

denverpost.com

THE DENVER POST

cu football

CU's frosh linemen in spotlight

Big, new Buffs get down to business

By Tom Kensler
Denver Post Staff Writer

Article Last Updated: 08/07/2007 01:41:04 AM MDT

Boulder - Jeff Grimes' smile grew almost as wide as the thick shoulders of his eight freshman offensive linemen.

As Colorado's first-year offensive line coach, Grimes had better find several newcomers ready to take on Colorado State's defensive line in the Sept. 1 opener. During spring drills, Grimes had six healthy offensive linemen, just seven total on the roster before the newcomers arrived.

"I told all the freshmen that you better come in here planning on playing," Grimes said Monday after CU opened its preseason camp with a morning practice involving newcomers. "We'll have somewhere between two and four of them in the two-deep. And maybe even a couple starting."

Until recent years, conventional wisdom among college coaches was that all true freshman offensive linemen be redshirted. The feeling was that 18- or 19- year-olds would get pushed around because they weren't big or strong enough.

That's changed.

"The coaching, the strength training, and the amount

College Football 2007

- [Read](#) a preseason glance at Colorado, with returning starters and practice times
- [Glance](#) at the Buffaloes' 2007 football schedule for times and dates
- [View a slide show of CU's first practice Monday](#)
- [Read](#) a preseason glance at Colorado State, with returning starters and practice times
- [Glance](#) at the Rams' 2007 football schedule for times and dates
- [Read](#) a preseason glance at Air Force, with returning starters and practice times
- [Glance](#) at the Falcons' 2007 football schedule for times and dates

of combines and camps that these kids can go to - it all helps," head coach Dan Hawkins said. "You see a big difference in kids coming out of high school in just the last 10 years."

All of the Buffs' newcomers passed the eye test. The most ballyhooed of the bunch - Parade All-American Ryan Miller from Columbine - goes 6-feet-8 and 310 pounds. Another freshman offensive tackle, Sione Tau, is 6-6, 310.

Advertisement

Visit our 50,000 square foot showroom of New & Used Office Furniture



OfficeLiquidators.com
11111 W 6th Ave
Between Kipling & Simms

OFFICE LIQUIDATORS
Profit From Our Experience
303-759-3375

SHOWROOM COUPON
\$50 OFF
MARKED PRICE ON ITEMS TOTALING \$300 OR MORE

You must present this while visiting our showroom at time of purchase.
One per customer. Cannot be combined with other offers.
Expires 7-31-07

Print Powered By  **FormatDynamics™**

denverpost.com

THE DENVER POST

The tale of the tape for the eight: an average of 6-4 and 289 pounds. All but Tau, who is from Hawaii, have been in Boulder since June.

"Ryan Miller is a kid who has a lot of physical tools," Grimes said. "He's big. He moves his feet well. He plays very aggressive.

"But I'm reluctant to single out anybody too much. I really feel good about all of them."

Miller and Mike Iltis (6-3, 285) are among those who look ready to go. Miller can't recall the last time he wasn't the biggest kid in his class. He was 6-4, 250 as a high school sophomore, 6-6 and 260 as a junior.

Not one to rest on his reputation, Miller stayed after Monday's afternoon practice to run - "I'm probably 320 now and need to lose 10," he said - and get one-on-one instruction from Grimes.

Miller, who chose CU over Notre Dame, said he needs to work on his pass-protection technique.

"I have God-given size, but there is no way I'm ready to start right now," Miller said. "It felt good. Obviously things are going 90 miles an hour.

"In high school, you dominate. In college, you're back on that first level."

Iltis, who is from Sarasota, Fla., began working with a personal trainer in the seventh grade. Two years later, he started heavy power lifting to build muscle for football.

His personal bests in high school included a 380-

pound bench press and 525-pound squat.

"Our high school had a big weight room, so we were pretty lucky," said Iltis, who picked CU over Missouri, North Carolina State and Michigan State.

CU coaches hope the competition among the eight young offensive linemen will produce some internal synergy, which in turn could accelerate their learning curve.

Strength and size are important for a freshman blocker, but not the only thing.

"Now the key is, are they emotionally ready?" Grimes said. "Are they confident enough? Can they learn the system quickly enough to play a game in four weeks or not? We'll see."

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

 Print  Email  Return to Top  Share »

Advertisement

Visit our 50,000 square foot showroom of New & Used Office Furniture



OfficeLiquidators.com
11111 W 6th Ave
Between Kipling & Simms

OFFICE LIQUIDATORS
Profit From Our Experience
303-759-3375

SHOWROOM COUPON
\$50 OFF
MARKED PRICE ON ITEMS TOTALING \$300 OR MORE

You must present this while visiting our showroom at time of purchase.
One per customer. Cannot be combined with other offers.
Expires 7-31-07

Print Powered By  **FormatDynamics™**

denverpost.com

THE DENVER POST

college football

CU adds another QB to the fray

By Tom Kensler
Denver Post Staff Writer

Article Last Updated: 08/07/2007 02:53:27 PM
MDT

Boulder — Colorado may have some depth at the quarterback position after all.

Matt Ballenger, a 6-foot-5, 220-pound true freshman from Nampa, Idaho, flexed his strong right arm Tuesday morning and put on a show. He hit receivers with several deep passes and also completed difficult throws to the sideline outside the reach of defensive backs.

The plan remains to redshirt Ballenger this season. But he already shows signs of being able to step in and make plays as an emergency quarterback if something were to happen to Cody Hawkins and Nick Nelson.

"Matt looks real good, real good," said wideout Markques Simas, a true freshman who figures to make an impact this fall. "Yesterday (Monday) we were a little off on the timing but today we are lot smoother and he got the ball there."

CU coach Dan Hawkins has said Ballenger is a diamond in the rough and may need some time. In high school, Ballenger was known

College Football 2007

- [Read](#) a preseason glance at Colorado, with returning starters and practice times
- [Glance](#) at the Buffaloes' 2007 football schedule for times and dates
- [View a slide show of CU's first practice Monday](#)
- [Read](#) a preseason glance at Colorado State, with returning starters and practice times
- [Glance](#) at the Rams' 2007 football schedule for times and dates
- [Read](#) a preseason glance at Air Force, with returning starters and practice times
- [Glance](#) at the Falcons' 2007 football schedule for times and dates

more in high school for his basketball skills, having twice earned Idaho's two-time Gatorade player of the year award as a guard. For football, he was named the nation's No. 23 quarterback prospect by [Rivals.com](#).

Two of Ballenger's deep throws on Tuesday went to freshman speedster Josh Smith.

"I thought Ballenger did a great job today,"

Advertisement

Visit our 50,000 square foot showroom of New & Used Office Furniture



OfficeLiquidators.com
11111 W 6th Ave
Between Kipling & Simms

OFFICE LIQUIDATORS
Profit From Our Experience
303-759-3375

SHOWROOM COUPON
\$50 OFF
MARKED PRICE ON ITEMS TOTALING \$300 OR MORE

You must present this while visiting our showroom at time of purchase.
One per customer. Cannot be combined with other offers.
Expires 7-31-07

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™

denverpost.com

THE DENVER POST

Dan Hawkins said. "He threw some nice balls. He's very, very raw. But I think he will get better at an accelerated rate. He's got the size, the arm strength and the athletic ability and intelligence - all those things you want. He's got some poise. I like what he's done so far."

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

 Print  Email  Return to Top  Share »

Advertisement

Visit our 50,000 square foot showroom of New & Used Office Furniture



OfficeLiquidators.com
11111 W 6th Ave
Between Kipling & Simms

OFFICE LIQUIDATORS
Profit From Our Experience
303-759-3375

SHOWROOM COUPON
\$50 OFF
MARKED PRICE ON ITEMS TOTALING \$300 OR MORE

You must present this while visiting our showroom at time of purchase.
One per customer. Cannot be combined with other offers.
Expires 7-31-07

Print Powered By  **FormatDynamics™**

Rocky Mountain News

To print this page, select **File** then **Print** from your browser

URL: http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/ncaa/article/0,2777,DRMN_23932_5661935,00.html

Buffaloes find some catching up to do

Receiver auditions seek to cure past air sickness for CU

By B.G. Brooks, Rocky Mountain News
August 6, 2007

BOULDER - For a freshman on Day 1 of college football practice, even the basics - prepractice stretching, moving from drill to drill, etc. - have changed.

And not just a little.

"Organizationally, it's a little bit of chaos for them," University of Colorado passing coordinator Eric Kiesau said after alternately prodding and shepherding a handful of recruits through a two-hour introductory session Monday morning.

Nowadays, more is expected from college freshmen on almost every practice field.

But at CU, particularly from receivers coach Kiesau's position, the expectations are stratospheric. They have to be after the Buffaloes' struggles with air sickness for most of last season.

Kiesau is counting on incoming freshman wideouts Josh Smith, Kendrick Celestine and Markques Simas to ratchet up the overall competition and raise CU's passing game from the Division I-A depths (116th nationally in 2006).

All have received the same message, as have the veterans, from Kiesau: "All jobs are open. . . . I want the best guys to play, and if that's six freshmen, it'll be six freshmen. If it's six seniors, it'll be six seniors. If it's a mix, it'll be a mix."

Coaches can't watch summer seven-on-seven passing work, but news of playmakers spread quickly.

Celestine, a high school 100-meter prodigy (best time was 10.6 seconds), "was taking us to town," senior linebacker Jordon Dizon said. "His name's been passed by word of mouth; he's Mr. Kendrick now. For a lot of reasons, our offense is going to be night-and-day different."

But Celestine was a Day 1 no-show; he had trouble with airline connections leaving Mamou, La., and was expected to arrive Monday night.

The dreadlocked Smith, of Moorpark, Calif., also shone under the summer sun, while Simas, of San Diego, arrived for a three-week stint in June, then missed a portion of the seven-on-seven work for a July family trip. He returned to Boulder three days ago.

All three now are eager to hold Kiesau to his word.

"We were told, 'All positions are open - go out and fight for one,' " Smith said. "I feel right now I'm picking it up just as good as the other guys. The playing field is level, but I'm just trying to better the team each day."

Added Simas, who said his conditioning suffered because of the family trip: "I looked at the veteran guys and they're good. But I feel like if I work hard, learn the playbook and (coaches) see the talent, then I'll have the opportunity to play."

But until camp progresses, predicting a youth movement at wideout is premature. CU returns seven experienced players; no newcomer has even made the depth chart.



Photos By Evan Semon © News

Buffaloes tight end Joe Sanders loses control of the football after a momentary tug of his shorts by freshman free safety Travis Sandersfield during the first day of football practice Monday on the University of Colorado campus in Boulder.

Still, Kiesau is anxious to test the new blood.

"I'm excited to see those guys a week down the road when everything is in and they're more comfortable and not left so big-eyed by the seniors," he said. "But they've got a long way to go."

ETC.: Linebacker **Michael Sipili** said he "feels horrible" about the June brawling incident that led to his arrest and indefinite suspension. "I feel bad for my mistake. I let my team down," he said. Sipili has an Aug. 16 court date. . . . Freshman offensive lineman **Sione Tau** weighed in at 334 1/2 pounds. He hopes to play at about 320. . . . A morning class conflict put 6-foot-8, 320-pound freshman offensive lineman **Ryan Miller**, CU's highest profile recruit, in the afternoon session. . . . For depth purposes, coach **Dan Hawkins** said switching **Marcus Burton** from "will" to "mike" linebacker is a possibility. He said junior **R.J. Brown**, Sipili's replacement, is "tough and smart." . . . Receiver **Cameron Ham** suffered a cracked fibula during afternoon drills.

brooksb@RockyMountainNews.com or 303-954-5466

Copyright 2007, Rocky Mountain News. All Rights Reserved.



Let the battle resume: Nelson ready to give Cody Hawkins a run for starting QB spot

By Kyle Ringo
Tuesday, August 7, 2007

BLOG: [Kyle Ringo will be reporting the next few weeks from CU training camp on his blog. Read it here.](#)

Colorado coaches have a bona fide quarterback quandary on their hands.

At least that is what receivers catching passes from redshirt freshman Cody Hawkins and junior college transfer Nick Nelson said on the first day of fall practices following a summer of seven-on-seven drills.

When spring practices ended in mid-April it was clear Hawkins held an advantage over Nelson in the race to be the next starter in Boulder, but Nelson apparently closed the gap over the summer in the eyes of his teammates.

"This summer wasn't a cakewalk. It wasn't vacation time," wide receiver Patrick Williams said. "Nick was in there grinding. He was in his playbook. He would call me up and be like, 'Let's go throw.'"

"... I think he's definitely made up ground. Nick is a competitor. He's not going to sit back and watch somebody take it from him. If he's outright beat out, I think he'll be OK with that, but he's going to make it tough for Cody to start and I'm pretty sure Cody will make it tough for him to start, too."

Monday was the first day since the spring game that offensive coordinator Mark Helfrich and head coach Dan Hawkins were able to see the two quarterbacks competing side-by-side. They liked what they saw. Helfrich, who Dan Hawkins said will likely make the decision, said he also believes Nelson has made up ground on Cody Hawkins in terms of his mastery of the offense and his confidence on the field.

"I think mentally, he's ready to rock and I think Cody is the same way," Helfrich said. "So now, hopefully, this isn't a situation that sometimes can happen at this point in the deal where one or both of the guys are pressing."

"Those guys need to practice with confidence, and, hopefully, we will come out of this with two guys we feel can play for us."

Helfrich said it would be ideal to be able to select a starter two weeks ahead of the season opener against Colorado State on Sept. 1. If that holds true, the Buffs would have a starter in place after the first two weeks of camp or by about Aug. 20.

But Helfrich said he's not setting a deadline or holding any timelines over the heads of his quarterbacks. He said the players ultimately make the decision with how well they execute in practices.

Wide receiver Cody Crawford said he believes Nelson feels more comfortable in his surroundings than he did in spring practices, which began only two months after Nelson arrived from Saddleback College in California.

"Lately, Nick has come on real well here in the summer," Crawford said. "He has studied a lot. They've both put in a ton of work. Toward the end of the summer, they've both looked dead even to me honestly."

While most of the Buffs waffled between the two quarterbacks when asked which player was ahead in the race, tight end Riar Geer was brave enough not to straddle the fence. Of course he made it clear ahead of time that he likes both as players and people.

"They both know what they're doing, but right now I think Cody's kind of got an edge on the offense because he's been around football his whole life and he's a real smart guy and knows every play by heart," he said. "Nick is struggling because he hasn't been here as long as Cody and he hasn't had that experience that Cody has had with his dad and his previous team."



© 2006 Daily Camera and Boulder Publishing, LLC.



Pitman promotes CU power

Strength coach making major inroads with Buffs

By Kyle Ringo
Tuesday, August 7, 2007

BLOG: [Kyle Ringo will be reporting the next few weeks from CU training camp on his blog. Read it here.](#)

It only took Colorado football coach Dan Hawkins a few minutes in his first training camp meeting with the media Monday morning to grab every reporter's attention.

In discussing his team's strength and fitness levels at the outset of August practices, Hawkins casually mentioned that strength and conditioning coach Jeff Pitman had told him the 2007 Buffs were the strongest football team he has trained.

"That's a pretty huge turnaround," Hawkins said.

When Hawkins and his staff arrived in Boulder in January 2006, fewer than 15 Buffs could power clean 300 pounds. The power clean is a lift Pitman values most when gauging a player's overall strength.

At the start of camp Monday, 63 Buffs had conquered 300 pounds and dramatic progress had been made in every other area of the strength program.

"It's kind of exciting in years to come what is going to happen in this deal," Pitman said.

Pitman said the lack of strength he found in CU players when he followed Hawkins to Boulder in the spring of 2006 was a huge problem when competing on the field last fall as the Buffs went 2-10.

"From the first day I got here to the last game, it was a problem," he said. "Strengthwise, conditioningwise, toughnesswise the whole deal."

Pitman has earned a reputation among players for setting high standards and getting the Buffs to meet them through brutal workouts. His no-nonsense approach was not completely embraced last season, especially by some members of the senior class.

But as time as wore on, more and more players have come to love Pitman's style and the results it produces.

"We're not there yet because we're young as a program in this regime and we've got young kids," Pitman said. "But I feel confident that we can go into any game, no matter who we play, and I feel that we can compete physically with them, which we couldn't do last year in a lot of cases."

Sipili regrets brawling

Buff linebacker Michael Sipili, who has been suspended indefinitely after his involvement in a June fracas, is still being allowed to practice with the team.

Also still being allowed to practice are defensive linemen Chris Perri and Taj Kaynor, who have been suspended for three games and one game, respectively. Perri and Kaynor were involved in a separate incident earlier this year, and Perri was also involved in the incident that resulted in Sipili's arrest.

Sipili, who was listed as the Buffs' starter at the "Mike" spot, told reporters after Monday's practice that he felt "horrible" about the incident.

"I feel like I let down the team, the coaches, the school," Sipili said. "But I have to deal with this. I thank the coaches for giving me this opportunity to keep practicing, and I'll deal with it."

Sipili was arrested last Wednesday on suspicion of second-degree assault and criminal mischief.

"It's something that should have never happened," Sipili said. "It's definitely been a learning experience. I should have never put myself in this position."

Still the champ

Senior cornerback Terrence Wheatley said he remains the fastest player on the team despite the addition of some speedy freshmen this fall.

Wheatley, who has been clocked running a 4.2-second 40-yard dash, said after competing against his new teammates during the summer that he isn't worried about losing the title.

Wheatley is on the preseason watch list for the Thorpe Award, given annually to the nation's best defensive back. Fellow defensive back Joel Adams said he will be surprised if opponents choose to throw in Wheatley's direction much in 2007.

Adams said Wheatley showed up to a seven-on-seven competition this summer against the Wyoming football team in Fort Collins and made quick work of the Cowboys.

Wheatley made an interception and caught a touchdown pass as a wide receiver, burning a player the Cowboys were touting as the fastest man on the field. Wheatley then took off his cleats and left, feeling he had nothing left to prove.

"It was the most Hollywood thing I've ever seen," Adams said, giving his teammate a hard time.

Bad break

Redshirt freshman wide receiver Cameron Ham suffered a broken fibula in his right leg about halfway through the evening practice Monday and will likely miss the rest of camp and the first few games of the season.

Ham, who joined the program a year ago as an invited walk-on, was the only player to suffer a significant injury on the first day of drills.

The Daily Hawkism

Hawkins was asked Monday if he sees fewer jitters from younger players on the first day of camp than he might have six or seven years ago. "Definitely," he said. "They have a better feel for what's going on. They're acclimatized. I think ... they have no idea how much they run and then the intensity at which you need them to run at this level every time."

Notable

True freshman wide receiver Kendrick Celestine missed his plane Sunday on his way back to Boulder from his home in Mamou, La., and was not back in camp Monday. He is expected to be on the field today. ... Offensive lineman Erick Faatagi and wide receiver Alvin Barnett did not participate on the first day of drills because they are focusing on academics, Hawkins said. ... Linebacker Jordon Dizon won an informal golf tournament organized by players recently to determine the best player on the team. Dizon shot a 78 on the Knolls course at Riverdale in Brighton. He beat Adams by one stroke. ... Jashon Sykes will remain in his job as assistant director of on-campus recruiting after completing an internship this summer with the Denver Broncos. Sykes said he interned in Denver to build his knowledge of the game. He hopes to be a coach one day.

Neill Woelk contributed to this report



© 2006 Daily Camera and Boulder Publishing, LLC.