



CU football offense 'countless days' ahead of 2006

Helfrich says execution already better than at any time last season

By Kyle Ringo
Tuesday, August 14, 2007

Rewind nine months to a hallway inside Memorial Stadium in Lincoln, Neb., where Colorado offensive coordinator Mark Helfrich talked to reporters about one of the worst offensive seasons of football in Colorado history.

That afternoon Helfrich admitted that at no time in 2006 were the Buffs capable of using even 50 percent of the team's offense. He said there were multiple reasons for it and multiple players struggling with it.

If that was indeed the case in the aftermath of the 12th game of the season four months after the first fall practice, what must have those early days of training camp been like a year ago? How extensive could the game plan have been against Montana State or Colorado State in Games One and Two of the year?

To hear coaches and players tell it. It was like playing a season with one hand tied behind their backs.

And now, in the early stages of fall camp in 2007, the Buffs are light years ahead in terms of what has been installed and what the team is capable of doing on game days.

Comparing the offense at this time last year to the development this year is like expecting offensive lineman Ryan Miller on his first day of life 18 years ago to measure up to the enormous human being he has become.

"This year it's good because we're getting all that stuff put in way faster than we did last year," center Daniel Sanders said. "So now we have time to just sit there and work on it and run it as much as we can before the first game."

Helfrich said players on the offensive line and at the quarterback position are already executing at level they never reached last season, but there are still growing pains this fall. Helfrich said the team's young group of talented wide receivers were joking with him Sunday night. They told Helfrich they feel like every time they begin to understand something, there is more heaped upon them.

"The expansion of things is where it makes you, hopefully, a little bit harder to defend," Helfrich said. "When guys can do multiple base things, whether it's run or pass, then you can expand off of those base things."

“That’s what we’ve been able to do a lot more of this fall.”

Helfrich said the coaching staff used a different approach with most of the players this season, throwing the playbook at them and asking them to absorb it all at once. They are comfortable with this approach because more than half the team has been in the system for at least a year.

Helfrich said the entire running game has been introduced to players a little more than one week into camp. Helfrich wasn’t willing to put a percentage on how much of the offense is at his fingertips these days.

“Our game plans last year were very limited,” Helfrich said. “That will change and also the variety of things that we’re able to do will change.”

Redshirt freshman Cody Hawkins holds a lead in the race to be the next starting quarterback at CU. Last year he watched every game from the sidelines and practiced with the scout team.

But Hawkins participated on game days in signaling in the plays to quarterback Bernard Jackson. He also wore a headset during games and was able to hear Helfrich call plays.

“We’re doing more shifting and motion now than we ever did last year,” Hawkins said. “We’re applying a lot more concepts out of different formations. Last year we had certain packages and there was one specific package that we only ran out of one formation. We’ve run it out of five or six different formations this fall. “

“We are countless days ahead of where we were last year. I mean, it’s unbelievable. We’ve got to show it in a game first, but definitely, we’ve got a lot more things going than last year.”

Notable

The Buffs will have a brief walk-through this morning but coach Dan Hawkins decided they have earned the rest of the day off. Coaches will take players paintballing this afternoon. ... The team will practice twice Wednesday at 9 a.m. and again from 8-10 p.m. Two of the Buffs’ first three games begin at 8 p.m. or later and coaches want to acclimate players to being on the field at that time. ... Wide receivers Josh Smith and Markques Simas sat out all or part of Monday’s afternoon practice with shoulder injuries. Defensive lineman Lagrone Shields, linebacker Brad Jones, safety D.J. Dykes and tight end Riar Geer also missed practice because of minor injuries. ... Bernard Jackson missed another practice because of a commitment to an independent studies class.



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Collins confident defense can improve

By Kyle Ringo
Tuesday, August 14, 2007

There is no question the defense was the strength of the Colorado football team a year ago. It managed to keep the team in nearly every game in a 2-10 season, despite an offense that seemed, at times, almost hopelessly incapable of scoring points.

Defensive coordinator Ron Collins is optimistic the Buffs can improve this season, even though for the first time in his career, he is facing the prospect of playing a lot of true and redshirt freshmen.

The defense became a little less experienced over the summer when sophomore middle linebacker Michael Sipili was arrested for assault and indefinitely suspended.

With a little more than two weeks remaining before the season opener against Colorado State in Denver, Collins is searching for answers to some key questions on his side of the ball. The list includes who might fill Sipili's shoes, finding a starting cornerback, and how to improve on a 67-percent completion rate allowed to opponents last season.

On top of all that, the defense, playing mostly a vanilla scheme, allowed 609 yards of total offense in the first scrimmage of fall drills Sunday. Collins discussed it all after both practices Monday.

Q: Are there any significant changes in what you're doing with this year compared with last year?

A: "Subtle but not dramatic. I think the biggest thing for us in being in it a year, being familiar and understanding what we're trying to accomplish."

Q: Can you compare where you are now as a defense with where you were a year ago at this point?

A: "It's way different. Just being in it a year, the kids know our expectations and what we want. I think anybody that watches us practice can tell it's a totally different deal. The guys are focused. Their intensity is way better. They're having fun. I mean they're great kids to be around. ...I think as we've gotten to know each other, things have gotten a lot better."

Q: How do you expect playing a lot of young guys will affect your defense this season?

A: "It always affects you because they haven't experienced what the older players have experienced. So you know they're going to make mistakes and you've got to kind of live with that. Anybody who is coming in as a freshman is going to make mistakes. So they have to learn from those mistakes and sometimes you have to live with it, but hopefully, they will get better from it."

Q: At linebacker it seems like you have Jordon Dizon and Brad Jones who are fairly entrenched and no one knows what might happen with Michael Sipili right now. So who are the other

linebackers you are seeing as candidates for playing time?

A: "Right now, R.J. (Brown) is going to compete for the middle linebacker spot. We moved Nate Vaionmunga down to the weakside linebacker spot. Jeff Smart will be in there. Tyler Ahles is a freshman and has a long way to go before he is ready. Marcus Burton is definitely there. We're very thin there. We really are. That's just kind of how it's played out over the last couple years. We moved Joe Sanders over to offense. We moved Maurice Cantrell over to offense. So through that attrition we're kind of thin."

Q: You say R.J. is competing at the middle linebacker spot, but with Sipili suspended, who is he really competing against?

A: "He's competing with Mike. I want those guys competing. We're basically treating Mike right now like he is here until we figure out otherwise. And that decision will be made pretty soon. He's got to take care of his issues and once that is determined, we'll know where we're at. ...We expect that to happen before the first game." (Sipili's first court date is Thursday).

Q: Last year you gave up a high completion percentage. Have you fixed that problem or are you on the way to fixing it?

A: "It is certainly a priority in this camp to get better in our pass defense. Is it fixed? We're working to get better. I wouldn't say we've ever arrived because we couldn't pinpoint one thing or another that was affecting us. We're definitely working to get better, and I think we are. Once again that comes from a familiarity standpoint, being in the system for a year, that I think we'll be better."

Q: How do you see the competition shaping up at the cornerback spot opposite of Terrence Wheatley?

A: "Ben Burney, Cha'pelle Brown, Jalil Brown and Jimmy Smith. Those guys are all competing. And we expect all those guys to have a role on this defense in one way or another. Now who will be that definite guy come Colorado State? Those guys will compete for that spot."

Q: Do you expect to do a better job as a defense when it comes to creating turnovers this year? And how will you do that?

A: "Definitely. We're putting an emphasis on it. Coach (Hawkins) has made a big emphasis on stripping the ball. Game time will determine whether we get those or not. I think the way guys are playing and understanding and knowing offenses and knowing how our defense relates to the offense, I think we'll be able to create more opportunities for us to get turnovers."



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THE DENVER POST

cu football

Bufs' Williams catching on

Unheralded junior has two touchdown receptions in Sunday scrimmage

By Tom Kensler
Denver Post Staff Writer

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Boulder - It sounded mean, but it wasn't meant to be.

"He's made more plays the last two days than he did all last year," Colorado offensive coordinator Mark Helfrich said after watching junior wide receiver Patrick Williams catch two touchdown passes during the Buffs' first scrimmage of fall camp Sunday.

For Williams, it was affirmation of all the hard work he has put in. The 6-foot-2, 200-pounder from Texas might have caught more spirals during the summer from quarterbacks or the Jugs throwing machine than anyone on the team.

"Every day it was something like 40 balls high, 40 balls low, 40 to the left, 40 to the right," Williams said Monday after nabbing everything in sight during the two-hour morning session.

A former high school quarterback, Williams has been trying to rid himself of "the dropsies" since he arrived in Boulder in 2004. Quarterbacks, by nature, have

soft hands and good ball skills. But Williams couldn't seem to hang on to the football. After he broke bones in both hands early in his freshman season, he took a medical redshirt season, no doubt delaying his development.

When Williams did catch a pass, he didn't seem to go anywhere with it. Although a track star at DeSoto High School with a best of 14.3 seconds in the 110-meter hurdles, Williams averaged just 8.6 yards on 28 catches in 2005 under Gary Barnett and 12.7 yards on 19 grabs last fall in Dan Hawkins' system.

"He was very raw," Hawkins said. "His body used to get out of whack (when catching the ball). I think he's learning how to manipulate his body a little bit better."

It's too early to say his performance Sunday was a "coming-out party," but signs are encouraging. On his two TD receptions from Cody Hawkins during the scrimmage, Williams shielded the defender and utilized his leaping ability. As a high jumper at DeSoto, Williams could clear his own height (6-2).

"That was just going up and attacking the ball," Williams said of his TD catches. "I just thought the ball was mine."

Freshman wideouts have turned heads in camp. But coaches say they haven't forgotten about Williams.

"I'm very excited about Pat's progress," receivers coach Eric Kiesau said. "He's the kind of big receiver you need in the Big 12."

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Dan Hawkins drew a loud cheer following the afternoon session when he canceled today's only scheduled practice. Instead, the team will conduct a

scrimmage with the first team, Hawkins said the 6-1, 295-pound freshman center from Hawaii "has a chance to be in the mix. He's not a 6-5 guy, but he's strong, smart."

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Post Poll - CU Football

How many wins will the Buffs tally this season under

short walkthrough and then head to a paintball center for what Hawkins called a "team unity thing. They've been working really hard....They need to get their legs back." ... Two freshman wideouts are banged up. Josh Smith, the star of Sunday's scrimmage, "tweaked his neck" Monday but is OK, Hawkins said. Markques Simas injured a shoulder in the scrimmage. X-rays were negative, but Simas will be examined by a doctor as a precaution, Hawkins said....A bruise on his throwing hand gave quarterback Nick Nelson no problems Monday. ... One of the first of the newly invited walk-ons to contribute could be Tyler Cope as a kickoff specialist. Cope connected on 6-of-8 field goals in 2006 at Portland (Ore.) Jesuit High School. "He can bang. We were really happy to get him," Hawkins said. ... After reviewing film of Kai Maiava's performance in the

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CU lineman's charge is off the charts

Freshman Maiava emerging as rock for the Buffaloes

By B.G. Brooks, Rocky Mountain News
August 14, 2007

BOULDER - Until shortly before college football's national signing day in February, Kai Maiava hardly was chin-deep in Division I scholarship offers.

Raise two fingers: one for New Mexico State, the other for Idaho.

But about a week before signing day, Maiava was able to hoist a third finger. The University of Colorado's pursuit of a more highly rated offensive lineman hit a dead end, sending the Buffaloes to their fallback list and in the direction of

Maiava.

By chance, Maiava received the Buffs' last offer and became their final commitment. He came to Boulder for the first time in mid-April to see CU's spring game, and by then, it was way too late for signer's remorse, not that he experienced any.

Odd how recruiting shakes out. Rated a two-star prospect by most services, Maiava currently is running at right guard with CU's No. 1 offense as position coach Jeff Grimes continues to sift through his flock of newcomers and fashion a cohesive unit.

Maiava's emergence has surprised everyone. Even he admits his rapid ascent wasn't completely expected: "It's surprised me a little bit, but my dad was always hyping me up, saying I had to come over here and try to start."

That's probably because

Maiava's father, Scott Mahoney, earned three letters as a CU offensive lineman from 1969 to 1971.



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But that family tie didn't bind Maiava to Boulder; he chose CU because he wanted to play the best competition, which he'll find weekly in the Big 12 Conference.

Physically, the sturdy Samoan with shoulder-length hair is not a prototypical offensive lineman. Generously listed as 6-foot-1 but every bit of 295 pounds, his lack of stature might play to his advantage, as do hand speed, footwork and a toughness honed in island boxing rings.

After losing his first bout as a junior heavyweight, he reeled off six consecutive victories and won Hawaii's 2004 Junior Olympic Championship. The memory of his lone loss isn't as sharp as one left by battling one of two older brothers, Ilima, a 6-3, 230-pound U.S. Coast Guardsman who "kicked my (butt)" and remains "the biggest guy I ever fought."

His close-knit family is littered with real-life action figures. Another older brother, Kaluka, is a junior linebacker at Southern California. An uncle is actor-wrestler Dwayne Johnson, aka "The Rock," whom Maiava met at a family reunion three years ago ("It's pretty cool knowing he's part of my family."). And one grandfather was "Prince" Neff

Maiava, a wrestling icon about five decades ago.

Little wonder Kai, short for Kealaka'i, wound up in a ring of some sort, and it has benefited him.

"Boxing gave me good hands and feet, and I like to be physical and bang heads," he said. "I had a lot of people who doubted me before, saying I was too small to play D-I. . . . I'm just trying to come out here and prove everybody wrong."

Don't count Grimes among the doubters.

"He's tough and competitive, and that gives him a chance," Grimes said. "If a freshman come in and doesn't have that, he's going to be intimidated by the older guys. But he'll back down from nobody - and I love that, so he gets my attention right away. He's the classic kid who does well because it means something to him."

Junior defensive tackle George Hypolite sees Maiava as a no-excuse player - "the mark of a guy who's going to be great," Hypolite said, adding Maiava's grasp of the system is complemented by the timing of his pass-blocking "punch."

"He probably has the best hands, but maybe not the best punch (of the offensive linemen)," Hypolite said. "But he's very good at timing his punch. If you're an O-lineman and can time your punch and stay on balance, there's not too many guys who can pass rush you."

A high school guard who called all of his line's checks, Maiava also benefited from an offense that "threw the ball 80 percent of the time," Grimes said, noting some other incoming freshmen, including five-star recruit Ryan Miller, arrived needing work in pass protection. Conversely,

Maiava's run blocking needs work.

Miller's pass protection "improves daily," said Grimes, who could have his top seven or eight linemen identified by week's end. Among that group will be a tackle who could play guard, with the next best player a guard also capable of playing center.

Maiava is playing both spots - guard with the first unit, center with the second. If he winds up No. 1 at either, he joins a short list (eight all time) of CU true freshmen to start in the offensive line.

Not bad for the last guy chosen.

QUARTERBACK WATCH: Despite bruising his throwing hand Sunday, junior college

transfer Nick Nelson practiced Monday. Offensive coordinator/quarterbacks coach Mark Helfrich said Nelson's right hand was swollen "and bothering him a little, but he keeps playing."

Redshirt freshman Cody Hawkins maintains an edge in their

duel. Identifying the starter - at least to the team - could come after Saturday's scrimmage (11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., Folsom Field), Helfrich said.

Also, coach Dan Hawkins downplays depth charts, preferring to call them "contributor's charts."

Preseason camp's initial "contributor's chart" won't be released until Saturday's scrimmage is reviewed by coaches.

ETC.: Conditioning remains freshman offensive tackle **Sione Tau's** top hurdle. He reported about 15 pounds above his desired playing weight (320). . . . Freshman receivers **Josh Smit** (neck) and **Markques Simas** (shoulder) joined tight end **Riar Geer** (ankle) pulling sand-moving duty. All their injuries are considered minor. . . . Coach **Dan Hawkins** addressed his players about athletes not missing playing time. His prime examples: **Cal Ripken Jr.** (baseball) and **Walter Payton** (football). . . . Hawkins is giving the team most of today off. A walk-through and light lifting are scheduled this morning, with a paintball/team bonding excursion scheduled in the afternoon.

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No worries

Bufs confident pass defense will be improved

By Patrick Ridgell
The Daily Times-Call

BOULDER — What, Terrence Wheatley worry? Naaahhh.

Colorado's fifth-year senior cornerback enters his final season in Boulder saying he hasn't a concern about what many fret over today: CU's pass defense, which struggled in 2006.

Wheatley is the leader of a group whose main characters thus far at camp include fellow corners Ben Burney and Cha'pelle Brown, plus safeties Ryan Walters, Lionel Harris and D.J. Dykes. That's about the same cast that allowed a 66.9 completion percentage a year ago. But Wheatley said there's no cause for alarm.

"This is the one time I'm not really stressing over the secondary. I'm not really worried about it," he said. "There were times in the past I was worried about it because of who we had back there and because of other things. But this year, I'm not worried about it at all. We have enough leadership and we know enough back there now where I'm not stressed about it. If Ryan says he's going to be there, I know Ryan is going to be there."

CU has had a spring and summer to digest what went wrong last year. And after a summer to consider solutions, no change in philosophy appears coming. Coach Dan Hawkins said the pass defense is one of about 37 things that needs fixing from last year. So defensive coordinator Ron Collins said the Bufs still want to stop the run first and ask questions later.

"When you hear coach Hawk speak, he says great teams run the ball and they stop the run," Collins said. "So this is a philosophy that's espoused by the whole program."

Last year's problems, they maintain, stemmed from confusion. As Wheatley and Burney have said, there were times in 2006 when one half the defense played man coverage and the other was in zone.

"It's almost comical when you look at it on film; you go, 'Did we just invent a new coverage, or do we not know what we're doing?'" Wheatley said.

"It was like that for the first six games. We were just out there, and we didn't know anything. We didn't know when to check off of something. You didn't know the base call to what's being run. There were times where we'd get a call in from the sideline and it would be a hand signal, and we'd be, 'What does that signal mean?' You'd forget the signal."

The best example came in the loss to Colorado State. CU had the Rams in a third-and-8 with 2 minutes, 31 seconds to go. CSU quarterback Caleb Hanie threw a 32-yard completion down the sideline at Invesco Field over Wheatley to receiver Johnnie Walker. Then CSU ran out the clock in its 14-10 win.

That play made Hanie 20-for-23 and marked Walker's 10th catch. And on the play, according to Burney on Monday



Colorado defensive back Ben Burney, right, fights through a block by teammate Sione Tau during a scrimmage at Folsom Field in Boulder on Sunday. Burney is a key member of a secondary looking to improve.

Times-Call / Lewis Geyer

morning, half of CU's secondary was in man, the other in zone.

"Now we know the D so much better that we have a chance to communicate better," Burney said.

Burney — whose father, Jacob, coaches the Denver Broncos' defensive line — is starting opposite Wheatley so far in camp. Opponents aren't expected in 2007 to test Wheatley, whose nine interceptions tie him for 12th in program history. Burney sees opportunity ahead.

"That means I have a chance to have a very good season," he said. "I have to get out there and make my plays, because I know they're going to come after me."

While questions regarding the pass rush remain and the secondary's speed will be tested most weekends in 2007, CU plans to improve its pass defense on better knowledge. The Buffs don't expect confusion to return.

"We know the scheme much better now, and we can do a lot of different things," Burney said. "We can let our best players do what they can do."

CU was 11th in the Big 12 and 95th nationally in 2006 in pass efficiency defense, allowing opposing quarterbacks to post a 138.42 rating. The Buffs were 10th and 94th in passing yards allowed, at 228.5 per game.

"I think we will get better in that category because we're going to get better overall," Collins said. "Our guys understand the system; we've been in it a year. We're going to be a better team."

Collins said improving the coverage is a top priority in camp, but he added that third-down efficiency has to get better, too. Problems defending the pass especially reared themselves on third downs. Opponents converted 47.8 percent of the time, which was worst in the Big 12 and 113th in the nation. There are 119 Division I programs.

"It just seemed like we couldn't get the continuity we needed," Collins said. "We'd get teams in third downs, and we wouldn't be efficient in those downs. This year, what we're trying to do is teach our players how the defense relates to what the offense is trying to do to us. I think they're doing a much better job of trying to learn that."

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