt Ballenger is not leaving CU with hard feelings toward coaches, his father said. Joe Ballenger said his son, a two-time Gatorade Player of the Year in high school basketball in Idaho, reached a crossroads this spring when it began to appear he would be spending another season on the bench behind junior Cody Hawkins and fellow sophomore Tyler Hansen.

Matt Ballenger had spurned multiple offers from Division I basketball programs out of high school in order to come to Colorado to play football. In recent days, he began to wonder if his future wasn't in basketball after all.

Joe Ballenger said his son wants to leave CU with dignity and class.

"We wish the best for the University of Colorado," he said. "We appreciate the scholarship for Matt and we wish the best to Matt's friends and teammates. Hopefully they will go on to great success."

Joe Ballenger said he would not comment when asked whether he and his son believe Matt was given a fair chance to win the starting quarterback job at CU. He also refused comment when asked if they

believe Cody Hawkins being the head coach's son has impacted the quarterback competition in Boulder.

Joe Ballenger said his son struggled mightily with the decision to leave CU because he has many strong friendships with fellow players and others on campus.

"This has been very hard on Matt," he said.

Cody Hawkins and Hansen both said they were stunned by the news Friday night.

Hansen found out Ballenger had decided to transfer when he received a text message at dinner from Cody Hawkins.

"I couldn't believe it," Hansen said. "I thought he was kidding around at first. It was unbelievable, a total shock to me."

Dan Hawkins said he was pleasantly surprised Ballenger chose football out of high school instead of basketball because he was so talented on the hardwood. He wasn't completely surprised by Matt Ballenger's decision because he can understand players don't like to sit and watch.

Hawkins previously said he wants five scholarship quarterbacks on the roster at one time. He amended that number to four Saturday saying if you look at programs around the country, it's difficult to keep that many because the players at the bottom of the depth chart become antsy and impatient.

"That fourth guy, he sticks around for a semester and then he kind of goes, 'Hey, I'm not in the mix. I'm going to roll,' " Hawkins said. "I understand that. I understand the nature of it. Guys want to play."

Colorado has only two quarterbacks on the roster now, but 2009 recruits Clark Evans and Josh Moten will both join the program at some point this summer. They probably won't arrive until after the July Fourth holiday because they attend California high schools, where the school year runs deep into June.

Recruit in town

CU hosted Stanley Jean-Baptiste, a wide receiver recruit from Miami, on an official visit that counts toward the 2009 total on Saturday. Coaches are continuing to look for possible additions to the 2009 class at wide receiver, where there are only three scholarship players this spring.

Baptiste was joined on the sidelines by 20-25 high school juniors who are likely to be recruited in the coming year. The majority of those players were from in-state schools.

Notable

CU linebacker Lynn Katoa is no longer on the team, according to linebackers coach Brian Cabral. ... CU place-kicker Aric Goodman made seven of nine field goal attempts in Saturday's scrimmage and all six of his extra point attempts. ... Running back Demetrius Sumler will return to practice Monday, but will probably be limited for several days as he recovers from a strained neck that required him to be taken from the practice field on Thursday in an ambulance. ... Offensive lineman Matt Bahr is expected to resume practicing in about a week. He has a strained shoulder. ... Guard Ryan Miller suffered a sprained ankle Saturday, but is expected to practice this week. ... Hawkins said the Buffs will continue to use some no-huddle offense this year and will devote significant practice time to it in the coming week.

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Longmont, Colorado
Monday, April 13, 2009

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First CU scrimmage yields mixed results

By Patrick Ridgell
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BOULDER — The good news was that the Colorado Buffaloes committed no turnovers during their first scrimmage of spring on Saturday. The bad news was that the Colorado Buffaloes forced no turnovers during their first scrimmage of spring on Saturday.

“You go, ‘All right, great job offense, not so great defense,’” head coach Dan Hawkins said. “When your offense is really on it and diligent, it becomes hard for the defense.”

Whether CU’s offense was that diligent in its first scrimmage is a point that can be debated. According to statistics compiled and reported by CU sports information, the quarterbacks put up some good numbers. But the power ground game the Buffs say they’ll implement in 2009 did not.

Quarterback Cody Hawkins engineered 11 drives and went 18-for-28 for 328 yards and seven touchdowns. His competition for the starting spot, Tyler Hansen, led 10 drives and went 13-for-23 for 207 yards and three touchdowns.

Rushers totaled 108 yards on 33 carries, an average of 3.3 per — even though the offensive line was missing two key players in guards Matt Bahr (shoulder) and Ryan Miller (Miller sprained his ankle on an early series, Dan Hawkins said, and did not return). The Buffs want a higher average than 3.3 per carry.

“In our league, you need to get five yards a crack to be good on offense,” Hawkins said. “We’re trying to set the bar pretty high there, and I don’t know that we’ll necessarily meet that. The defense got the better end of that.”

Coaches dictated the scrimmage’s flow, frequently calling for specific third-down situations rather than just letting things play out.

Turnovers, once again, are a point of emphasis this spring. At minus-7, CU finished ninth in the Big 12 in turnover margin last year.

“I think overall, as far as the run game, we did pretty good,” senior linebacker Marcus Burton said. “But passing the ball, we have to work on that.

“(Turnovers) are a large concern, especially when we have opportunities to get them and we don’t take advantage.”

BIG DAYS: Receiver Scotty McKnight said he suffered a strained triceps in practice this week. He did not play Saturday, which opened the door for walk-on Jason Espinoza, who had seven catches for 154 yards and three touchdowns.

“As long as I stay healthy and keep working hard, I’m very confident,” said Espinoza, who broke his right collarbone twice in 2008. As Espinoza conducted interviews Saturday, Dan Hawkins gave him a high-five and yelled, “You can’t

OFFENSIVE SCRIMMAGE STATS

RUSHING — Scott 9-21, Stewart 13-43, Lockridge 8-29, Hansen 2-10, Smith 1-5

PASSING — Hawkins 18-28, 328, 7 TD; Hansen 13-23, 207 yards, 3 TD

RECEIVING — Espinoza 7-154 3 TD, Devenny 4-138 2 TD, Simas 3-47 2 TD, Scott 3-25, Stewart 2-36, Maxell 2-23 1 TD, Walters 2-29, 1 TD, Wallace 3-27 1 TD, Shanahan 3-30, Behrens 1-5, Lockridge 1-21.

hold him back!”

Tight end Patrick Devenny caught four passes for 138 yards and two scores, including a 70-yard touchdown, on which he outran several linebackers and defensive backs.

Kicker Aric Goodman went 7-for-9 on field goals and 6-for-6 on extra points.

MORE INJURIES: Hawkins said running back Demetrius Sumler has a strained neck. He did not play. Hawkins said he’ll go light on Monday and will be eased into more work on Tuesday. Sumler left the practice field Thursday in an ambulance, but did not spend the night in the hospital.

Hawkins said CU will act smart regarding Bahr’s shoulder. He’ll be eased into more work this week.

EXTRA POINTS: The scrimmage lasted 125 plays. ... Burton led the defense with nine tackles, seven solo. Linebacker Michael Sipili and safety Patrick Mahnke had five each. Sipili had two sacks. ... Hawkins said the offense will start working with the no-huddle more next week. ... Hawkins said freshman right tackle Bruce Givens is progressing well: “It’s almost like every day in practice, you see him get better.”

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Longmont, Colorado
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Ballenger's exit shocks Buffs' players, coaches

By Patrick Ridgell
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BOULDER — Shock and disappointment permeated the team, although the Colorado Buffaloes insist there are no hard feelings.

That doesn't mean Matt Ballenger's departure isn't a problem.

Ballenger's decision to quit the football program and transfer, possibly to play basketball, capped a strange week of spring drills at CU. The program banned fans from practices. It saw receiver Chance Blackmon quit and leave it with three receivers on scholarship. As expected, touted linebacker Lynn Katoa is gone, as assistant coach Brian Cabral confirmed to The Denver Post the other day.

But Ballenger's announcement, which came late Friday night after he and his father met with head coach Dan Hawkins, leaves the Buffs with only two quarterbacks until this summer, when two more will arrive as freshmen.

CU wants four quarterbacks on scholarship in its program. An injury this spring or next fall to junior Cody Hawkins or sophomore Tyler Hansen will leave the Buffs paper-thin under center.

Dan Hawkins liked to tell a story about once seeing Ballenger, who's 6-foot-4 and 210 pounds, play at Skyview High in Nampa, Idaho, and rave about how Ballenger looked the way a quarterback is supposed to look. But he was not developing fast enough to beat Hawkins or Hansen for the job.

As offensive coordinator Mark Helfrich said: Ballenger wants to play, but it didn't appear he would at CU anytime soon. So his decision is understandable.

"You look across the country, and that happens daily this time of year, guys leaving a school for various reasons, and that's OK," Helfrich said. "We'll help him, whatever he wants to do and whichever sport he chooses. We'll support him and help him the best we can."

"He was progressing fine. He was third (string), and that was just kind of how the play bore out. But again, we're not mad at him, and he's not mad at us. Things will work out somewhere else, hopefully."

CU must be hoping things will work out for itself, too. The Buffs are coming off a season in which they lost 121 player games due to injury. The team is also emerging from a 15-month stretch during which about a dozen current or recently-departed players had legal problems. Those still in the program at the time of their arrests were suspended.

There were also last year's plights of receiver Markques Simas and offensive lineman Sione Tau. They would have contributed had they been academically eligible.

Blackmon and Ballenger were not expected to play key roles in 2009, but their departures zaps CU of some of the



Tyler Hansen takes a snap during CU's scrimmage Saturday at Folsom Field in Boulder. Hansen and Cody Hawkins are now CU's only quarterbacks this spring.

Lewis Geyer/Times-Call

depth it craves — the depth it has not had since Hawkins took over prior to 2006.

Hawkins said CU will continue to stress heightened competition for playing time at all positions, regardless of the outcomes.

“You can never sacrifice that,” he said. “So that, to me, is the ultimate thing. “You look across the country, and you see that. As teams get better and guys compete and they realize, ‘well, you know, I’m not going to play here,’ they look for other places. All of that is not bad. What you can’t do is sacrifice your standards. You have to have the bar there, and guys have to meet it.”

Several Buffs expressed surprise over Ballenger’s exit. Hansen said he heard about it Friday night from Cody Hawkins, and thought Cody was kidding. Hansen said it really hit him when he went by Ballenger’s former locker Saturday morning, and Ballenger wasn’t there.

“Matt’s a great guy,” Hansen said. “You can’t blame a guy for wanting to play. Everybody wants to be out there, and only one guy can be out there at a time.

“One thing that I wish he wouldn’t have done, I guess, is I wish he wouldn’t have left in the middle of spring.”

Hansen and senior linebacker Marcus Burton said it’s important that CU cut down on the attrition that plagues it.

“Being around these guys every day in the locker room, you build relationships. And when people leave, it’s hard; it’s hard to deal with,” Hansen said.

Said Burton: “It’s very pivotal that you don’t get too thin. Last year, we were spread thin in a lot of places. We’re starting to get there in some areas. I think it’s important we just keep focused on our tasks and not worry about the off-field problems.”

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THE DENVER POST

cu football

QB's Hawkins, Hansen shine in scrimmage

By John Henderson
The Denver Post

Posted: 04/12/2009 12:30:00 AM MDT



Tight end Patrick Devenny tries to break away from the defense during Colorado's 125-play scrimmage Saturday at Folsom Field. (Kasia Broussalian, Daily Camera)

BOULDER — Cody Hawkins and Tyler Hansen combined to throw 10 touchdown passes during Saturday's scrimmage, which is a good sign if you

followed Colorado last fall.

Then again, this is spring, and spring football is rife with however's. Such as . . . how-ever, only two scholarship players played from a wideout corps that's as shallow as Boulder Creek. And . . . however, a running attack that was mediocre last year did very little behind another patchwork offensive line.

So there were only a few signs of improving a Buffaloes offense that was 100th nationally in scoring (20.2 points per game) on a 5-7 team that missed a bowl game for the second time in three years. Fortunately, one of those areas that looked sharp was the most important position on the field.

Hawkins completed 18-of-28 passes for 328 yards and seven touchdowns, and Hansen connected on 13-of-23 for 207 and three touchdowns. Most important, the offense didn't commit a turnover during the 125-play scrimmage on a crisp 50-degree day.

Only 13 hours after third-string quarterback Matt Ballenger announced his decision to transfer, the two top returnees lit it up.

"They played pretty efficient," coach Dan Hawkins said. "They didn't turn the ball over. For the most part, they moved the club."

Cody Hawkins and Hansen split playing time last year, with Hansen debuting at midseason. Unless one really explodes or another falters, expect them to split time this season, not that it bothers

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Cody's dad much.

"You can have a role depending on how it goes," Hawkins said. "I think we want to end up having a starting quarterback, but that doesn't mean you couldn't do other funky stuff."

They both looked sharp. At one point Cody Hawkins hit Jason Espinoza on three consecutive touchdown passes. If you have never heard of Espinoza, he's a sophomore walk-on who was an all-stater at Alamosa High School in 2006. Colorado has only three wideouts on scholarship, and junior Scotty McKnight, last year's leading receiver, didn't practice because of a muscle strain in his arm.

They threw to Josh Smith only once. Instead, the leading receivers were Espinoza with seven catches for 154 yards and senior tight end Patrick Devenny with four for 138 yards and two scores.

"I avoided turning the ball over, and obviously we were able to move the ball pretty well," Hawkins said. "We need to run the ball a little better."

Colorado didn't have a 700-yard rusher last year because of a line that lost former prep All-American Ryan Miller to a blown knee and played two freshmen and a converted tight end. It didn't help Saturday with guard Matthew Bahr, one of those freshmen, out with a sprained shoulder and Miller rolling his ankle on Saturday's fifth play.

That's one reason the two quarterbacks suffered six sacks and tailbacks Darrell Scott and Rodney Stewart combined for only 72 yards on 21 carries.

"We have a young line," Scott said. "We're trying to read everything, but everything will come together in the end. We have a lot of potential."

Ballenger, who hit 8-of-12 passes for 118 yards and a touchdown last year, may consider playing basketball. He was a two-time state basketball player of the year at Skyview High School in Nampa, Idaho.

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john henderson

Henderson: Buffaloes have some catching up to do

By John Henderson
The Denver Post

Posted: 04/13/2009 12:30:00 AM MDT

BOULDER — To give you an idea of how dire the Colorado football team's playmaker situation is, the most productive player in Saturday's scrimmage was a 5-foot-8 walk-on wide receiver from Alamosa coming off two broken collarbones.

Yes, sophomore Jason Espinoza will likely get playing time this fall. Either he or sophomore Ryan Maxwell should make the two-deep. Who's Maxwell? He redshirted at Cal-Davis two years ago. No one in Davis knew who he was, either.

Please excuse Mack Brown if he's not burning the midnight oil at Texas game-planning against Colorado's passing game.

This spring, the Buffaloes may have the thinnest wide receiver corps in the country. Three are on scholarship. Colorado is coming off a 5-7 season without a single wideout catching 50 passes or

averaging 14 yards a catch.

As I traveled around during the NCAA basketball tournament, writers frequently asked me about coach Dan Hawkins' job status. I think he's safe. However, the pressure shouldn't be so much on his son the quarterback as on the receivers to whom he throws.

Entering Hawkins' fourth year, his program is woefully short of play-makers. However, it has potential. Markques Simas was a SuperPrep All-American out of San Diego's Mira Mesa High who hasn't caught a pass in two years in Boulder.

He redshirted in 2007 and was academically ineligible in 2008. He said he finally has his priorities in order and should prevent defenses from double-teaming Josh Smith, one of the few scary-fast Buffs, who caught a pedestrian 29 passes a year ago. Last year's leading receiver was Scotty McKnight, a former walk-on.

"We're all good. We all know our role," said Simas, who caught two touchdown passes Saturday. "We just lack that playmaker. We have one in Josh Smith. We have one in Scotty McKnight. But we need that third wideout to complete that corps. I can be that third guy."

Colorado probably needs instant contributions from two three-star recruits in 6-foot-4 Terdema Ussery of St. Mark's School in Dallas and 6-5 Jarrod Darden (who missed his senior year with an ankle injury) of Central High in Keller, Texas, and four-star Andre Simmons (6-3) of Independence (Kan.) Community College.

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Tailback Brian Lockridge is also getting reps at receiver.

"We've got to get some help from those incoming guys," Hawkins said. "You need more."

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UPDATE: Receivers make most of opportunities in Buffs' first spring scrimmage

By **B.G. Brooks**
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BOULDER — While both are capable, Patrick Devenny and Jason Espinoza didn't enter spring football practice at the [University of Colorado](#) as established go-to performers in the passing game.

But their teammates and coaches now recognize both as opportunists who performed admirably Saturday when their chances arrived.

The receiving work of Devenny, a senior tight end who began his CU career at quarterback, and Espinoza, a walk-on sophomore sidelined twice last season by a broken collarbone, highlighted a turnover-free offensive performance by the Buffaloes in their first spring scrimmage.

Devenny set the tone with a 70-yard catch-and-run score on the scrimmage's opening play, finishing with four catches for 138 yards and a pair of touchdowns. Espinoza made seven receptions for 154 yards and three touchdowns.

Their step-up efforts, said quarterback Cody Hawkins, filled a void left by the absence of receiver Scotty McKnight, who missed the scrimmage because of a triceps injury.

"With all the new stuff we're doing . . . and with the injury to Scotty, we had a couple of guys step up and take his role, because he's an integral part of the offense," said Hawkins, who completed 18-of-27 passes for 328 yards and seven touchdowns (three sacks).

Hawkins called Devenny "a really mobile tight end," who can be used as a big receiver. "He's making a lot of plays down the field for us; he's a really athletic guy.

"Both of those guys deserve a lot of credit, because they've been busting their butts all offseason. And you can see it paid off today."

Offensive coordinator/quarterbacks coach Mark Helfrich echoed that: "Our receivers did a good job battling; Espinoza has practiced well . . . and he showed up well today. And Devenny has had a good spring to this point.

"You never know how a scrimmage is going to play out, but it's good to see guys who've worked hard and improved a ton kind of be rewarded."

Hawkins and Tyler Hansen shared time running all three offensive units. Hansen, who opened with the No. 1 offense, completed 13-of-22 passes for 207 yards and three TDs (3 sacks).

Helfrich said both quarterbacks "did some pretty good things and some things we can correct pretty easily . . . In the course of the scrimmage we didn't turn it over — which is huge.

"I think with some minor tweaks here or there, when we get a little healthier, I definitely think we're going in the right direction."

Hawkins assessed his morning as "OK. We took care of the football, but I would have liked to have done a little better in third-down situations."

Hansen offered a similar critique of his performance: "We were doing some new things — some boot and play-action stuff that kept the defense off-balance, and I thought I was OK with that. But I've got a lot of room to improve."

FINDING THEIR LEGS: The Buffs have made a point of saying they would be more physical in the offensive line, which should translate into a more physical running game.

Those results were mixed Saturday, when the ground game produced 108 total yards.

But tailback Demetrius Sumler (neck strain) missed all of the work, and right guard Ryan Miller (ankle sprain) was injured early and missed the bulk of the scrimmage. The O-line also was minus Matt Bahr (shoulder).

"We're probably not where we want to be running the football, but the good news/bad news is that in the Big 12 in the old days, you get three yards a crack you're pretty good," coach Dan Hawkins said. "Now, it's more like you have to get 5 yards a crack to be good on offense. We're trying to set the bar pretty high there, and I don't necessarily know that we'll meet that.

"So, on that hand, the defense probably got the better end of the deal (Saturday)."

But, he added, "I sure like the mentality" of the offensive line and its work in the run game.

Linebacker Jeff Smart said the defense "did a pretty good job of stopping the run," adding the offense "threw in some wrinkles we haven't seen in practice, so we had to adjust to those. But overall, I think we did a good job."

Linebackers Marcus Burton (nine tackles, seven solo) and Michael Sipili (five tackles, two quarterback sacks, three third-down stops) were the defensive leaders.

Smart conceded one of the spring defensive goals is to "get some more speed out there; we're always trying to utilize our skill sets as best we can."

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Asked if he believes the defense is playing faster, Dan Hawkins said, "I think they are . . . you see a lot of subtle things — the way they communicate, get lined up, you see the linebackers moving guys around.

"There seems to be more cohesiveness of guys signaling to each other. I think they're playing at a greater tempo that way — and part of that is their comfort and confidence with what they're doing."

Still, with no forced turnovers, he added, "That's `great-job offense, not-so-good defense.'"

ONE FEWER QB: The Buffs went through Saturday's scrimmage with two quarterbacks, the result of sophomore Matt Ballenger's announcement Friday night that he would transfer.

If Ballenger's decision shocked his teammates, it didn't seem that way to Helfrich.

"Yes and no," Helfrich answered when asked if he was shocked. "I mean, in this day and age, at the quarterback position there are only so many slots and guys wind up making decisions for various reasons. We'll help him out, whatever he needs, and we wish him the absolute best."

Cody Hawkins said he was "pretty upset" about Ballenger's departure. "He's a real competitive guy. He wants to do what he has to play. I'm not sure what he's going to do, but whatever it is, he'll be successful . . . but it's a bummer to see one of my good friends on the team go.

"The tough thing about football when you're a quarterback, everybody wants to be the guy and sometimes there can be only one. So, it's a really tough situation."

Hansen seemed puzzled Ballenger decided to leave in the midst of spring practice, adding that in recent quarterback meetings Ballenger "seemed real quiet.

"I can't blame him for wanting to play, though. But when people leave, it's hard."

Dan Hawkins' former goal was to have five scholarship quarterbacks on the roster every season. Now, he's downsized that to four.

"As teams get better and guys compete, and as guys (realize) I'm not going to play or get a sniff, they look for other places," he said. "All of that is not bad."

GOOD FOR GOODMAN: Placekicker Aric Goodman, who endured an up-and-down debut season in 2008, has shorted his approach to the ball. Two steps instead of three seems to be working.

He connected on 6-of-9 field-goal attempts Saturday, with his longest kick just under 50 yards.

"It's confidence and a comfort thing," Goodman said of the altered approach. "Everything seems to be slowing down for me now. I'm just feeling better all the way around."



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