



Bufs' kick-blocking skills on upswing

By Kyle Ringo

Tuesday, April 21, 2009

BOULDER, Colo. — An unfamiliar sound has been heard a little more often on the football fields at Colorado spring practice this year.

Thud-thud.

It's the sound of a place-kicker or punter striking the ball only to have it blocked by an onrushing teammate.

This is a good-news-bad-news situation for CU's coaches. The Bufs are hoping to block more kicks this year than they have in the past three years under coach Dan Hawkins and special teams coordinator Kent Riddle, whose units at Boise State were actually quite good at blocking kicks.

CU didn't block a kick in 12 games last season but gave up three blocks. Riddle said blocking kicks can sometimes come down to having a player or two on the roster who has a knack for it.

More consistent results haven't come in Boulder, yet, because the personnel hasn't been in place, Riddle said. This year some of the Bufs playing special teams will be in their third year in the same roles. That experience, and the fact there is more strength and athleticism throughout the roster, should product better results, Riddle said.

"If you look around, we have a lot more big, fast guys than we did," Riddle said. "So the more guys you get like that, the better chance you've got of getting one."

Colorado's special teams play has been criticized at times in Hawkins' tenure, especially last season, when place-kickers struggled mightily, making just six of 17 field goal attempts.

Some forget the Bufs were one of just six programs in the nation in 2007 to rank in the top half in the national rankings in all five special teams categories: net punting, punt returns, kickoff returns, punt return defense and kickoff return defense.

Hawkins said he has seen a heightened level of intensity in the battle for playing time on special teams this spring. Much of it can be traced to having so many experienced players returning, including eight of the top 10 special teams performers from a year ago.

That group doesn't include dynamic return man Josh Smith, who is also back for another year.

"I think even the simple little drills that we've done before, they're kind of getting to those little, subtle nuances and picking things up," Hawkins said. "That's a big part of it. We want some of those guys to step up and establish themselves and get some reps here."

Punting rugby style

Riddle said coaches will probably ask punters to roll out and kick on the run rugby style a healthy percentage of the time in the coming season, but the team will not go completely away from the standard punt.

Riddle said using the rugby style punt can help neutralize explosive return games prevalent throughout the Big 12 Conference. There is also another solid reason for adopting the strategy put in place by multiple teams such as Missouri and Kansas last season.

"If you can get it on the ground, now all of a sudden it's bouncing around and it takes funny hops and it's a little bit harder to get a return," Riddle said. "Plus it's harder to know where it's going to come down in the first place."

A bouncing ball can lead to turnovers.

Notable

Hawkins welcomed members of the Air Force coaching staff to practice Tuesday. He said the staffs won't be exchanging notes on Colorado State, the Buffs' first opponent next season, but they are friendly. Hawkins said he visited Air Force spring practice earlier this spring. "Hey, in any business, when you stop learning, you stop growing," Hawkins said. ... The format for Saturday's spring game will be similar to last year, with 10-minute quarters and the team split into offensive and defensive groups. Instead of focusing on situational work, it will be played like a game with the offense trying to drive and score against the defense, with special teams worked mixed in. Hawkins said if the play count begins to get high, they might move to a running clock at the end.



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Helfrich to interview at Oregon

Buff OC looking at same post with Ducks

By Kyle Ringo
Tuesday, April 21, 2009

BOULDER, Colo. — The Colorado football program could be looking for a new offensive coordinator as early as next week.

Mark Helfrich, who has served as offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach in Boulder since 2006, will interview for the same position next week at the University of Oregon, according to a release published on the CU athletic department Web site.

Helfrich would be the second member of the coaching staff to leave Colorado this offseason and the fourth member to at least entertain the idea. If offered a job at Oregon, he would be the second member of the CU staff to be courted by the Ducks this year. Helfrich was born in Medford, Ore., and played college football at Southern Oregon. He served as a graduate assistant at Oregon in 1997.

Meanwhile, there is no support at the top of the University of Colorado for multi-year contracts for assistant coaches.

Interim chancellor Phil DiStefano will likely take over leadership of the campus on a permanent basis in the next month after recently being named the sole finalist for the chancellor position. DiStefano discussed a range of topics related to athletics in a recent interview with The Camera, including his position on the multi-year contracts for assistants.

Football coach Dan Hawkins has been a proponent of at least trying to lobby the state legislature to change the law that limits each state institution to six multi-year contracts at one time. Hawkins said multi-year deals for assistants are becoming more commonplace around the country and Colorado's inability to offer that kind of stability makes it difficult to retain the best assistants.

"The problem that comes up, and I've talked to many people about it, is that the head coach has a contract, and if an assistant has a contract and a new head coach comes in, more than likely the new head coach might want to make some changes there," DiStefano said. "Then the athletic department has to pay two salaries, one of the assistant coach who may be leaving with a contract, and then to bring in another assistant coach.

"I think it's a good policy to make sure the head coaches have contracts, but I'm not convinced it's a good policy for the assistant coaches to have them. I think the athletic department could run into some budgetary problems by doing that."

DiStefano said he favors offering assistant coaches "significant" incentives that would "sweeten the pot." He said those incentives could be offered based on achievements on and off the fields or courts of

play, addressing graduation rates as well. He said he is in favor of taking the same approach when it comes to retaining faculty members around campus.

“I’m talking about making them significant enough that No. 1, they will have to perform, but No. 2, if they do, it’s going to mean a larger paycheck for them,” DiStefano said.

The CU football program has lost at least one assistant coach every year since 1989 except for the offseason between the 2007 and 2008 seasons. This winter the program waved goodbye to former offensive line coach Jeff Grimes, who bolted from Boulder to take on the same job at Auburn.

Secondary coach Greg Brown was offered a co-defensive coordinator job at South Florida but turned it down and Oregon offered a job to assistant head coach and wide receivers coach Eric Kiesau, who also chose to stay in Boulder.

DiStefano has a long relationship with the athletic department, including serving as the faculty athletics representative at one point. DiStefano has served as a professor, dean, vice-chancellor and provost during his lengthy CU career. He has also served as interim chancellor twice, including back in 2005 when he was directly involved in hiring athletic director Mike Bohn, Hawkins and women’s basketball coach Kathy McConnell-Miller.

During the coming months, DiStefano will be responsible for leading the school through needed budget cuts in the face of funding shortfalls and the economic downturn. Some of those cutbacks are bound to affect the athletic department.

The CU System and the Boulder campus have raised the level of institutional support for athletics in recent years. It fell from a high of about 46 percent of the total athletic department budget in the early 1990s to about 4 percent in 2004. The athletic department also received an \$8 million loan from the CU System and the Boulder campus

DiStefano said he plans to continue working with the athletic department and he will regularly attend games and other athletic department events. Former chancellor G.P. “Bud” Peterson left earlier this semester to take over as president at Georgia Tech. Peterson was wildly popular with CU fans, student-athletes, athletic department staffers and coaches because he was always there to support the teams.

“I was intimately involved with athletics and kind of moving athletics forward before Bud came in,” DiStefano said. “So I would definitely continue to do that.”

Peterson worked without a multi-year contract during his time at CU, allowing one to be freed up for another employee on campus. It is unclear whether DiStefano will do the same if he is hired as chancellor on a permanent basis.



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college football

CU coach says QB race is tight

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

Posted: 04/21/2009 12:04:43 PM MDT

Updated: 04/21/2009 01:49:10 PM MDT



Colorado quarterback Cody Hawkins hands the ball off to Darrell Scott during their scrimmage game in the practice dome in Boulder on April 17. (Daily Camera | Mark Leffingwell)

When it came to Dan Hawkins' turn this morning on the Big 12 football spring teleconference, the Colorado coach was asked about the ongoing quarterback battle between junior-to-be Cody

Hawkins and sophomore-to-be Tyler Hansen.

"They're both playing great, they really are," Dan Hawkins said on the call. "Both of them have really raised their level of play and are able to do a lot of things. Both of them are playing really well."

The coach was asked if it was difficult to pull his son in favor of Hansen as the starter for the Oct. 25 game at Missouri last fall.

"The first thing is, we have to do what's best for the football team," Dan Hawkins said. "(Cody) understands that. And I understand that. One of the things that determines

Colorado Football

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how successful people are, is how they handle adversity.

"You can't keep anybody in a glass bubble. And everybody has a backup quarterback. Everybody has backups and not everybody can be a starter. Everyone needs to understand that."

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Hansen also started the Nov. 8 Iowa State game, but Cody Hawkins took every snap in Nov. 15 game against Oklahoma State and played most of the way at Nebraska in the season finale.

CU coaches have said rotating quarterbacks in 2009 could be a possibility although that would not be their preference.

"Was it hard to sit your starting quarterback? Yeah, it was," Dan Hawkins said on the teleconference. "We were so beat up, up front (along the offensive line), we really needed Tyler to come in (against Missouri) and run. I felt bad for Tyler, too. Having to pull off his redshirt year was a huge sacrifice. It was a huge sacrifice on both their parts."

"But I think they both handled it really well. They both wanted to do what's best for the team. And they both supported each other. That made it work out. You're trying to do what's best for the whole program."

Colorado's spring game is Saturday, beginning at 1 p.m. at Folsom Field. It is open to the public.

Expect the quarterback battle to continue into August drills.

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CU receiver corps have depth issues

By B.G. Brooks
[bbbrooksrn@aol.com](mailto:bbrooksrn@aol.com)

BOULDER — Spun this way, several heretofore (and in all likelihood, future) unknowns occupying the University of Colorado's receiving corps have cashed in on spring opportunities to get noticed.

No disrespect to Ryan Maxwell, Kyle Cefalo, Dustin Ebner, et al (it's OK at this point to ask, "Who?"), but when spun in the logical direction, it's as clear as a Colorado sky that CU's good-hands group still is in need of a considerable infusion of Big 12-caliber talent.

It's no secret the Buffaloes don't need any more defections or injuries at the position and need every incoming signee to show up eligible and if not ready for prime time, then really, really close.

By late Saturday afternoon, CU will have completed spring drills with only three scholarship receivers. But that statement needs a qualifier or two.

Top 2008 receiver Scotty McKnight missed most of the work — Saturday's spring game (1 p.m., Folsom Field) is to be included — with a partially torn right triceps. With talented Josh Smith missing a couple of days with an ankle sprain, only now-eligible and re-energized Marques Simas was left to run the whole spring route and make his mark as a potential big-time threat — which he has done.

Jason Espinosa has shown well enough to likely become a former walk-on by spring's end, but the receiving corps has been so thin that running back Kevin Moyd has spent some practice time with the group.

One unwanted byproduct of the personnel shortage at that position is a slight reduction of quality work for the entire offense.

Asked Monday about the progress of quarterbacks Cody Hawkins and Tyler Hansen, coach Dan Hawkins answered, "The thing that hurts them is when you have some inconsistency in the lineup — and we've had little bit of juggling in the O-line and at tight end and with the receivers.

"That kind of hurts in the cohesion of the whole thing. But I think both (QBs) are playing really well."

Passing game coordinator/receivers coach Eric Kiesau chose to run the "absences create opportunities" route, citing the spring development of Espinosa, Maxwell and Cefalo but conceding the August arrival and immediate contributions from junior-college transfer Andre Simmons and high school signees Terdema Ussery and Jarrod Darden are paramount.

CU is eyeing Stanley Jean-Baptiste, a high school prospect who would be eligible in the fall, and former Michigan receiver Toney Clemons visited Boulder last weekend. He is said to be deliberating between CU and Cincinnati, but with a transfer season mandatory, his participation at any Division I school won't come until 2010.

Same with Cefalo, a transfer from Oregon State who is no relation to former Penn State receiver Jimmy Cefalo. But Kiesau can picture Kyle Cefalo, who made four catches for 66 yards in Friday's second spring scrimmage, as a future contributor.

Cefalo sitting out the 2009 season, Kiesau said, "is OK. He needs to lift, get stronger and bigger than he is right now (5-foot-10, 165 pounds). He studies, he's smart and this is important to him. He's got good hands. He's not going to look the part; he's not going to walk out on the field and make you go, 'Wow.'"

"But he's shown in practices and a scrimmage that he can be productive going full speed with a full rush in front of him. So we'll see how it goes; we'll continue to watch his progress and see where it takes him."

He's even more anxious to see where Simmons' academic progress takes him at Independence (Kan.) Community College. Kiesau said Simmons "is doing well (but) it's a day-to-day thing.

"I'm on the phone every other day with his counselor, making sure he's staying on track. Really, I'm just trying to be a constant reminder of the things he has to get done to come in here and not let this opportunity slip. And really, I think he's doing a great job."

The additions of Simmons (6-3), Ussery (6-3) and Darden (6-4) — provided they learn the offense and are physically able to play — would offer the Buffs size and depth they haven't had at receiver in the Dan Hawkins era.

McKnight, meanwhile, said he can begin rehabilitating his arm injury in about three weeks, with his continued absence from practice a precautionary move. He has had an MRI "to make sure it doesn't get to the point where it needs surgery.

"Those things are kind of a freak deal. If I had pushed off with it, it might have rolled up and I could have been out maybe six months. It should be better in about three weeks, then I'll rehab it and be full go all summer."

McKnight, an established leader in his group, said his absence has allowed Smith and Simas to fill that role.

"I'm still trying to show that, too," he said. "But it's a little bit harder when you're not in the mix with guys. I think Josh and Marques stepped up and have been a little more vocal, and that's beneficial for us."



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CU offensive coordinator Helfrich to interview at Oregon

By **B.G. Brooks**
bbrooksrn@aol.com

BOULDER — The University of Colorado could lose offensive coordinator/quarterbacks coach Mark Helfrich to Oregon.

Helfrich, who was born in Medford, Ore., will interview with the Ducks next week for their vacant offensive coordinator opening, it was reported Tuesday night on CU's Website CUBuffs.com.

Helfrich played collegiately at Southern Oregon and was a graduate assistant at Oregon in 1997.

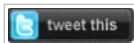
Oregon recently changed coaches, with offensive coordinator/quarterbacks coach Chip Kelly, a Ducks staffer since 2007, replacing longtime coach Mike Bellotti, who became the school's athletic director.

Kelly, named Oregon's coach March 13, offered the offensive coordinator position to former Tampa Bay coach Jon Gruden, according to the Nashua (N.H.) Telegraph.

Helfrich, 35, is the third-youngest offensive coordinator in Football Bowl Subdivision. He was Arizona State's quarterbacks coach for five seasons before joining CU coach Dan Hawkins' staff in 2006.

In a response to a voice mail message left for him Tuesday night, Helfrich told INDenverTimes.com by text message his only comment "would be to confirm the content of the release and remain solely focused on closing out our very productive and positive practice sessions here at CU."

BUFF BITS: Air Force coach **Troy Calhoun** and a few of his assistants attended Tuesday's practice. Hawkins called Calhoun "a great guy" and said the visit was reciprocal. "I visited them when they were in spring ball. ... In our business, you never stop learning." ... Saturday's spring game (1 p.m., Folsom Field) will amount to a game-condition scrimmage, Hawkins said. Quarters will be 10 minutes long, with the possibility of the clock being allowed to run unstopped in the final quarter. The No. 1 offense and defense will be matched, with time also against the No. 2 units for each. ... Offensive lineman **Sione Tau** missed Tuesday's work for what Hawkins called "personal reasons." ... Hawkins said linebacker **Jon Major**, who missed his freshman season after suffering a knee injury that required surgery, has progressed well in spring drills. ... Hawkins reiterated on a Big 12 Conference coaches spring football teleconference Tuesday morning that the quarterback duel between his son **Cody** and **Tyler Hansen** is close. Hawkins said both players have really raised their level of play and are able to do a lot of things."



CATEGORY: College football, Sports

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CU's Helfrich to interview at Oregon

By Patrick Ridgell
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BOULDER — The Colorado football program announced Tuesday night that offensive coordinator Mark Helfrich will interview next week for the vacant offensive coordinator position at Oregon.

In a text message late Tuesday night to the Times-Call, Helfrich wrote, "My only comment would be to confirm the content of the release, and (I) remain focused solely on closing out our very productive and positive spring practice sessions here at CU."

CU concludes spring drills with a practice Thursday and its spring game Saturday.

Helfrich, 35, was the third-youngest offensive coordinator among the nation's 120 Division I programs in 2008, and the youngest at any BCS school. CU's offense finished last in the Big 12 in scoring and total yards in 2008.

CU coach Dan Hawkins hired Helfrich from Arizona State upon succeeding Gary Barnett in December 2005. During his time in Tempe, Ariz., Helfrich coached quarterback Andrew Walter, who broke several Pac-10 and program records.

Helfrich was born in Medford, Ore., and played college football at Southern Oregon before working as an offensive graduate assistant for the Ducks in 1997. He attended Marshfield High in Coos Bay, Ore.

Oregon head coach Chip Kelly was hired in March to replace Mike Bellotti, who left the position to become athletic director. Kelly was Oregon's offensive coordinator in 2007 and 2008, during which the Ducks set program records for points and yards both years.

CU already lost one assistant since the 2008 season ended when offensive line/assistant head coach Jeff Grimes left for Auburn. Secondary coach Greg Brown interviewed with South Florida but stayed with CU.

At Auburn, Grimes received a multi-year contract, something CU assistants can't receive because of state law. Grimes said the multi-year contract was not a reason why he left.

Hawkins has said other programs will try to lure away CU's assistants with multi-year deals, among other incentives, and has voiced his interest in hoping the legislature will reconsider. CU gets six multi-year contracts.

Patrick Ridgell can be reached at pridgell@times-call.com