



Kicker set to re-launch CU career

Broomfield product Eberhart gets his chance after waiting behind Crosby

By Ryan Thorburn
Friday, August 17, 2007

It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that Mason Crosby left some pretty big cleats to fill at Colorado this season.

But the coaching staff is confident that having a future aerospace engineer stepping into the team's place-kicking duties will make the transition a smooth one.

After patiently waiting his turn behind Crosby for the past four seasons, fifth-year senior Kevin Eberhart will finally be in the spotlight when the Buffs open the 2007 season against Colorado State on Sept. 1 at Invesco Field.

"I'm just glad that I stuck it out and have the opportunity to be here now. I'm excited about it," Eberhart said. "It's a great feeling to know you're going to have an opportunity to help the team and go do what you like to do."

Crosby is now working for the Green Bay Packers. The two-time All-American, who calmly drilled a 52-yard field goal during an exhibition game earlier this month, has stayed in contact with Eberhart as much as he can since training camp opened.

So what lesson from Crosby did CU's new 3-point specialist take to heart?

"Mason was really good about just showing up every day and taking care of business," Eberhart said. "He was very technique-oriented."

During Thursday night's practice, Eberhart took care of his duties. He demonstrated the consistency the coaches are looking for by making all four field goals — two from 34 yards and two from 43 yards — during a live special teams test.

"There's an increased level of focus for me actually having the opportunity to be out there and kick and help the team this year," Eberhart said. "In the past I've tried, but it's a little bit difficult when you're waiting in the wings. ...

"I was kicking nice and easy today. I felt like today I'm finally starting to put my technique together — nice and smooth and be consistent. That's really what it's going to take this year."

Eberhart would like to handle kickoffs as well, but the coaching staff has opened up the competition for the job as the team adjusts to the NCAA rule change that will move kickoffs back to the 30-yard line

this season. Wide receiver Scotty McKnight is the new holder this season.

"I expect Kevin to have a really good year," CU special teams coach Kent Riddle said. "He's got a good leg, he really does. He's accurate. It's just a matter of getting him out there and getting him comfortable, which he's doing a very good job with."

Eberhart, a product of Broomfield High School, finished his undergraduate degree in aerospace engineering (bioastronautics) last semester and is currently working on a master's degree. He is keeping his professional options open — including NFL and NASA dreams — while focusing on scoring some big points for the Buffs.

"He's a great guy. He works his tail off academically and in football," Riddle said. "I'm sure it's nice to get out of the library for a little bit and get out here and do something he loves doing."

For a lot of the players memorizing their offensive and defensive assignments during August two-a-days can be stressful. For this place-kicker the pressure of a practice — despite following in Crosby's footsteps — is often a release.

"If you can go into the classroom and perform and perform on tests in a stressful environment, it helps you here," Eberhart said.



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CU's Brown has come long way

Former walk-on is now a team captain and has a good chance to start at middle linebacker

By Ryan Thorburn
Friday, August 17, 2007

From walk-on to the cover of the media guide.

It has been quite a year for R.J. Brown, who was selected to be one of the captains on Colorado's football team this season. He was also rewarded for his performance and leadership on special teams in 2006 with a scholarship.

Now there is a good chance that the junior will be the Buffs' starting middle linebacker on Sept. 1 in the opener against Colorado State at Invesco Field.

Talented sophomore Michael Sipili is practicing but has been suspended indefinitely after being arrested on Aug. 1 for participating in a June street brawl. His preliminary court appearance is today.

"I could definitely use another week of camp," Brown said as two-a-days resumed on Wednesday. "But I feel like I'm absolutely going to be ready come September 1st."

Brown was also a captain at Honolulu's Punahou High School, which played Jordon Dizon's (Waimea) team on the prep gridiron. The two former rivals became close friends after arriving on CU's campus in 2004.

Brown said being around the Buffs' defensive captain and a preseason All-Big 12 selection has helped raise his game to a level worthy of cracking the starting lineup. Dizon is flattered but said he might not be quite the player he is without the extra motivation Brown provides in practice.

"Having R.J. out there is awesome," Dizon said. "Because when he works hard, I work hard. I work hard, he works hard. We just feed off of each other and we just keep going and going."

"And it's hard to get tired next to someone like R.J. Because if he's not tired, there's no way I can be tired."

Brown's fingerprints are still going to be all over the special teams — likely on kickoff return, punt return, kickoff coverage and punt coverage. But the coaching staff is also confident enough in his skills at a linebacker to give him an opportunity to be in the spotlight next to Dizon.

"It's to his credit. He has earned everything he has done right now," CU linebackers coach Brian Cabral said. "Even as captain, he has out-worked everybody. He just made a name for himself on special teams last year. And even as a backup you could tell he was going to be on the rise. ..."

"He's got an opportunity right now to step in and step up. And so far he has. Everything we've asked and everything we expect of him he's doing."

After attending the Big 12 media days in San Antonio with coach Dan Hawkins, Brown was still pinching himself about his new status in the program.

"I love the guy, I really do," Hawkins said. "He asked me ... 'Why did you give me a scholarship?' I said, 'Because you're a tough guy, you're a hard worker, you're a good leader, you do things right, you're the kind of guy we want in the program. And you want to reward that.'"

"He's one of those guys who in a good system, which I think we have, can compensate sometimes for some physical things by some mental and intangible things."

Brown is not blessed athletically quite as much as Dizon. But it's getting harder and harder to notice in practice.

"He's up to par with me now," Dizon said when asked if Brown was ready to start. "His problem when he got here was confidence. He struggled with that coming here as a walk-on and seeing all these scholarship players who are a lot faster and quicker. But the difference with him is he's blue collar. He's a hard worker, man. Where he is right now, he earned every inch of it because he worked his butt off. ...

"Before he was more of a stop his feet and then hit a guy. Now he's just running through guys and he's one of the hardest hitters on the team. He brings it every time."

Brown's father works for Marriott and growing up R.J. (short for Robert Joseph) lived in Saudi Arabia, Vietnam and Australia before finishing high school in Hawaii.

"I've lived in a bunch of places. Lot of good experiences, lot of bad," Brown said. "I think overall it shaped me for the better and made me able to adapt to situations better and be able to jump in.

"Like I might have to now."



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CU offense catching up to 'D'

By Ryan Thorburn

Friday, August 17, 2007

For a split second it looked like a coaching nightmare was about to unfold.

Colorado quarterback Cody Hawkins, the likely starter, was fair game while running in the open field as the blur that was Jordon Dizon prepared to plant him about 6 feet deep.

But the redshirt freshman put a shifty and athletic move on the preseason All-Big 12 linebacker and kept on running for a first down to start off the Buffs' final 11-on-11 period of Thursday night's practice.

"He didn't get that from me," quipped CU head coach Dan Hawkins, who is also Cody's father.

The fun didn't stop there for an offense that had been struggling to solve the defense since camp opened. Tailback Demetrius Sumler broke through the line of scrimmage untouched for a long run on the next snap, and wide receiver Cody Crawford made a difficult catch in traffic on the snap after that to cap the session.

"I think offense has kind of caught up with defense a little bit last night and today," Dan Hawkins said.

That's a positive sign for the Buffs after finishing the 2006 season ranked 102nd overall on the sexy side of the ball.

Redshirt decisions

The coaching staff is trying to decide which true freshmen are ready to play — as in play a lot — and which would probably benefit from a redshirt season.

"I always think it's just such a crime to play a guy and not play him enough," Dan Hawkins said.

Three freshmen wide receivers — Markques Simas, Josh Smith and Kendrick Celestine — all have a chance to play right away. Tailback Brian Lockridge could also figure in the Buffs' immediate plans. And five-star recruit Ryan Miller is expected to be a part of the offensive line, probably at guard initially, and could be joined by one or two other classmates.

Defensive linemen Eugene Goree and Conrad Obi should be in the rotation. Same story for Anthony Perkins and Anthony Wright in the secondary.

"We've got to force a couple of those guys into action and get them going," Dan Hawkins said when asked about using freshmen on the offensive and defensive lines, where experienced depth is an issue. "The great thing is I think physically a lot of them are pretty close. It's just a mental thing of getting them going and getting them to do the right things."

Sipili update

Michael Sipili practiced on Thursday after making a preliminary court appearance. He was arrested on Aug. 1 for his part in a June street fight.

Dan Hawkins said the sophomore linebacker will probably not play in the Sept. 1 opener against Colorado State.

"If there's nothing resolved that would be correct," the coach said.

Scrimmage plan

The Buffs will scrimmage on

Saturday at Folsom Field and the coaching staff would like to get as many as 115 plays run, including 45-50 for both the first- and second-team units.

"We need to play football," Dan Hawkins said. "We need to up those reps. And then the following scrimmage we will up them again."

CU's final preseason scrimmage will be on Aug. 24.

Notable

Defensive coordinator Ron Collins was screaming throughout practice but could only hold his breath after Dizon and safety Ryan Walters were shaken up after colliding with one another. Both key starters took a minute to get up but quickly returned to practice at full speed. ... Sophomore middle linebacker Jake Duren had the defensive highlight, intercepting a Cody Hawkins' pass in the red zone. ... Defensive tackle Brandon Nicolas had the best hit of the day, leveling Perkins during a live punt drill.



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cu football

CU receiver hopes to use family ties

Josh Smith's nephew top back in U.S.

By Natalie Meisler
Denver Post Staff Writer

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Boulder - Without playing a down in what promises to be an exceptional college career, Colorado deep threat wide receiver Josh Smith is already known as "J-Fly" around his teammates.

A year from now, he hopes he can be called "uncle" by a teammate.

Smith's nephew, Darrell Scott, is the consensus top running back prospect in the nation. He rushed for 3,194 yards and 45 touchdowns teaming with Smith at Moorpark (Calif.) High School last season. Scott is transferring to another high school this fall, and CU is on his list of prospective suitors. So is nearly every power in the country.

"We're definitely in his pack," Smith said. "He has so many choices."

Scott is the son of Smith's older sister, Alexis Scott. The Buffs freshman moved from Florida to California for his high school career to live with his sister and nephew.

"We're more like brothers because we're the same age," Smith said. "We love each other a lot. I'd love to have him out here and play at CU with me. But I respect the decision he makes. It would do a lot for the family for him to be here."

Smith, who caught a 54-yard TD pass in Sunday's scrimmage, hopes to do more of the same Saturday when the Buffs scrimmage at Folsom Field.

Coach Dan Hawkins said Thursday he is looking at the scrimmage in part to narrow down the freshman class between those who will play and those who will take redshirt status.

Three receivers, several offensive and defensive linemen and two defensive backs likely will avoid redshirt years.

Of course, Smith was a given to play immediately when he signed his letter of intent. If the 6-foot-1, 185-pound receiver runs as well as he did last week, it will be hard to keep him out of the starting lineup.

"I've been working in the starting lineup against the ones and the twos. There's so much talent out there. It's always getting me better," Smith said. "Those guys recognize I have a lot of good talent as well, and it helps them get better as well because of the speed I bring out on the field."

He earned a rebuke from Hawkins for showboating after his long TD pass last week and promises he learned his lesson.

Last week, the first and second units each had about 35 plays. Hawkins wants the top two units to see 45

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to 50 plays this week.

Footnotes

Linebacker Michael Sipili made a court appearance Thursday on assault charges stemming from a June incident and had another court date set for the first week of September, after the opener. Hawkins said his indefinite suspension is unchanged and if the case isn't resolved before the Sept. 1 opener, Sipili won't play. ... Quarterback Cody Hawkins showed some deft moves in a goal-line drill. Said Coach Hawkins: "He didn't get that from me." ... The defensive line worked on the tackling sled after the afternoon practice. Hawkins said he thought line coach Romeo Bandison wanted to see more "oompah" from his players.

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D-line holds high hopes

Barrett, Lucas expect Buffs' front to be one of the nation's best

*By Patrick Ridgell
The Daily Times-Call*

BOULDER — Maybe Alonzo Barrett and Maurice Lucas are just talking.

Then again, maybe not.

Barrett and Lucas are defensive ends at Colorado who play a position that graduation hit hard following 2006. Gone are Abe Wright and Walter Boye-Doe, last year's starting defensive ends.

Wright led CU and the Big 12 with 11 1/2 sacks in 2006. Barrett and Lucas played 311 snaps in 2006 and recorded one sack between them.

CU returns two experienced tackles in George Hypolite and Brandon Nicholas, but Barrett and Lucas are asked to replace the ends, and behind them is no one who's played a down of Division I football.

Yet Barrett and Lucas say they expect CU's defensive line to not only improve but also be one of the nation's best. It might be just hyperbole, but they sound convinced, and their reasoning is notable for anyone eager to see the indoor practice bubble grace campus.

"I believe our starting four; I'd put them against any other line in the country," Barrett said.

Really?

"Absolutely. Hands down," Lucas said.

Why?

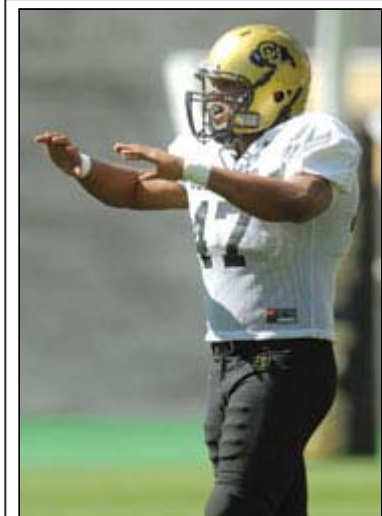
"We definitely have the talent, and we definitely have the conditioning for it right now," Lucas said. "There's no doubt in my mind." Talent and conditioning aren't what they base their beliefs on, though.

"We're tougher than anybody," Barrett said. "No doubt. After the offseason we've been through, I don't think anybody in the country is tougher than us. I know nobody in the country is tougher than us."

Toughness is the camp's buzzword. To determine where the defensive line found its machismo, you have to go back to last winter, when its members were running sprints on snow-swept practice fields, Barrett and Lucas say.

"People have indoor facilities and everything, and we're out here running 300-yard shuttles in blizzards and still making our times," Barrett said. "I don't think any other team in the country did that."

Said Lucas: "Some teams have the luxury of practicing in an indoor facility. When you're in a game, you're not going to have that luxury. ... So you know what? We're better prepared that way."



With the losses of Abraham Wright and Walter Boye-Doe, senior Alonzo Barrett, above, and junior Maurice Lucas step in this season as CU's starting defensive ends.

Times-Call/Lewis Geyer

Coaches might grin widely upon hearing players claim CU's lack of an indoor facility toughens them up. (CU officials say the bubble will be ready in October.)

But coaches share their hopes for the 2007 defensive line with less bravado. Wright enabled CU to pressure opponents without relying on blitzes. That luxury is gone, and whether the defensive line can get to the quarterback without help is unknown.

"We'll see how that goes," head coach Dan Hawkins said. "Abe made it very comfortable for a defensive coordinator. Anytime you can rush four and still get pressure, that's awesome. So we'll have to see how that transpires.

"In this day and age, it's funny. Even at Boise, we had the same thing. It's hard to have a four-man rush and still get pressure, because you're getting really big athletic offensive linemen who do a nice job of shutting you down."

One way, Hypolite said, is for several Buffs to provide the pressure. So instead of one guy making a dozen sacks, a few contribute six apiece. Hypolite calls it a "committee pass rush."

Upon hearing Hypolite's idea, defensive line coach Romeo Bandison responded with, "We'll see about that."

But Hypolite knows how important it is for CU to generate a pass rush.

"It's not quite where we want it to be. Maybe it's because we're perfectionists on the D-line," he said.

"To anchor our defense, we have to get to the quarterback so the DBs don't have to cover for six seconds. We had to do a lot of that last year, and it's pretty hard to cover a guy for six seconds."

And finally, will the line live up to what Barrett and Lucas say it can? That, too, is to be determined.

"We have to get those guys ready to roll," Bandison said. "They work hard, and they're very good, but there's still something to say for experience, no matter how talented you are."

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