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Hypolite can wait for NFL hype

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

Article Last Updated: 12/18/2007 11:11:47 PM MST

BOULDER — Colorado's George Hypolite is in the process of submitting a request for an evaluation from the NFL's College Advisory Committee, but the junior defensive tackle said Buffaloes fans should not consider that a sign that he is ready to jump to the pros a year early.

"I don't plan to leave the University of Colorado until I'm ready to leave, and right now I'm not ready to leave," Hypolite said Tuesday during CU's on-campus Independence Bowl media day activities.

"When you evaluate the process, people buy into that (hype) too much," he added. "I love the University of Colorado. It's been a great university for me. I've been allowed to flourish while I'm here."

Hypolite, 6-feet-1 and 285 pounds, said he doubts that any feedback from the NFL, even an extremely positive evaluation, would convince him to leave.

"It would have to be whoever has the No. 1 pick in the draft coming to me and saying: 'We're taking you No. 1 overall. We can start

Colorado Football

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working on contract negotiations,' " Hypolite said with a grin. "I don't think that's going to happen. I don't think I'm going anywhere.

"I have a lot of things to work on. I'm not as good as people think I am."

ESPN draft analyst Mel Kiper Jr. currently ranks Hypolite fifth among defensive tackles in the junior class. In September, Kiper had rated Hypolite fourth among juniors at his position.

Hypolite said the two partially torn tendons in his left thigh feel better but aren't 100 percent.

"It doesn't stop me from doing what I want to do, but right now I'm just not perfectly where I want to be," he said.

Hypolite, who earned first-team all-Big 12 Conference honors from the league's

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coaches as well as the media, said he applied for an NFL evaluation because he "was just curious."

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Non-seniors must be out of high school for three years to be eligible for the draft. Hypolite is the only third-year player to request an evaluation, CU coach Dan Hawkins said.

"George is a smart kid. He'll do a good job of looking at (the evaluation)," Hawkins said. "We'll do the best job we can do of helping him, as well. If (turning pro early) is a realistic option and a realistic opportunity for him and it's a good thing for him, that's great.

"But stats bear out that for juniors, that's usually not a good thing. We just have to see if he's in that exception box."

Footnotes.

Senior offensive tackle Tyler Polumbus, on Alabama: "They're not just fast. They're fast and big." CU will practice Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Players are off for Monday and Tuesday (Christmas) and will reconvene Wednesday afternoon at the team's bowl headquarters in Shreveport, La. The Independence Bowl is Dec. 30, with a 6 p.m. kickoff (ESPN). No Colorado assistants have been contacted for other jobs, Hawkins said. Considering the snowy weather of recent weeks, Hawkins joked that if CU didn't have a practice bubble, "I guess we would call up (Alabama) to see if we could have a basketball game."

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CU bowl report: NFL can wait for Hypolite

By B.G. Brooks

Originally published 04:09 p.m., December 18, 2007

Updated 04:09 p.m., December 18, 2007

The chances of junior defensive tackle George Hypolite leaving for the NFL are miniscule – or smaller.

Hypolite, a first-team all-Big 12 Conference selection, said Tuesday he will satisfy his "curiosity" about the NFL draft and submit his name for underclassman evaluation by the Jan. 15 deadline.

But here's his caveat: "I'd have to be the No. 1 pick overall" to leave school. He added, "I love college, I love CU (and) I don't plan on leaving."

Coach Dan Hawkins said it has been his practice to encourage underclassmen to "do what's best for them" if they are assured of being a first-day, first-round pick. But, he added, the percentages are against most juniors finding it worth their while to leave school early.

"I just want them to be very realistic (and) look at it long-term," he said.

Hawkins said Hypolite was the only CU junior interested in the NFL evaluation process.

Gates update

The status of running back P.T. Gates remains uncertain. A 2007 CU signee, he has spent the fall semester at Saddleback (Calif.) Community College (he didn't play football) trying to meet CU admission requirements, and he might come up short again.

Wednesday is the first day of the signing period for junior college prospects, but Gates couldn't sign a national letter of intent even if he were eligible. NCAA rules prohibit prospects from signing two national letters of intent, and Gates signed CU's last year.

Gates has said on several occasions he still hopes to enroll at CU, but if he qualifies for admission, he will have to sign a financial aid agreement, which is non-binding.

CU has one other known junior college commitment – linebacker Shaun Mohler, of Orange Coast (Calif.) College. Another JC prospect – linebacker Josh Berard, of El Camino (Calif.) Community College – has changed his commitment and plans to sign with Kansas State, according to Rivals.com.

Sitting it out – again

CU's bowl travel roster features 99 players, but that number doesn't include senior offensive captain Bernard Jackson, who missed this season due to academic ineligibility.

Jackson remains ineligible, which prohibits him from making the trip. Asked about the possibility of Jackson petitioning for a sixth year of eligibility, Hawkins said, "He needs to focus on school work and graduating."

Nothing left undone

By the time they convene in Shreveport, La., on Dec. 26 for their first bowl-site position meetings and practice, the Buffaloes

will have their entire game plan in place.

After three practices this weekend (Friday, Saturday, Sunday), Hawkins said the Buffs will be done scheming for Alabama. When position meetings resume Thursday – the last day of final exams – "the lights have to be on," Hawkins said.

Thus far, he said, "I feel good about what we've done."

Numbers game

331 points this season are the most CU has scored since 2002 (398).

He said it

"I'd always wondered, God, why me, why now? . . . ESPN just put up everybody's mascot in America, but I didn't see Ralphie."

Hawkins on the agony of being a spectator last postseason

Etc.

-- Hypolite (two partially torn tendons near left hamstring) said he is "not perfectly where I want to be (health-wise), but I'm not complaining." Injured during the bye week before Nebraska, he played in that game and expects to play in the bowl.

-- Although Terrence Wheatley (fractured bone in left foot) is practicing again, Hawkins is uncertain whether the senior cornerback will be used as a kick returner in the bowl.

-- Hawkins said he has not been contacted by any schools wanting to talk with his assistants about jobs.

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Bufs prepare for Cajun cooking

By ELIOT DEMPSEY Colorado Daily Sports Editor
Tuesday, December 18, 2007 8:48 PM MST

Louisiana crawfish season traditionally begins with the onset of winter and extends to mid-summer. While it is possible nowadays to find the little mud-bugs most anytime of the year, they are at their best, size-wise and taste-wise, during the months of December through June.

Lucky timing for the CU football team, because when they arrive in Shreveport, La. next week for their Dec. 30 PetroSun Independence Bowl matchup with Alabama, they won't have too much to occupy their time other than football practice and Cajun cooking.

For a CU team that is looking to "finish strong," a bowl game in Louisiana, away from the distractions that accompany venues like Tempe or New Orleans, could be a blessing in disguise.

"I think we really want to come in and some teams don't take the bowl games seriously and I think that is something we want to do, to get the win at the end of the season and win our last game to create momentum going into next year," said CU wide receiver Scotty McKnight.

"I think even if we were in a place like Vegas, we would be pretty focused anyway. Besides, Coach Hawk won't let us stray too far away," he said with a smile.

At CU's PetroSun Independence Bowl Media Day on Tuesday, CU head coach Dan Hawkins and several players spoke to reporters about their upcoming matchup with Alabama.

"I think we all know and understand the history of Alabama and have a tremendous amount of respect for the SEC," said Hawkins. "I think any time you get into a bowl game you always want to play the best possible team that you can play. Even though their record is just like us, not where they want it to be, they are a very formidable team. I think that definitely grabs your attention."

The Crimson Tide are in their first year under head coach Nick Saban and with the game being played virtually in their backyard, the Tide are expected to bring a large contingent of fans to the game.

While Alabama may hold an advantage in fan support, the Buffs have been playing far better football in the closing weeks of the season. Both schools finished regular season play at 6-6, but the Crimson Tide have lost four games in a row, including a shocker to Louisiana Monroe and a close loss to rival Auburn.

"I think they just had a couple of bad breaks, they weren't getting blown out, they were very close games, a couple of rivalry games in there and the SEC is the toughest conference in the country and you are going to play some tough teams," said CU quarterback Cody Hawkins. "I would not say they are on a skid at all. Going into the bowl game with all this preparation, with that coaching staff and those athletes, it is kind of like a whole new season."

The Buffs have not seen game action since their 65-51 win over Nebraska on Nov. 23. They have stayed in shape by running and working out, and have been practicing since Dec. 7, on and off. The elder Hawkins said that they have mostly been working on technique and getting everybody reps, and that they will begin formal game planning next week.

When players were asked if they were able to stay in shape during their time off, the answer was a resounding "yes."

"We have done our 'Pit running,'" said McKnight. "I don't know if you have heard, but it is pretty intense and

it will keep you in shape.”

McKnight was referring to the Buffs strength and conditioning coach Jeff Pitman who has made his mark on the program by improving overall team strength and placing an emphasis on hard work in the weight room.

One player who has shown his fair share of strength this season was freshmen offensive lineman Kai Maiava, who hails from Wailuku, Hawai'i. Maiava was second on the team with 74 knockdown blocks in just nine games played. Maiava is one of five players from Hawai'i, with quite a few more hailing from sunny California.

With all those players coming from such beautiful and exotic locations, Shreveport might not seem like the best vacation destination. Maiava himself said he never dreamed he would visit the Louisiana town, but that did not diminish the excitement that he and his teammates felt over the announcement.

“Wherever we went was just an honor and a privilege to just go to a bowl game. Growing up, I always wanted to go to one of these. To just come here in my freshman year and be able to play in one of these, it is a big honor,” said Maiava.



Seniors ready for Alabama

Bufs gear for Independence

Kyle McDaniel

Tuesday, December 18, 2007

The Colorado Buffaloes' showdown on Dec. 30 against Alabama in the Independence Bowl gives the team the opportunity to play against one of the best programs in college football.

"It's a chance to go out there and prove to the nation that you can play with top-level talent," said senior cornerback Terrence Wheatley on Tuesday. "So it's nice to go out and kind of be the unknown team and kind of go out there and shock the world and have that kind of mentality. I think it's definitely good for us to play a team like Alabama and a team that's in the SEC."

Like the Buffaloes, Alabama finished the regular season at 6-6 with a 4-4 conference record. The Crimson Tide started the season 6-2 before losing its last four games against LSU, Mississippi State, Louisiana-Monroe and Auburn. Alabama will be making its 55th appearance in bowl game.

CU senior wide receiver Dusty Sprague said Colorado is fortunate to be playing against a team like Alabama. Sprague is among the 15 seniors who will be playing in their last game for the Buffs.

"I'm excited. You know, it's been a ride. I just want to go out and play my best game and give it all I got and be with these guys one last game," Sprague said on Tuesday.

Sprague had 27 receptions for 336 yards and two touchdowns in the regular season for the Buffs.

Colorado's matchup against the Crimson Tide also marks the final game for Wheatley. In his 10 games this season, Wheatley had five interceptions and returned one for a touchdown.

After suffering a hairline fracture on his foot against Missouri, Wheatley missed the Iowa State and Nebraska games. Wheatley is probable for the game against Alabama and said he doesn't want to get stressed out about playing in his final game for CU.

"I just want to enjoy it. After being here for five years, you just want to enjoy your last game," Wheatley said.

Other seniors who will be playing in their final game for the Buffs include tailback Hugh Charles, who rushed for 989 yards and eight touchdowns in the regular season, and linebacker Jordon Dizon. After leading the Buffs with 160 tackles, Dizon was a consensus first-team All-American.

After going through a coaching change and a 2-10 season last year, the Buffs are happy to send off their senior class with a bowl game.

“It’s been great for us to get to a bowl game because they deserve it,” junior defensive tackle George Hypolite said. “This class has been through so much, especially from when they first go here until now; they’ve been through so much.”



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Lucas stepping out of his shell

Hawkins sees defensive end finishing strong

By Kyle Ringo

Wednesday, December 19, 2007

He has been the "Who is that?" guy on the Colorado football team for three years now.

When someone unfamiliar with the Buffs stops by practice or brushes past him in the Dal Ward Center or on campus, they often ask, "Who is that?"

Maurice Lucas looks like a big-time football talent at 6-foot-4, 260 pounds, but the defensive end's play hasn't always matched his potential. He's quiet and methodical in taking care of his business and not one to make a name for himself in the media with colorful quotes.

Those factors have combined to make him a bit of an enigma to this point in his career, but he seems to be coming out of his shell on the field and when the pads come off.

In the second half of his junior season, Lucas has found a comfort zone. And it came with a twist. Just as he has started to flourish and really understand what coaches and teammates want from him, his family has been dealt a staggering blow it will be recovering from for years to come.

Lucas' younger brother, Marcus, suffered a broken neck in a high school football game last month when an opponent from Highlands Ranch High School grabbed his facemask and yanked him to the ground.

The move fractured two vertebrae in Marcus Lucas' neck, but he was fortunate not to suffer any paralysis and could potentially play football again after at least a year off. However, because of the injury Marcus Lucas will likely miss out on the football scholarship and free education his older brother enjoys.

"He's doing a lot better," Maurice said of his little brother. "Right now I'm just happy for him to be out of the hospital. He's back in school. His neck is healed. I'm happy for him and glad this is all behind us."

But it's not really.

The Lucas family must pay significant medical bills from the injury. Those costs could lead to the family filing a lawsuit.

Maurice Lucas hopes to put himself in position to help out by taking several more big steps in his development and hopefully playing himself into an opportunity in professional football.

Lucas said he wants to raise his level of play beginning in the Dec. 30 Independence Bowl against Alabama to match that of his fellow defensive linemen Brandon Nicolas and George Hypolite.

Both of those players are already considered pro prospects. Hypolite is in the process of submitting his paperwork to a NFL committee that will give him an evaluation of which round he would be most likely drafted if he were to turn pro this season. Hypolite said he would probably have to be considered the No. 1 overall pick to leave early.

One of the reasons Hypolite wants to come back for his senior season is the chance to play with Nicolas and Lucas, who he believes is on the verge of becoming great.

"For him I think it's never been the physical side," Hypolite said. "It's always been the mental side, grasping everything and making sure he's always doing his job.

"This year he's just done some great things where you can just tell, 'Mo got it.' For everybody it clicks at different times, and I think it's starting to click for him. He's starting to realize where he can make plays in our defense."

CU coach Dan Hawkins said Lucas was set back a year ago in adjusting to the dramatic changes in philosophy between Hawkins' coaching staff and the former staff led by Gary Barnett. Hawkins said Lucas is now starting to master those finer points.

Lucas said the game has slowed down and now that it has he has to speed up.

"Right now I have to put forth a lot more commitment than what I've been putting forth," he said. "It's just getting in there and getting stronger, getting my weight up. "



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Woelk: Motivation big factor for bowl teams

By Neill Woelk

Wednesday, December 19, 2007

Anyone familiar with college bowl games knows this much: the level of enthusiasm and excitement can vary widely from team to team.

Records don't matter. The leagues they represent don't matter. Even the talent level of respective squads can be misleading.

Rather, look at what's at stake. Consider the motivational factors involved, then pick your winners.

Example?

Try last year's Fiesta Bowl, when Big 12 powerhouse Oklahoma found itself matched against WAC champ Boise State.

The Sooners had very little to gain with a win. They were not playing for a national title, they were playing a school that didn't represent a BCS conference, and they were supposed to win handily.

Motivation level on a scale of 1-10: about a 5.

Boise State, on the other hand, had everything to gain: respect, an unbeaten season, national prominence and the reputation that goes with playing one of college football's storied powerhouses. Motivation level: 10-plus.

Guess who won.

In 1998, Kansas State swept through the regular season unbeaten. Ranked No. 2 in the nation by the Associated Press, the Wildcats were one game away from playing for a national title.

But they lost in double overtime to Texas A&M in the Big 12 championship game, and were then banished to the Alamo Bowl as a result.

Motivation level: Zero, and the one-time national title contenders lost to unranked Purdue in their bowl game.

There are similar examples every year -- and it's by no means easy to predict.

Former Colorado coach Eddie Crowder saw it work both ways when he was a coach.

In 1969, Crowder took his 7-3 Buffs to the Liberty Bowl to meet Alabama. His players at the time called the chance to play a program so steeped in tradition a "once in a lifetime opportunity."

In a missive to current coach Dan Hawkins, Crowder wrote, "The practices ... were the most focused and intense of any game preparation week in my 11 years of coaching the Buffs."

The Buffs then proceeded to deal Bear Bryant's Crimson Tide a 47-33 defeat, a game that vaulted CU into national prominence.

A year later, though, the Buffs were invited back to the Liberty Bowl. Several high-profile schools, including Florida, turned down invitations to Memphis. The Buffs instead played Tulane, and Crowder said the disappointment in his team was palpable.

"Our guys had no interest," Crowder said, and it was evident. Tulane won, 17-3, in perhaps CU's most-listless performance of the season.

Which brings us to this year's CU bowl game against Alabama.

On the surface, at least, Colorado should have no problem in the motivation department. A modestly successful season, a game against one of college football's storied programs and the chance for a winning record are on the table.

In short, it's the chance for the Buffs to continue to push the program in the right direction. There's plenty at stake from their end.

It is the Crimson Tide that will be a question mark.

A team that started out 6-2 was at one time ranked No. 17 in the nation after a 41-17 win over Tennessee. But then came four consecutive losses down the stretch, including a defeat at the hands of Louisiana-Monroe, followed by a bitter loss to rival Auburn.

Any way you draw it up, it's a disappointing season for the Crimson Tide. Throw in the fact that the seniors likely have little allegiance to first-year coach Nick Saban, plus the Tide players can't be happy about returning to Shreveport, La., for the second straight year, and you have to wonder how high the Tide will be.

Motivation factor? Good question.

It doesn't mean the Tide won't play lights out.

But it is something to consider.



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Longmont, Colorado
Wednesday, December 19,
2007

DAILY TIMES-CALL

Publish Date: 12/19/2007

Buffs back on solid ground

Following rough time, CU thrilled to play in Independence Bowl

*By Justin Williams
Longmont Times-Call*

BOULDER — This isn't your typical bowl game.

More often than not, college football's postseason is an afterthought. If you're not playing for a national championship, then it doesn't mean anything.

But after a recruiting scandal, a coach's firing and a 2-10 season marred Colorado's program, suffice to say Dec. 30's Independence Bowl against Alabama means just a little more to the Buffaloes.

"I think it does say something if you finish with a big win like this against a big program, especially with what we've been through," CU senior cornerback Terrence Wheatley said. "You just get say, 'You know what? We've been through all the crap. Now we won a big game, our last game, and you all can just take that and leave us alone.'"

This season has shown a different CU team, one that beat Oklahoma and then hung 61 points on Nebraska on its way to 6-6. It's a season that many hope defines a new perception of Buffs football.

"We've been, low, low and lower. ... low to the point where you don't if we're even going to have a program anymore," Wheatley said. "And now you see some of the highs we had this year, and it just shows that we're not going away."

"I definitely think that says something about the players, the program, the administration — everybody. It's something that should definitely be recognized instead of all the crap in the past. Look at what we are now and realize that we're still here despite all of it."

And the players recognize that a win over Alabama, a program reputed for its history and bowl success, will just further that notion.

"If we finish strong against Alabama, that's signs of a good program," junior defensive tackle George Hypolite said. "That's signs of a program moving in the right direction, and that's what we want to do. We've done a lot of good things this year — we just haven't been very consistent — and if we can come out with a consistent effort, that would be encouraging."

While it's important to the seniors to win their final college football game, senior Tyler Polumbus said it's also important to leave knowing CU is on the right track.

"This game is about a lot more than the seniors," the offensive lineman said. "It's about getting the Buffs back where they belong and setting the tone for next year."

"I want to win games, and I came to Colorado to win games. In retrospect, I probably didn't get to win as many as I hoped I would in my career here, but at the same time, I wouldn't trade any of it for the world. I want to set the tone for



Colorado senior Byron Ellis runs 28-yards for a touchdown against Nebraska on Nov. 23 in Boulder.

Richard M. Hackett / Times-Call file

where the Buffs need to be, and that's important for the seniors to be able to say, 'Hey, by the time we walked out this door, we left this program on solid ground.'"

CURIOUS GEORGE: While Hypolite said he will throw his name into the hat for NFL evaluation, the junior said he has no intentions of leaving college early.

"I'm just curious," Hypolite said. "I guess me evaluating the process and things like that, people buy into that a little too much. I love college; I love the University of Colorado. It's been a great university for me, and I've been allowed to flourish while I was here.

"I don't plan on leaving the University of Colorado until I'm ready to leave, and right now, I'm not ready to leave."

Hypolite went as far to say the only scenario he could picture himself leaving would be if he was guaranteed to be drafted No. 1 overall.

"And I don't think that's going to happen; I don't think I'm going anywhere," he said.

Hypolite — who has two partially torn tendons in his hamstring, yet plans to play against Alabama — said he will likely send in the paperwork to get evaluated by the NFL sometime this week. Head coach Dan Hawkins said no other junior has taken that step.