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Bufs secondary turning corner

By B.G. Brooks, Rocky Mountain News
August 22, 2007

BOULDER — Greg Brown remembers a time in University of Colorado football when the secondary was second to none.

He should — he was coaching it, and among the defensive backs he tutored during his first stint in Boulder were Thorpe Award winners Deon Figures (1992) and Chris Hudson (1994).

In recent seasons, though, the Buffaloes' "back end" hasn't resembled what Brown remembers. During the past four seasons, CU's highest NCAA Division I-A ranking in pass defense was 87th in 2005, up from 114th two years earlier. Last season, the Buffs were 94th.

But Brown believes improvement is ahead, mainly because of an all-conference cornerback (senior Terrence Wheatley) and a handful of other returnees seasoned for a year in CU's defense.

Still, Brown is cautious.

"We've come a long way, but we're far from arriving," he said.

Opposite Wheatley, CU's initial training camp depth chart listed Benjamin Burney, with Ryan Walters at free safety and D.J. Dykes and Lionel Harris battling at the strong safety position. Brown's nickel backs are Cha'pelle Brown and Gardner McKay.

Walters is backed up by freshmen Anthony Wright and Anthony Perkins, with redshirt freshmen Jalil Brown and Jimmy Smith behind Wheatley.

Dykes, a transfer from Idaho who sat out last season, said CU "had talent last year, but it was a matter of us getting comfortable in the defense and being able to adjust to different sets. It wasn't a case of the talent, it was the learning curve we were on."

Wheatley's five interceptions in 2006 were CU's best and second in the Big 12 Conference, numbers Burney knows will send more passes in his direction this season.

"They're going to be coming after me," he said. " 'T-Wheat' is well-known with all those interceptions last year. I know I'm going to be attacked — I've just got to be well-prepared and make the plays when they come at me."

Brown's top concern through two scrimmages has been pass-interference calls and missed tackles. He estimated his group should have made 10 more tackles in last weekend's scrimmage.

"We have to be more consistent in individual techniques, in understanding leverages and where we fit in certain schemes," he said. "That's typical 'coachspeak,' but it's what we have to stress for us to get better."

TEE IT UP: Golfers are needed to participate in the 13th CU vs. CSU Golf Challenge, set for Wednesday at Riverdale Dunes Golf Course in Brighton.

Same-day registration begins at 7:30 a.m., with a shotgun start one hour later. A reception and barbecue follow the competition. More information: 303-492-4653 (CU).

Also, Desert Edge Mentoring Services, a nonprofit organization in Phoenix co-directed by former CU tailback J.J. Flannigan, is sponsoring its first golf tournament Sept. 8 at Bougainvillea Golf Club.

Flannigan is hoping to attract Buffs fans who will be in the area to attend that night's CU-Arizona State game in Tempe, Ariz. More information: 602-237-2485 or www.DesertEdge

Mentoring.com.

ETC.: Freshman receiver **Josh Smith** (bruised kidney, out indefinitely) was released Wednesday after a four-night stay at Boulder Community Hospital. Coach **Dan Hawkins** said Smith might be able to return for the Florida State game (Sept. 15). . . . The Buffs were bused to Invesco Field at Mile High for a short walk-through. Hawkins said he wanted the team to visualize a victory in the Sept. 1 opener against Colorado State. . . . Senior offensive captain **Bernard Jackson** did not practice during the afternoon. He has missed work throughout camp while concentrating on academics.

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cu football

Buffaloes visualize victory at Invesco

By Tom Kensler
Denver Post Staff Writer

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Boulder - An avowed believer in the power of visualization, Colorado coach Dan Hawkins took his football team to Invesco Field at Mile High for a Wednesday morning visit.

Colorado will play Colorado State there Sept. 1.

"I think everybody has to have a vision for what they want to be and what they want themselves to look like," Hawkins said. "The more you can do for your guys to give them experience and go through those motions, I think that helps them.

"Just showing up in a stadium blind and not having a whole lot of perspective about it would be just one more hurdle you've got to get through."

Redshirt freshman Cody Hawkins, the coach's older son and newly named starting quarterback, said the trip might have helped the young players get over the "wow" factor.

"Coming out of that tunnel is pretty unbelievable because you wait for the stands to stop and they just

keep going and going and going," Cody said. "Just getting off the bus and getting in there, smelling the grass, that was great preparation for us."

Dan Hawkins had his 2006 team visit Invesco Field last fall. CSU won that meeting 14-10.

"This was great for us to go down there and look up at the scoreboard and imagine the Buffs coming out on top," Cody said.

Smith out for opener

Freshman wideout Josh Smith will not play against Colorado State, Dan Hawkins said.

Smith, already a contender for a starting position after the first two weeks of fall camp, was released from Boulder Community Hospital on Wednesday. He was hospitalized Saturday night after bruising a kidney that morning in a scrimmage.

Hawkins said the feeling among medical personnel is that Smith might be cleared to play in the Sept. 15 home game against Florida State. The Buffaloes play Sept. 8 at Arizona State.

It's too early to guess when Smith will be allowed to practice, the coach said.

Blocking brigade

Although a true freshman is listed as the top backup at all five positions on the offensive line, there's a good chance that some of the five will redshirt this season, Hawkins said.

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"There will have to be a couple of those young guys that have to (play)," he said. "And they'll have to be some on the 'ready ready.'"

"You don't want to have to burn their redshirt year. But if something catastrophic happens (at that position), you may have to do that."

Ryan Miller (6-feet-8, 320 pounds), a former Parade All-American from Columbine, and Kai Maiava, a 6-1, 295-pounder from Hawaii, appear to be the most ready to play immediately among the eight freshman offensive linemen.

Helping their cause is versatility. Miller can play tackle or guard. Maiava has been used at center and guard.

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

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Lucas eyeing breakout year on CU D-line

Former Rangeview standout has improved 'a ton' since last year

By Ryan Thorburn

Thursday, August 23, 2007

Romeo Bandison had a solid career as a player at the University of Oregon before getting drafted in the third round of the 1994 NFL draft by the Cleveland Browns.

But Colorado's defensive line coach admits that he could have been more consistent — just like one of his talented pupils, junior defensive end Maurice Lucas.

"I told him the other day, 'You're kind of like I was when I was in college,'" Bandison said after Wednesday's practice. "If I didn't practice well that week, I didn't play well in the game. He just needs to stay on top of it with the reps. If he gets the reps, then he's on it. If he misses a few days, in my opinion, he doesn't play as well as he's capable of."

Lucas has missed some practices during this camp due to knee tendinitis and a concussion. The promising 6-foot-4, 255-pound prospect has still done enough to earn a spot at the top of the Buffs' current depth chart at left defensive end along with Marquez Herrod.

Last season Lucas had just 14 tackles playing behind current Big 12 sack leader Abraham Wright and Walter Boye-Doe.

"Last year I got to watch some really great role models," Lucas said. "Just watching their film and taking what they said is really good inspiration for me. ... They taught me to never give up, take criticism, and just go 100 percent. No matter who you are you're going to make mistakes, but learn to thrive from that."

Unfortunately, the previous coaching staff made a mistake — or at least didn't do Lucas or the new staff any favors — by taking his redshirt off six games into the 2005 season.

"So he missed out a little bit on some progress there," Bandison said. "But he's catching up. I'm pleased with where he is right now."

Lucas was at the top of a lot of recruiting lists after earning SuperPrep All-American honors as a senior at Aurora's Rangeview High School.

And then reality bit the big guy when he arrived in Boulder.

"I found out there's always going to be someone better than you," Lucas said. "It's hard being at the top coming out of high school and coming back to college on the bottom. The big thing is just taking what you get and working your way up to the top."

There is still some work to do and adjustments to be made, but Lucas appears to be close to performing at the level he was projected at upon entering the program. He said he is now comfortable with defensive coordinator Ron Collins' system and confident about stepping into the spotlight vacated by Wright and Boye-Doe.

"Right now I have a feeling that I'm going to break out," Lucas said. "But I'm taking it one step at a time. I've still got a lot of things I've got to do."

Living up to his own expectations is going to be the easy part. Exceeding his position coach's expectations is going to be difficult but potentially very rewarding.

"He has definitely improved a ton from last year and I'm pleased with his progress and his improvement," Bandison said. "He did miss a few days here and he's not the kind of a guy who can afford to miss a few days. ... Mo is the kind of guy who just goes hard and he's super strong. He'll knock a guy on his butt in pass rush, which is a hard thing to do."

If Lucas can do it consistently then the Buffs may have something at defensive end.



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Behind enemy lines

By JEFF GRAHAM Colorado Daily Staff Writer
Wednesday, August 22, 2007 10:11 PM MDT

Since coming to Colorado in the fall of 2004 from the westernmost high school in the U.S., on the island of Kauai, Hawaii, CU captain Jordan Dizon has all but been the face of CU's linebacking corps. Playing alongside former Buffs Akarika Dawn and Thaddeus "Thad" Washington as an underclassman, Dizon quickly learned the strong tradition of Buffs linebackers.

As an upperclassman, he has garnered nation - wide respect for his gritty determination and a tackling ability developed from his time as a young boy chasing wild pigs in Hawaii.

Back for his final campaign in the black and gold, Dizon will again have quite the load to bear after several off-the-field incidents have left the usually solid position in unfamiliar territory. Sophomore inside linebacker Michael Sipili, who had earned the respect of his teammates as one of the team's hardest hitters over the past year, is currently suspended indefinitely.

Sipili and junior college transfer Chris Perri were involved in a June brawl on the "Hill," and only Sipili since has been charged with a crime. Coach Dan Hawkins said he will be out as long as court proceedings take to sort out the situation.

Most likely a game one starter, Sipili placed an already thin linebacking group in a tough place, but it was an academically ineligible junior, Marcus Burton, that made an already tentative situation worse. Coach Brian Cabral who has been coaching linebackers at CU since 1989 said that this is the first time in his career where this many players have been sidelined for extracurricular issues.

"Not at all, not like this," Cabral said. "It's a lot of work, a lot of preparation on their part. We have got to put them in situations to bring them along, and they are."

With such a narrow margin for error CU must maintain their health at linebacker to once again be the bright spot of a defense that saw their fair share of dark days last year. The Buffs run defense ranked in the top 15 nationally for much of the season last year and was the team's highest statistical rating at seasons end.

PROJECTED STARTERS:

MIKE(INSIDE)LINEBACKER:

#34-R.J. Brown, 6-1, 230, Jr.- Brown was selected by his teammates as special teams captain prior to the start of fall camp. Currently listed atop the depth chart at the position after junior Marcus Burton was labeled academically ineligible after summer classes. Coach Dan Hawkins awarded the former walk-on with a scholarship this fall for his hard work and team leadership.

WILL(INSIDE)LINEBACKER:

#44-Jordan Dizon, 6-0, 220, Sr.- CU's 17th all-time leading tackler with 280 total is projected as a starter once again and has seen significant action since his true freshman year in 2004. Dizon once again was selected as the defensive captain and is a first team All-Big 12 preseason selection. Dizon is also listed as one of 42 candidates for the Ronnie Lott Award presented to the nation top linebacker. In a game in high school, Dizon ran the ball 37 times for 376 yards and five touchdowns.

SAM(OUTSIDE)LINEBACKER:

#40-Brad Jones, 6-3, 225, Jr.- Started 11 games last year and was third on the team in tackles with 72. Jones recorded his first interception of his college career last year in a game against the University of Kansas. Against Arizona State last year, Jones recorded eight tackles and also had the opportunity to play against his older brother Preston who is a running back for the Sun Devils. Jones figures to be the starter once again at the outside linebacking position.

OTHER CONTRIBUTORS:

MIKE(INSIDE)LINEBACKER:

#57-Jake Duren, 5-11, 230, Soph.

(10 Michael Sipili, 6-1, 250, Soph.*;) Suspended indefinitely

WILL(INSIDE)LINEBACKER:

45 Jeff Smart, 5-11, 210, Soph.*

35 Nate Vaiomounga, 5-10, 195, Fr.

SAM(OUTSIDE)LINEBACKER:

52 Bryan Stengel, 6-2, 215, Soph. OR

59 B.J. Beatty, 6-1, 220, Fr.-RS

55 Josh Hartigan, 6-1, 215, Fr.

Junior R.J. Brown would be the first to admit that this is not how he imagined making his way to the top of the depth chart, but teammates and coaches cannot deny he deserves it. Because of the depth issues, Brown has ascended into the starting role and according to Cabral has had a seamless transition thus far.

"He is adjusting real well," Cabral said. "He's picking things up and taking leadership. He's ready. He's earned it and he's ready."

One of the younger players looking to make an impact in the absence of some returning players is sophomore Jeff Smart. Smart saw action in four games last year, but has yet to record a tackle.

"I think Jeff Smart would be the first guy to come to mind," Cabral said. "He's having a very good camp and he's starting to step up."

Whatever the case, this Buffs linebacking group is poised for an interesting season.

[Print page](#)[Close window](#)

Longmont, Colorado
Thursday, August 23, 2007



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Bufs sneak peek at Invesco

CU's visit a part of Hawkins' strategy

By Patrick Ridgell
The Daily Times-Call

BOULDER — You have to see it to believe it.

That's was the philosophy behind Wednesday morning's trip to Invesco Field for the University of Colorado football team, which opens its season at the venue Sept. 1 against Colorado State.

CU head coach Dan Hawkins is a big believer in visualizing success, and he said anything he can do to aid his team in the process, he'll do.

"The more you can do for your guys to give them some experience so they can see that and go through those motions, I think that helps them," Hawkins said. "Just showing up at a stadium blind and not having a whole lot of perspective about it, I think, is just one more hurdle you have to get through."

CU called the Denver Broncos and asked permission to visit their home stadium. There were cones down the middle of the field, marking areas players were to avoid. CU conducted its work on the sides.

Hawkins said that if his freshmen were in awe, they didn't show it.

"Most of those freshmen were probably bubbling over inside, but they weren't showing it on the outside," he said.

CU was on the field for about 45 minutes.

"Coming out of that tunnel was pretty unbelievable," redshirt freshman quarterback Cody Hawkins said. "You walk out and you keep waiting for those stands to stop, and they just keep going and going and going. You feel like you can finally see the top when you're standing at the 50-yard line."

"It's a pretty impressive place and the freshmen were really excited to get out there. And I'm really excited to get out there and play."

Smith goes home: Freshman receiver Josh Smith left Boulder Community Hospital on Wednesday morning after spending the previous four nights there receiving treatment for the bruised kidney he suffered in Saturday's scrimmage.

Hawkins said he didn't know Smith's exact prognosis, but said he could possibly play by CU's home opener against Florida State, which is Sept. 15. That would mean Smith will miss the opener and the second game, Sept. 8 at Arizona State.

Smith was at orientation Wednesday afternoon when the Buffs practiced in Boulder.

Hawkins said Smith was in "good spirits."

According to team trainer Miguel Rueda, Smith's CT scans Tuesday were "very encouraging."

He'll undergo weekly scannings until he can be cleared to play.

Extra points: Hawkins called Wednesday's practice a little sluggish at its beginning and end. Emphasis continues to be on preparing for CSU, and small mistakes are annoying coaches. "We got our horns out in full game mode," he said. "If a guy has a nose hair out of place, you're bent out of shape." ... Hawkins said defensive end Maurice Lucas is playing well in camp. He battled knee tendinitis last year and he's healthy now. "I think the whole front four has a chance to be pretty good," Hawkins said.

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