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cu football

Cody wins quarterback job

Freshman receiver Smith, star of camp, hospitalized with bruised kidney

By Tom Kensler
Denver Post Staff Writer

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Boulder - Just Cody Hawkins' luck. Shortly after being named Colorado's starting quarterback, Hawkins learned that CU likely will be without its most explosive wide receiver for the Sept. 1 opener against Colorado State.

Josh Smith, a true freshman and one of the stars of fall camp, was hospitalized for observation Saturday evening after suffering a bruised kidney in the morning scrimmage.

CU trainer Miguel Rueda said it is doubtful Smith will be cleared to play in the opener. He is listed as out indefinitely.

"Losing J-Fly, that's going to be big, obviously," Hawkins said. "He brings a lot of energy, and a lot of playmaking ability."

A 5-foot-11, 190-pound redshirt freshman, Hawkins was told by coaches during a team meeting Saturday evening that he won the starting job. Offensive

coordinator Mark Helfrich said Hawkins performed more consistently in practices and scrimmages than Nick Nelson, a junior-college transfer.

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"Nick is a great kid," Helfrich said, "and he took it probably exactly how a competitive guy would take it - he's still going to compete. He's obviously disappointed. But we're going to need that guy."

"Right now, Cody has just been practicing a little bit better. Nick took it well, and we wouldn't have to limit things a great deal if he's in the game."

The announcement was made public Sunday morning following a 90-minute practice.

"I'm really excited that I get a chance to lead the Buffaloes," Hawkins said. "But it's also a bummer to see a friend like Nick be disappointed."

It is believed Hawkins will be the first Division I-A starting quarterback to be the son of the head coach since Rodney Bryant played for Ohio University coach Cleve Bryant in 1989 and 1990.

CU coach Dan Hawkins said his only concern was about finding a quarterback who can move the team

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and not about family ties.

"(Cody) is a good kid and a good player, and I like all that stuff about him," Dan Hawkins said. "But I'm not out here going: 'Hey, there's my boy. Look at my boy make plays.'

"I was jacked up when Nick made some plays. I want to score some points and win some games. I don't care what (the quarterback's) last name is. If he's productive and he's good, that's great. I don't look at it much different than that."

Nelson said he had trouble keeping his head up Saturday evening but felt better about the situation after practicing Sunday.

"It's a team sport," Nelson said. "And I'm going to keep pushing him and trying to get better. It's the Big 12. There's going to be a lot of banging going on. I think I'll get a shot eventually. It's a long season."

No formal announcement was made to the team. The two practices Sunday appeared to be business as usual.

"I think it helps the team feel a lot more comfortable," Cody Hawkins said. "But as far as me, I've always prepared like I was the starter."

He will miss Smith's sprinter speed on the outside. Helfrich said Smith, a 6-foot, 180-pounder from Moorpark, Calif., has been no worse than the team's second-best receiver during fall camp and some days he topped the list.

Team trainers aren't certain whether Smith bruised

the kidney when he fell after taking a hard hit following a reception or when he ran three-quarter speed into a retaining wall in the southwest corner of Folsom Field while looking back toward the quarterback on a fade route. Smith remained hospitalized Sunday night.

Footnotes

CU announced that junior inside linebacker Marcus Burton will miss the season because of academics. ... The biggest surprises on the newly released depth chart could be redshirt freshman Scotty McKnight being listed at No. 1 Z-receiver, and Idaho transfer Daniel Dykes earning co-starter status with senior Lionel Harris at strong safety. True freshmen are listed as the top backups at all five positions on the offensive line. That includes former Columbine star and Parade All-American Ryan Miller (6-7, 320) at right guard.

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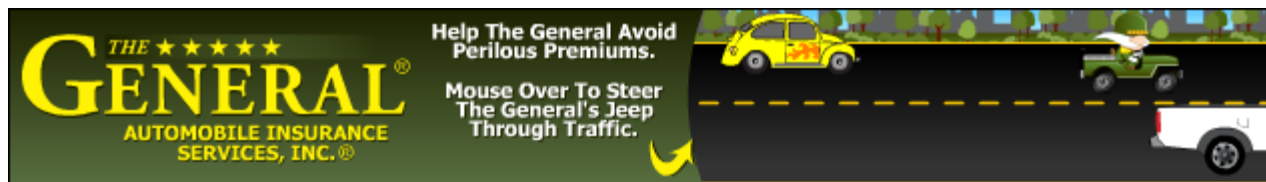
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cu football

CU's Brown exotically prepared for big stage

By Tom Kensler
Denver Post Staff Writer

Article Last Updated: 08/20/2007 12:31:50 AM MDT

Boulder - Colorado junior linebacker R.J. Brown isn't one to drop his jaw or feel the need to stomach a queasy case of the butterflies when he walks into a mega football stadium for the first time.

Nebraska's Memorial Stadium can feel intimidating, but Brown has experienced more heat. As a 9-year-old, he refused to let Saudi Arabian sandstorms ruin his day.

There's another big stadium down in Austin, Texas. But Brown ordered noodles on a busy street in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam - when he was 11. The son of an itinerant Marriott hotels executive, Brown has walked amid wonders of the world. How could anything else compare?

"If you're riding on the back of a camel and you see the sphinx on one side and the



Junior R.J. Brown has already made his mark on special teams, and will get a chance to do the same at linebacker. (Post / Karl Gehring)

pyramids are right there, a sea of red (at Nebraska) doesn't mean as much to you," Brown explained.

"It's still going to be a little overwhelming because it's a different atmosphere. But it doesn't quite throw you off as much."

Neither does a new challenge. A former walk-on who was voted special-teams captain for 2007 by his teammates, Brown has yet to play a down at linebacker during a game. Coaches are certain he

will adapt. He has all his life.

"For a kid that had everything, maybe growing up in other places, he was disadvantaged being a foreigner," linebackers coach Brian Cabral said. "R.J. is more mature than most guys. He does not take anything for granted."

Undersized for an inside linebacker at 6-feet-1 and 225 pounds, Brown moved atop the depth chart before fall camp when projected starter Michael Sipili, a 250-pound sophomore, was suspended indefinitely until legal issues are resolved regarding an off-campus fight in June.

Sipili was charged with second-degree assault and criminal mischief Aug. 1, leaving his availability for the season in question. He is practicing with the team but will not play in a game while suspended, coach Dan Hawkins said.

An opportunity appears to have opened for Brown, although not the way he would have liked.

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"You play football to get the most reps you can," Brown said. "If things go one way (with Sipili) and I get to start, I don't know there's a greater feeling in the world."

When Brown says he's still trying to get a feel for "this gridiron sport they call football," he isn't joking.

"If you would have asked me when I was 15 who the Super Bowl champion was, I wouldn't have had a clue, not a clue," he said.

That's before his father moved the family from Sydney, Australia, to work at a Marriott hotel in Honolulu before R.J. entered the ninth grade. Until then, Brown never had played organized football. Usually attending international schools, often taught by English citizens, Brown played soccer in Saudi Arabia and Vietnam and rugby in Australia.

"And it seemed like we could get baseball going everywhere I was," Brown said. "But that would be a 'league' of only three or four schools. Not a big deal."

Brown was excited to try out for the football team at Honolulu's Punahou School. Although he didn't know much about the sport, having played rugby gave him an appreciation for contact and effort.

"They put me on defense, where everything I did was pretty much instinct, not really understanding the concepts," Brown said. "I remember when my dad had to explain to me what an offensive guard was."

Brown became a two-year starter and an all-conference selection. But 200-pound defensive ends don't attract much recruiting interest.

He turned down a non-athletic scholarship offer to Division III Whittier (Calif.) College in 2004 to be an invited walk-on at Colorado on the advice of Jeff Cabral, an assistant on the Punahou staff and brother of CU's Brian.

Brown was put on scholarship by Hawkins before the 2006 season.

"I love the guy, I really do," Hawkins said last week. "When he asked me why I gave him a scholarship I told him: 'Because you're a tough guy, hard worker, a good leader. I wanted to reward that.'"

Senior linebacker Jordon Dizon also enjoys playing on special teams, although he is one of the team's top players. Dizon, a native Hawaiian who played against Brown in high school, said special-teams coach Kent Riddle frequently shows a highlight reel of Brown's kamikaze-like heroics during meetings.

"He hasn't played a snap at linebacker, but he was named a captain of the team," said Dizon, who captains the defense. "That's self-explanatory. The whole team respects him."

Coaches say they have no concerns about Brown's ability to handle the starting job at inside linebacker in Sipili's absence.

"Certain guys like R.J. have it the moment they step on the football field," Riddle said. "That's what we're looking for, guys that have it."

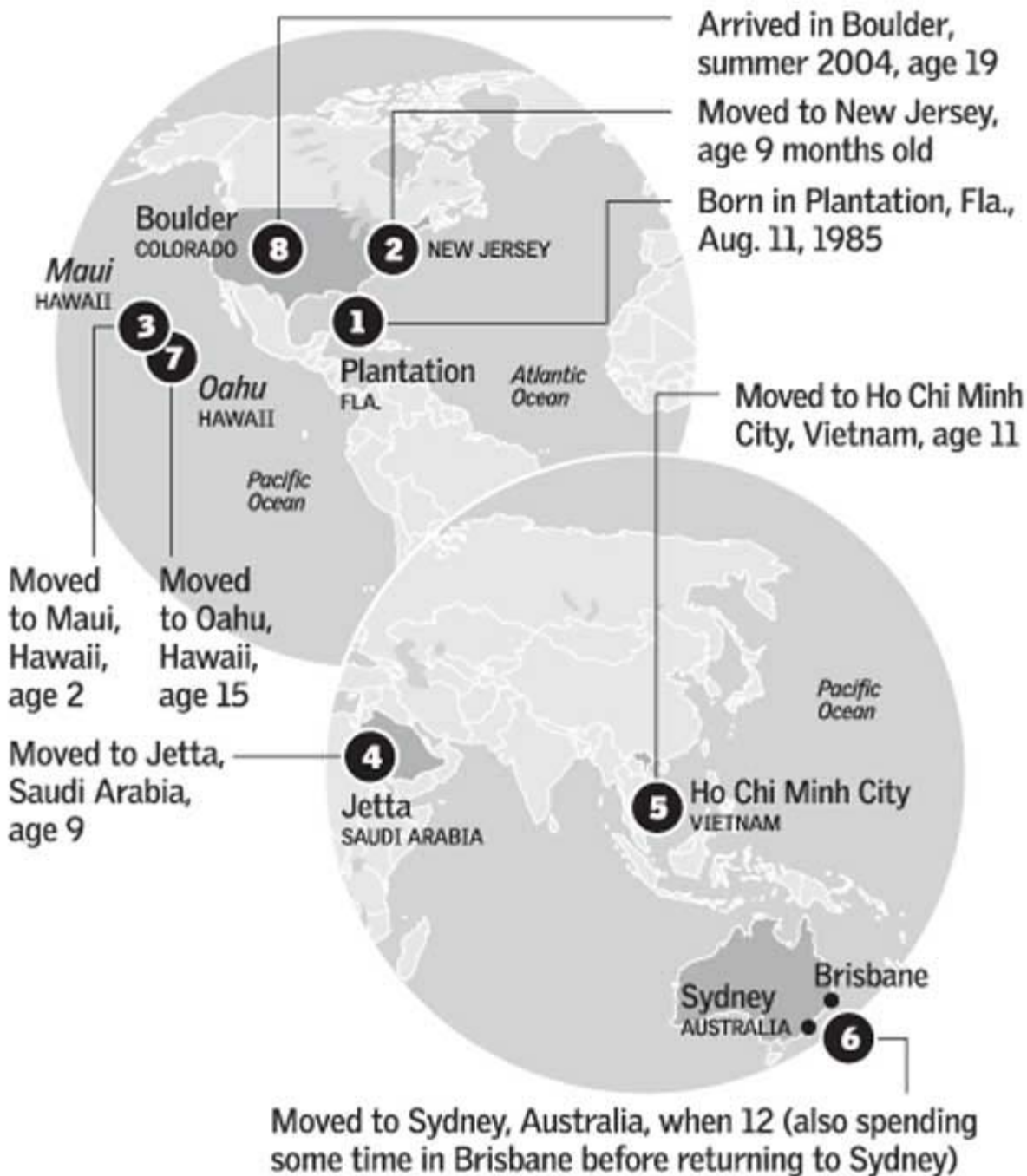
Carrying a tattered passport is optional.

Staff writer Tom Kensler can be reached at 303-954-1280 or tkensler@denverpost.com.



CU football's globe-trotter

Before landing in Boulder to play football for University of Colorado, R.J. Brown did his share of globe-trotting as a child, whose father was in the hotel business.



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Bufs keeping it all in the family

Cody Hawkins, picked as starter, built in father's mode

By B.G. Brooks, Rocky Mountain News
August 19, 2007

BOULDER — Like a penguin in a party hat, Cody Hawkins always has been pretty hard to miss, or to tune out.

It is late October 2006, and with a 20-15 loss the previous day at Kansas, the University of Colorado football team has slumped to 1-8. In what is supposed to be a light Sunday follow-up practice, coach Dan Hawkins has turned hard, ordering his players into Folsom Field to run steps.

When a "come to 'Hawk' " team meeting, followed by the grueling conditioning work, is complete, Cody Hawkins synopsisizes the afternoon as "pretty intense. It wasn't calling anybody out or 'dog cussing' anybody, it was just talking about the level we need to get to.

"And we're not getting that right now. We're going to change things up, and guys are going to work hard, and if people don't want to do it the coaches' way and the Buffaloes' way, then they can get the heck out."

As a true freshman, Cody Hawkins was anything but. He arrived in Boulder football-smart and locker room-savvy; vocal beyond his years, maybe even a wee bit mouthy at times; ready to shred the envelope instead of push it.

Older teammates might have hit the double-take button when first encountering him, but then, what did they expect, junior defensive tackle George Hypolite said.

"Look at the mold he comes from. . . . I think that would be the easiest way to say it," Hypolite said. "He's a coach's son, and most coach's sons are on the ball. He's no exception."

Added senior tight end Joe Sanders: "When he came in, he was immediately outgoing. He let everybody know he was here."

But did any of the older players size him up — which, at 5-foot-11 and 195 pounds didn't take long — and ask, "Who is this guy?"

"Not really," Sanders said. "On a team with 100-plus kids from all different parts of the country, you get all different kinds of people. That's one thing you learn on a football team: Not too many people are the same.

"He was kind of out there, and that's a good thing to see in a quarterback."

And now Cody Hawkins *really* is out there. On Sunday, to the surprise of not many, he was named the Buffs' starting quarterback. Those who have followed his football career will not be surprised.

Tim Tebow, Hawkins' counterpart at the University of Florida, met the younger Hawkins at the EA Sports Elite 11 Quarterback Camp in summer 2005.

Friends almost from the camp's first post route, Tebow remembers Hawkins as "definitely the lively one, the comedian. He was making people around him laugh, getting guys in a good mood. He had the most personality of anybody in that camp.

"But, oh, yeah, there was a competitive side. He really wanted to win, always wanted to compete with everybody."

At the Elite 11 camp, Hawkins won two awards — Most Accurate and Best in Chalk Talks — according to Gregg Biggins, the national recruiting editor for Student Sports.com and one of the camp's administrators.

"Cody was also the most popular guy in the group," Biggins said. "He has such an engaging personality, everyone is always drawn to him. It's funny, the first workout, there was some question about his size, but after seeing him throw absolute darts all over the field, everyone quickly gained a lot of respect for him."

It was what coach Tim Brennan witnessed from Hawkins during his career at Bishop Kelly High School in Boise.

Brennan, about to begin his first season at West Mifflin High School outside Pittsburgh, said he and the quarterback knew Hawkins' size would

be seen as the biggest detriment in him succeeding in Division I-A.

"But we never talked about him not playing at that level, just because he believed he could," Brennan said. "There were hundreds of other people out there who were asking questions about him being able to play (Division I-A), but they had never seen him play and certainly had never coached him. We didn't have any question about it; we knew he could."

Don't sell him short

As for Hawkins' size, Brennan quickly dismissed that as a factor in the quarterback succeeding.

"If he can do the job that (CU's) coaching staff saw in naming him the starter, then they're going to play him no matter his size," Brennan said. "That's the only way he's going to start; it has nothing to do with him being 6-feet or whatever."

"There are a lot of 6-foot quarterbacks out there, and I'll tell you what, a whole bunch of them probably aren't as good as Cody Hawkins."

Hawkins has been good — better still, successful — as long as he has been playing.

His record as a starting quarterback from youth football through high school is 59-0, and if he reaches 60-0, he will have guided CU past rival Colorado State in his Division I-A debut, the Buffs' Sept. 1 opener at Invesco Field at Mile High (10 a.m. FSN Rocky Mountain).

In winning the starting job, Hawkins outdueled junior college transfer Nick Nelson during the first two weeks of August camp.

Offensive coordinator/quarterbacks coach Mark Helfrich pointed to Hawkins "making every play that's there . . . his overall consistency, his command of the offense."

"And then there's the difference-maker plays that you have to make the majority of the time to be on the greater side of good. Cody works toward that."

The Buffs in 2006 didn't make many plays, score many points (196; 16.3 a game) or win many games (two). Basically, they were punchless, sometimes clueless, offensively. By the ugly numbers, CU finished 107th in Division I-A in scoring, 116th in passing offense and 102nd in total offense.

Cody Hawkins believes the offense will improve dramatically, but Sunday morning, his thoughts were more on Nelson than numbers.

He said his being named No. 1 is "exciting" if not completely unexpected, but added, "Fortunately for me, things went my way. But it's a bummer to see Nick disappointed."

Nelson said he is "happy for Cody, but I'll continue to push him and make him better, make the team better."

Still counting on Nelson

Helfrich's philosophy is for the starter to get upward of 70 percent of the practice time with the No. 1 offense, with the backup getting ample work. Only twice during the past eight years has a CU quarterback started and finished an entire season without missing a game.

Nelson took the announcement of his backup status "just as you'd expect from a competitive guy," Helfrich said. "But we're going to need him, he knows that."

As for identifying a starter less than two weeks before the opener, Helfrich and Cody Hawkins believe the offense will benefit.

"I think it helps the team feel a lot more comfortable, but as far as me, I think I've always prepared like I was going to be the starter," Hawkins said. "It's just kind of nice now to move forward and get a little more reps. . . . The way I've been preparing and thinking, it's not going to be a big change for me."

During the run-up to announcing a No. 1 quarterback, Dan Hawkins indicated Helfrich's vote carried the most weight in settling on a starter. But Hawkins offered a clarification Sunday.

"We all sit down on everybody (in competition)," he said. "It becomes more of a group consensus that one guy is (the starter). If three guys don't like a guy and one guy does, he better be able to jump up on a table in a strong way to back that up. So it was more of a consensus from the offensive group and input from the defensive coaches as well."

When Cody Hawkins signed with CU, his father knew there was the possibility of this day arriving. But the decision, Dan Hawkins said, is comparable to that at every other position.

"It seems like it's official because it's on paper, but, hey, if Cody Hawkins doesn't move the club, if he doesn't score points. . . . He's a good kid, a good player, and I like all that stuff about him," Dan Hawkins said. "But I'm not out here going, 'There's my boy, hey, look at my boy make plays.' I was jacked up when Nick made plays. I just want to score some points and win some games. I don't care what the (quarterback's) last name is."

There's not a chance he'll forget it any time soon.

2005 Elite 11

- The 12 high school seniors invited to the EA Sports Elite 11 Quarterback Camp in summer 2005:

Quarterback Hometown College Status

Neil Caudle Hoover, Ala. Auburn Reserve

Pat Devlin Downingtown, Pa. Penn State Reserve

Zach Frazer Mechanicsburg, Pa. Connecticut Reserve

Josh Freeman Kansas City, Mo. Kansas State Starter

Cody Hawkins Boise Colorado Starter

Jake Locker Ferndale, Wash. Washington Starter

Mitch Mustain Springdale, Ark. Southern California Reserve

Kevin Riley Portland, Ore. California Reserve

Jevan Snead Stephenville, Texas *Mississippi Not playing

Matthew Stafford Dallas Georgia Starter

Tim Tebow Jacksonville, Fla. Florida Starter

Isiah Williams Chicago Illinois Starter

*Transferred from Texas and must sit out this season

Word on Hawkins

Teammates comment on the University of Colorado's latest starting quarterback:

- "He's not the biggest guy, he's not the strongest guy, he's definitely not the fastest guy. But he's definitely the smartest guy. That's the one thing about football; if you don't know what you're doing, you can't be on the field. He definitely knows what he's doing, and he does it at the right time."

Jordon Dizon, senior linebacker

- "Cody is a vocal guy. He's your biggest fan, always there to pick you up when you (mess) up. He knows what he's doing. . . . There's not many redshirt freshmen out there yelling, cheering up guys, telling them what to do, be here, be there. He had the confidence to do that (in 2006). And he was a freshman who wasn't even on the field."

Tyler Polumbus, senior offensive tackle

- "Cody is a very good game manager at quarterback. He doesn't make a lot of mistakes and knows what he's doing. He gets (the offense) in the right calls pretty efficiently. That's a very good thing for a quarterback, and we didn't always have that last year."

George Hypolite, junior defensive tackle

- "He's an outgoing kid. When he came in, he was immediately outgoing and let everybody know he was here. And that's a good thing to see in a quarterback. . . . (Coaches) did a good job of keeping it a true competition. Truthfully, I never knew who was really ahead. It was pretty neck and neck. They made their decision and went with Cody. I don't think anyone just absolutely knew."

Joe Sanders, senior tight end

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Bruised kidney lands receiver in hospital

Freshman Smith is out indefinitely; return unknown

By B.G. Brooks, Rocky Mountain News
August 20, 2007

BOULDER - The top newcomer at one of the University of Colorado football team's neediest positions is out indefinitely.

Freshman receiver Josh Smith - "J-Fly" to his teammates - suffered a bruised kidney Saturday during a scrimmage and is listed as "very unlikely" to play in the Sept. 1 opener against Colorado State (10 a.m., Invesco Field at Mile High).

Smith was hospitalized Saturday night for observation and remained there Sunday.

Coach Dan Hawkins said he could not offer a guess on a prognosis, but he added his "gut feeling" was Smith would be able to return at some point and avoid a redshirt season.

Offensive coordinator Mark Helfrich said the 6-foot, 180- pound Smith was "one of our top two receivers in camp."

Smith undoubtedly had worked himself into a starting role with his speed and acrobatic receptions during August drills.

Smith, of Moorpark, Calif., was among three highly touted freshman receivers signed in February. Kendrick Celestine is behind Scotty McKnight at the "z" position; Markques Simas is listed No. 4 at that spot.

In other personnel matters:

- Inside linebacker Marcus Burton is academically ineligible and will miss the season but will continue to practice. With projected sophomore starter Michael Sipili suspended indefinitely, two inexperienced sophomores and a true freshman are in backup roles at linebacker.
- Redshirt freshman Wes Palazzi, who missed almost the entire first week of camp because of academic obligations, emerged as the No. 1 left guard. True freshman Ryan Miller, CU's highest- profile 2006 recruit, is listed as the backup right guard on a second unit made up entirely of first-year players.
- No first-game backup is listed for defensive tackle George Hypolite.

The two players behind him, Chris Perri (three games) and Taj Kaynor (one), are suspended for the opener.

- Return specialists on Hawkins' first "contributor's chart" of camp are seniors Hugh Charles and Byron Ellis (kickoffs) and seniors Stephone Robinson and Chase McBride (punts).
- How young are the Buffaloes?

Of the 44 players listed as starters/backups on offense and defense, 22 are sophomores, redshirt freshmen or true freshmen.

CU depth chart

• OFFENSE

Pos Starter Ht. Wt. Yr. Backup Ht. Wt. Yr.

WR Patrick Williams 6-2 200 Jr. Cody Crawford 5-11 180 Jr.



Cliff Grassmick ©
Boulder Daily
Camera

University of
Colorado receiver
Josh Smith, in a
scrimmage Aug. 12,
suffered a bruised
kidney during a
scrimmage Saturday.

WR Scotty McKnight 5-10 190 Fr. Kendrick Celestine 5-11 180 Fr.

LT Tyler Polumbus 6-8 300 Sr. Matthew Bahr 6-4 285 Fr.

LG Wes Palazzi 6-1 295 Fr. Mike Iltis 6-2 290 Fr.

C Daniel Sanders 6-3 310 Jr. Kai Maiava 6-0 295 Fr.

RG Devin Head 6-4 295 So. Ryan Miller 6-7 310 Fr.

RT Edwin Harrison 6-4 300 Sr. Sione Tau 6-5 330 Fr.

TE Riar Geer 6-3 255 So. Joe Sanders 6-3 235 Sr.

QB Cody Hawkins 5-11 195 Fr. Nick Nelson 6-1 230 Jr.

TB Hugh Charles 5-8 190 Sr. Byron Ellis 6-0 215 Sr.

FB Maurice Cantrell 6-0 240 Jr. and Samson Jagoras 5-10 220 Sr.

PK Kevin Eberhart 5-11 195 Sr. Tyler Cope 6-1 180 Fr.

• DEFENSE

Pos Starter Ht. Wt. Yr. Backup Ht. Wt. Yr.

LE Maurice Lucas 6-4 260 Jr. and Marquez Herrod 6-2 255 Fr.

DT George Hypolite 6-1 285 Jr. Taj Kaynor* 6-4 275 So.

NT Brandon Nicolas 6-3 290 Jr. Jason Brace 6-4 265 So.

RE Alonzo Barrett 6-3 235 Sr. Eric Lawson 6-3 275 Fr.

MLB R.J. Brown 6-1 230 Jr. Jake Duren 5-11 230 So.

WLB Jordon Dizon 6-0 220 Sr. Jeff Smart 5-11 210 So.

SLB Brad Jones 6-3 225 Jr. Bryan Stengel 6-2 215 So.

LCB Terrence Wheatley 5-10 185 Sr. Jalil Brown 6-1 205 Fr.

FS Ryan Walters 5-11 200 Jr. Anthony Wright 6-0 185 Fr.

SS Daniel Dykes 6-2 210 Jr. and Lionel Harris 6-0 195 Sr.

RCB Benjamin Burney 5-11 190 Jr. Cha'pelle Brown 5-7 175 So.

P Matt DiLallo 6-1 200 So. Tom Suazo 6-1 190 Jr. **Suspended*

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Smith may miss opener

Frosh WR standout has bruised kidney

By Kyle Ringo Camera Sports Writer
Monday, August 20, 2007

College football coaches spend the month of the August with their fingers crossed, hoping to avoid losing key personnel to significant injuries.

Colorado coach Dan Hawkins wasn't so lucky this year.

True freshman wide receiver Josh Smith, the surprise standout of training camp, had to be hospitalized Saturday and Sunday after suffering a bruised kidney during Saturday's scrimmage at Folsom Field.

He is scheduled to be released from Boulder Community Hospital today.

Smith, a 6-foot, speedy product of Moorpark, Calif., is out indefinitely as he recovers. It was unclear whether he was injured while being tackled during the scrimmage or if the injury occurred when Smith ran into a cement wall in the southwest corner of the stadium chasing a pass into the deep corner of the end zone.

To Smith's credit, he picked himself up after what had to be a painful moment and jogged off the field. He also came back to play later.

"Josh has been what we thought he was, kind of an electrifying type of guy," offensive coordinator Mark Helfrich said. "No question he was certainly one of our top two receivers; at times our best, at times our second. We'll just have to see how that all shakes down."

CU trainer Miguel Rueda said it is very unlikely Smith will be able to play in less than two weeks against Colorado State in the season opener at Invesco Field at Mile High in Denver. But Smith hasn't been officially ruled out of the contest either.

"Losing J-Fly, I mean that's going to be big obviously because he brought a lot of energy to us and a lot of playmaking ability," said quarterback Cody Hawkins, who was named the starter Saturday night. "We hope the best for him and we don't want to rush him back because it is a serious injury."

Coach Dan Hawkins said it's impossible to know exactly how the injury might affect Smith and he acknowledged the possibility exists that he could need a redshirt season. But the far more likely scenario is that Smith will miss a matter of weeks before returning to the team.



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McKnight atop charts at 'Z' receiver

By Kyle Ringo Camera Sports Writer
Monday, August 20, 2007

Some people choose to call it fate. To others, it's coincidence. It's funny how and when things work themselves out sometimes.

When Cody Hawkins and Scotty McKnight joined the Colorado football program in 2006, there was no harder working duo on the team. They both flew under the radar as true freshmen no one really expected to play, but there they were nearly every night after practice, working overtime on pass routes after their teammates had hit the showers.

They first met as children through their fathers. McKnight's father, Scott, was a college teammate of CU coach Dan Hawkins, Cody's father.

Cody and Scotty originally planned to go to Boise State together, but that plan was scrapped when Dan Hawkins became the coach at CU. They both became Buffs and brought a strong work ethic with them.

It seemed fitting Sunday when the new depth chart was released that both players were listed first at their respective positions.

"I definitely feel like it paid off," McKnight said. "You know one thing that has always been with me and Cody is we have always loved to come out and throw the ball around and go over assignments together. We're all about football and doing everything we can to get better."

Hawkins' ascension to the starting quarterback job had been expected but still was the biggest news of the day because of the importance of the position. McKnight, from California, is the No. 1 wide receiver at the Z position at this point in camp, and that was a bit of a surprise.

"He's very smart. He's very tough. He's pretty quick. He's strong and has great hands," Cody Hawkins said. "He's just a guy that you love to have out there. He understands football and he plays his heart out. It might surprise some people, but it doesn't surprise guys who see him play every day."

Wide receiver is one of the positions at which the Colorado coaching staff lists players in groupings. It is meant to de-emphasize who is listed first on the chart because six or seven players regularly rotate during games.

Still, it's no small accomplishment for McKnight to be in that group. He missed most of spring practices and some of the offseason conditioning program after breaking his ankle on the first day of spring drills.

Two guarded

As of Sunday, the Buffs starting guards, sophomore Devin Head and redshirt freshman Wes Palazzi, had one start between them. It belongs to Head who started the season opener last season against Montana State and then barely played again the rest of the year.

Both were listed first at their positions Sunday, but both reacted with cautious optimism knowing there is still two weeks before the season starts.

"It's still competition," Palazzi said. "I could lose it tomorrow or I could lose it the next day. I'm still going to keep coming. I have a lot to learn."

If Palazzi maintains his position as a starter, he will be the second in his family to play major college football. His grandfather, Lou Palazzi, played center at Penn State in the mid-1940s and two years in the NFL for the New York Giants.

There was a time not long ago when coaches wondered if Head had lost the desire to play football. Head now admits he tiptoed through his true freshman year two seasons ago and didn't get much out of the season. It's something he regrets now.

"I was one of those guys, unfortunately," Head said. "Looking back now I wish I wouldn't have done that. It's one of the things I regret. But definitely getting to play last year and getting that taste again was motivation to work hard in the offseason so I could be doing it again this season."

Burton to miss season

Linebacker Marcus Burton is academically ineligible and will redshirt this fall. Losing Burton further complicates an already thin linebacker corps. The Buffs can't afford a serious injury at linebacker this season.

Dan Hawkins said not all grades have been posted so he isn't sure where all his players stand academically. He should know by the end of the week if there are any other academic casualties.

"There are still grades rolling in and papers being written and guys taking independent study courses," he said. "So it's kind of a race to the finish line."

Down but not out

Fifth-year senior wide receiver Dusty Sprague was philosophical Sunday when informed he is third on the depth chart at one wide receiver spot behind McKnight and true freshman Kendrick Celestine.

"You just come every day and compete," Sprague said. "At receiver one nice thing is you do roll in and out. So everybody is going to get a chance to do what they do best, and that's the key. You've got to go out there and execute on what you do best and everything will be fine."

Notable

There were several more items of note on the depth chart Sunday. Redshirt freshman Marquez Herrod is running neck-and-neck with junior Maurice Lucas at defensive end. ... Ben Burney is listed as the starting cornerback opposite Terrence Wheatley. Cha'pelle Brown is behind Burney. Two true freshmen — Anthony Wright and Anthony Perkins — are vying for the backup free safety job.



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Cody Hawkins named Buffs starter

WR Josh Smith hospitalized

By Kyle Ringo

Sunday, August 19, 2007

In the end, it came down to the simple stuff. Cody Hawkins' mastery of the little things, along with his knack for leadership, earned him the starting quarterback job at Colorado this season.

Hawkins, a redshirt freshman with a 59-0 lifetime record as a starter, will be the first freshman to play quarterback at Colorado since Craig Ochs took over as the starter halfway through the 2000 season.

Colorado offensive coordinator Mark Helfrich named Hawkins his starting quarterback Saturday night — the program announced it Sunday — because of Hawkins' ability to execute the fundamental parts of the offense at a high level, Helfrich said.

Head coach Dan Hawkins, Cody's father (in case you have been on another planet), said Helfrich made the final call only after meeting with the rest of the staff. Hawkins said his son was the consensus pick over junior Nick Nelson.

Cody Hawkins had a small lead over Nelson at the end of spring practices and he carried that margin through summer work and into preseason practices. Coaches decided to name a starter Saturday night because they are beginning to install the game plan this week for the Sept. 1 season opener against Colorado State.

"Fortunately for me, things went my way, but it's a bummer to see Nick be disappointed," Cody Hawkins said.

Helfrich was asked to sum up what sets the two quarterbacks apart at this point. He pointed first to Cody Hawkins' consistency, but Helfrich also said he knows he will go into the season with two quarterbacks who can lead the team to touchdowns.

"He makes almost every routine play," Helfrich said. "That's a big deal as a quarterback, is just making every play that is there.

"And the difference-maker type plays, those are the ones you have to make the majority of to be on the greater side of good, and Cody definitely worked toward that. But just overall it was just his consistency, his command of the offense and making those routine plays." Nelson acknowledged his disappointment in hearing the decision, but he said he's a team-first kind of player and he plans to keep pushing his friend for the job.

"(Saturday) I was a little discouraged," Nelson said. "It was just disappointing, but you've got to live with it. It's life, man. Life is going to throw a lot of stuff at you and you've just got to overcome it."

Senior wide receiver Dusty Sprague said he feels "great" about having a freshman playing quarterback and being in a leadership role on the team. Sprague said Cody Hawkins seems naturally suited to being a leader and he has the respect of everyone on the team.

"He's been raised around this game and you can tell that," he said. "He's been a quarterback since he was little and so I think he's developed those skills over time, and I think it's pretty obvious when you meet him."

Cody Hawkins was named the starting quarterback in conjunction with the release of the first depth chart changes since

the beginning of training camp.

The offensive line won't feature a true freshman if it remains the same in the opener as it was constituted Sunday, but it will include redshirt freshman Wes Palazzi, who has risen to the starter's role at one guard spot. Sophomore Devin Head is the other starting guard at this point. Seniors Tyler Polumbus and Edwin Harrison are the tackles and junior Daniel Sanders is the center.

Other notable shifts in the depth chart included redshirt freshman Scotty McKnight at the top of the Z wide receiver grouping. True freshman Kendrick Celestine is second there.

Redshirt freshman defensive lineman Marquez Herrod is listed as a co-starter at defensive end with junior Maurice Lucas. Ben Burney is first at the right cornerback position over Cha'pelle Brown and a pair of true freshmen — Anthony Perkins and Anthony Wright — are battling for the backup free safety job behind Ryan Walters.

Dan Hawkins said there is still plenty of time for things to change at some of those positions prior to the season opener.

"I'm just one of those guys, I'm not into what you did yesterday or what you did last week," Hawkins said. "People have to play, and people have to make plays and people have to continue to step up. As long as we have that culture around here, we'll have the best 22 and 11 guys out there."



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Eyes on Hawkins

Redshirt freshman to start at QB; frosh WR injures kidney

*By Patrick Ridgell
The Daily Times-Call*

BOULDER — The Colorado Buffaloes have made downplaying their quarterback battle an art. Redshirt freshman guard Wes Palazzi turned it into a masterpiece Sunday morning.

“It’s whoever coaches think is the best guy,” Palazzi said. “We like everybody on our team, we don’t have favorites, so it’s whoever the coach thinks gives us the best chance of winning. We like everybody. I guess it doesn’t really matter.

“Who is the starting quarterback, anyway?”

That would be Cody Hawkins, another redshirt freshman and the son of the head coach. Other big news came Sunday besides the quarterback announcement, like the issuing of CU’s first depth chart of 2007 and, more notably, information about freshman receiver Josh Smith spending Saturday night in a hospital with a kidney injury that has him out indefinitely.

But Hawkins, who entered camp as the favorite, won the job over junior college transfer Nick Nelson. He’ll start Sept. 1 against Colorado State. Meanwhile, battles for playing time all over the team continue.

Coaches said they wanted the starting quarterback named as early as possible so the team could rally around him. But Sunday, the depth chart, which head coach Dan Hawkins calls a “contributor chart,” wasn’t more than just a piece of paper to several Buffs.

“There are a lot of guys who weren’t named starter who are still pushing,” senior offensive tackle Tyler Polumbus said. “They still want to be the starter and could be the starter.

“This depth chart doesn’t mean a thing. All it means is if we were playing Colorado State today, that’s who would start. We’ve got two weeks that people could outperform someone else.”

Said Dan Hawkins: “It seems like it’s official because it’s on paper, but, hey, if Cody Hawkins doesn’t move the club and score points ... It’s on paper today. That could be a different paper tomorrow and a different paper the next day.”

Cody Hawkins is the starter because of his consistency, his command of the offense and his ability to make the routine plays, offensive coordinator Mark Helfrich said.

“We feel that he’s our best guy right now, so that’s who we’re putting out there as our best opportunity to move and score points and win,” Helfrich said.

“I’m really excited I get a chance to lead the Buffaloes, especially Sept. 1 against Colorado State,” Cody said. “But it’s also a bummer to see a friend like Nick be disappointed.”

Coaches told the quarterbacks their decision Saturday night. While doing so, coach Hawkins relayed to Nelson a story about how he didn’t get to start at fullback during his junior college days. Nelson, in keeping with the day’s theme, said he’ll continue to push to make Cody better.

“(Saturday) I was a little discouraged,” Nelson said. “It was disappointing. But you have to live with it. It’s life. Life is going to throw a lot of stuff at you.”

Smith bruised his kidney during Saturday’s scrimmage. Trainers aren’t sure if it happened when he was hit while lunging for a catch, or later when he ran into a wall just beyond the end zone in the southwest corner of Folsom Field.



Colorado quarterback Cody Hawkins stands on the sideline during a scrimmage Saturday at Folsom Field. Sunday, Hawkins was named as the starting quarterback for the Buffaloes, beating out Nick Nelson for the job. **Times-Call/Lewis Geyer**

Smith showed his toughness and continued to play, but he began showing signs there was something wrong with his kidney shortly after the scrimmage ended. He went to Boulder Community Hospital on Saturday afternoon, and was expected to stay through at least Sunday night.

Smith has had a good camp. He's showed play-making skills the coaches crave. CU reported it is "very unlikely" he'll be ready for CSU. Dan Hawkins said he thinks Smith will play this season, but he's unsure when.

"Basically he's fine; it's just a question of probably what ... week we're looking at," he said.

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Freshmen fill up depth chart

By Patrick Ridgell
The Daily Times-Call

BOULDER — Colorado's first depth chart, released Sunday morning, left lots to discuss.

Redshirt freshman Scotty McKnight is atop the Z wide receiver grouping, and another redshirt freshman, Wes Palazzi, is first at left guard. With Cody Hawkins at quarterback, three redshirt freshmen are offensive starters. The offensive line's second string is all true freshman, including Ryan Miller at right guard.

Junior Daniel Dykes, a transfer from Idaho, and senior Lionel Harris are co-starters at strong safety. Eight juniors either occupy or share top spots on defense. Freshmen Anthony Perkins and Anthony Wright are behind junior Ryan Walters at free safety. And junior linebacker Marcus Burton has been suspended for the season due to academics. Coach Dan Hawkins said CU is still receiving grades about other players, but so far Burton is the only casualty. Burton will practice and use his redshirt in 2007. He'll have two years left starting in 2008.

The depth chart, or "contributors chart," as Hawkins calls it, contained no jolting surprises. But there were minor ones.

Palazzi missed practices the first week of camp to focus on school. He said Sunday he fell behind last year, and had to take four courses over the summer to retain his eligibility.

He said he earned an A, A-minus, B-plus and B-minus in his classes, which were personal finance, ethnic studies, nutrition and theater.

"I retook a theater class, and it's not like high school, trust me," he said.

Palazzi said he's only two or three classes behind his teammates who've missed no time. He said he's excited to have a starting spot for now, but he realizes it's not set in stone.

"I come out here every day like I'm third string and bust it and try to maintain and excel," he said. "I'm not going to sit here and take a break or anything. It's a great thing to have, but it takes great responsibility, too."

Said offensive coordinator Mark Helfrich: "Wes has come out and practiced really well. He's a guy who, I think, seized the light. We need some competition in there in the interior three to solidify that thing, and he's going to provide that."

CU will shuttle in players for different plays and formations, so the chart includes "groupings" at both receiver spots, tight end and tailback. McKnight is listed ahead of freshman Kendrick Celestine, senior Dusty Sprague, freshman Markques Simas and senior Alvin Barnett.

Helfrich said McKnight, who broke his ankle last spring, has been consistent.

"He's been catching the ball really well," Helfrich said. "He's not the fastest guy in the world, but he's run consistent, good, clean routes. He'll definitely be in the mix."

Extra points: There are 29 freshmen listed on the first depth chart, which does not include freshmen expected to redshirt. ... CU initially reported on its Web site Sunday morning that senior receiver Alvin Barnett is suspended. That was inaccurate and Barnett is not suspended Nineteen players caught passes in Saturday's scrimmage, so don't be surprised to see the Buffs spread the ball around. ... The Buffs will hold a brief walk-through this morning. Hawkins said they'll begin putting in the game plan for Colorado State on Tuesday.

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Colorado Daily Staff Reports

It's official.

Cody Hawkins will be the starting quarterback when CU takes on CSU in their annual rivalry match - up at Denver's Invesco Field at Mile High.

It was an eventful weekend for the CU football team. They played their second scrimmage of the fall on Saturday in front of about 4,800 fans at Folsom Field, and then on Sunday named their starters, including quarterback, with the release of a depth chart.

"He (Cody) makes almost every routine play and that's a big deal as a quarterback-just making every play that's there," said offensive coordinator Mark Helfrich. "And then the difference-maker-type plays, those are the ones you have to make a majority of to be on the greater side of good. Cody has worked toward that."

Hawkins beat out junior college transfer Nick Nelson after a competition that has been carried out since the spring. In Saturday's scrimmage, neither player did much to separate himself from the other, but both played well.

"We showed some flashes, it was a little sloppy at times on both sides," head coach Dan Hawkins said. "I thought the tempo was good, I think the guys are in shape, I think they are ready to get in a game and go the whole round. We were missing few guys-particularly up front defensively-and that's where it all starts and that hurts you. I think that's why the offense had a little bit more of an upper hand today," coach Dan Hawkins said on Saturday.

With Cody Hawkins under center, the offense scored three touchdowns and two field goals on 10 drives. He also threw a tipped ball interception.

Nelson directed the offense for seven drives and scored two touchdowns and two field goals. He also threw two interceptions.

Announced on Sunday along with the quarterback news was that freshman Josh Smith has been hospitalized with a bruised kidney suffered in Saturday's scrimmage. Smith had been in position to start in the CU-CSU opener, but will now likely be out.

"Josh Smith has been kind of what we thought he was," Helfrich said. "He's an electrifying-type guy. No question, he was certainly one of our top two receivers. At times our best, at times our second [best], but we will just have to wait and see how that all shakes down."

The run game had a productive day on Saturday, with seniors Hugh Charles and Byron Ellis, as well as redshirt-freshman Demetrius Sumler all producing on the ground. Sumler and Ellis each scored touchdowns, as did Kevin Moyd.

After a productive scrimmage on Saturday, the coaching staff released a depth chart on Sunday, detailing who will start in the opener against CSU on Sept. 1.

CU's first-team offensive line will feature returning seniors Edwin Harrison (right tackle) and Tyler Polumbus (left tackle) and junior Daniel Sanders (center, as he has moved over from guard), with sophomore Devin Head at right guard and redshirt freshman Wes Palazzi at left guard.

The second-team offensive line at this point is comprised entirely of true freshmen recruits, including Ryan Miller and Sione Tau.

Redshirt freshmen Scotty McKnight and true freshman Kendrick Celestine top the "z" receiver group, though it is likely the coaches will use a multitude of receiving combinations.

Defensively, with many experienced players returning, there are not as many new faces, though junior transfer Daniel Dykes is co-first team with senior Lionel Harris at strong safety. Junior special teams captain R.J. Brown is listed first at the

mike inside linebacker spot, as probable starter Michael Sipili is suspended indefinitely from game competition pending the outcome of an off-the-field issue.

Junior ILB Marcus Burton will also miss the season due to academics, though he will be able to practice with the team. He has a redshirt year available to him.