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Longmont, Colorado
Friday, August 10, 2007



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Buffs OK with messaging ban

NCAA declines to make changes to previous ruling

*By Patrick Ridgell
The Daily Times-Call*

BOULDER — You know all of those hopes so many college football coaches harbored for a change to the text message ban?

Well forget about it — at least for now.

The NCAA's Board of Directors decided Thursday not to change the ban, which prohibits coaches from text-messaging recruits, because an acceptable proposal for change has yet to be presented. It will consider future proposals at the NCAA Convention in January.

The ban stemmed from the complaints of recruits, who said they were overwhelmed by abundant text messages. University of Colorado head coach Dan Hawkins used text messages extensively to build his 2007 class, and many of his freshmen say it wasn't that big a deal.

Hawkins' reaction upon hearing the news late Thursday afternoon suggested he didn't expect a change.

"If the boss says no, it means no, I guess," he said.

Hawkins said he doubts the ban will have its intended effect.

He said coaches will now simply send e-mails, and recruits who can afford it will simply set up their phones to receive them.

But there will be a downside to that.

"Now the kid that can't afford to get e-mail on his phone, he's going to get shortchanged," Hawkins said.

Hawkins said he expects coaches will eventually sit down and rationalize their way to a proposal the Board will like.

But to fight the spread of technology, Hawkins said, makes little sense.

"I keep saying it's like 'Jurassic Park' when the guy's saying 'You can't stop nature,'" Hawkins said.

"To some degree you can't stop technology. To me, if you want to ban text messaging, ban phone calls."

It was inevitable: Hawkins referred Thursday to the three freshmen wide receivers — Kendrick Celestine, Markques Simas and Josh Smith — as the "Three Amigos."

"The Three Amigos definitely, I think, have a chance to get in the mix," Hawkins said. "I think there are some other guys there, as well."

“Physically, the three young guys are really doing a nice job as they continue to learn the package and get all the nuances down. It'll be nice to get them in with the older guys because the older guys have a better grasp on a few of the details.”

Will that nickname stick? Hawkins said he was just joking.

Extra points: Hawkins said he has “no idea” who'll comprise CU's starting offensive line. Keenan Stevens and Erick Faatagi remain out of camp to focus on school, leaving only five players practicing who went through spring ball. Stevens and Faatagi benefit from missing only one practice a day. Starting Saturday, the whole squad will have two daily sessions. ... Others who've missed practice time due to school include receiver Alvin Barnett and Bernard Jackson. Today marks the end of the summer “B” session, and if they've finished finals, they can practice this afternoon, when the team holds its first full workout at 4 p.m. ... Linebacker R.J. Brown, who has thrived on special teams, toppled two Buffs over backward, head over heels, Thursday morning as he ran down the field on a kick cover drill. ... Hawkins had his players lie on the ground and visualize success after the morning practice.

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DAILY TIMES-CALL

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Buff eye big returns

Rule change will result in more opportunities

By Patrick Ridgell
The Daily Times-Call

BOULDER — Kickoffs in 2007 will take place from the 30, five yards behind where they've been in recent years, and that's just fine with the Colorado Buffaloes.

"I think it'll make for an exciting game," special teams coordinator Kent Riddle said. "We'll see a lot more open field plays, give the skill guys a chance to get out in the open field and make something happen. There'll be fewer touchbacks, and then nothing happens. I'm real excited about it.

Said running back Hugh Charles: "I love it."

Most share Charles' sentiment.

Had the rule been enacted a year ago, when CU still had the powerful leg of Mason Crosby, the Buffs might have a little more to be excited about.

How well Crosby's successor, Kevin Eberhart, fares from the 30 is to be determined. But few kickers are expected to reach the end zone with much consistency. Touchbacks, coaches say, will drop drastically. Returns, one of the game's most exciting plays, will take place with more frequency in 2007.

CU head coach said Dan Hawkins said the old goal was to keep opponents from returning kickoffs past the 20. He said in the NFL, which also kicks from the 30, the average starting spot is the 33 or 34. In college football this year, he thinks it'll be about the 35.

Many of the best athletes, starters or not, will have to cover kicks.

"There's going to be more importance in getting all the fastest people on that team," Hawkins said.

If there is a drawback, it's the chance of an increase in injuries sustained on one of the game's most violent plays. Shortly after the NCAA announced the rule change last spring, Oklahoma coach Bob Stoops said, "I think it's great, but you worry about more opportunity for injury because those are high-impact plays."

Many teams will put more starters on return and coverage units, and there are high-profile examples of stars suffering injuries in such scenarios.

Former New York Giants cornerback Jason Sehorn was one of the NFL's best cornerbacks before he tore an ACL returning a kick in a preseason game in 1999.

The Buffs say they don't want to hear it.

"You can hurt doing anything on a ball field," running back Byron Ellis said. "You just try to get your best players on



The speed of CU senior cornerback Terrence Wheatley could be put to use on kick returns this season.

Times-Call file photo

the field to get the job done, no matter what.”

CU lists Charles and Ellis as its top two returners on the preseason depth chart. Stephone Robinson returned more kicks than any Buff in 2006, but he said he doesn’t expect to handle the duties in 2007.

Terrence Wheatley definitely wants a shot. Hawkins said CU wants to be creative with Wheatley and mentioned the possibility of using him as a returner.

“When you have that kind of speed, you want to try to utilize it a little bit,” Hawkins said. “He’s fast.”

Wheatley returned one last year, but had 16 in 2004, including one that went 59 yards.

Wheatley and Charles are two of the fastest Buffs, and they could pose a pick-your-poison dilemma for opponents. Riddle declined Thursday to name who would return kicks, saying there are few guys to choose from and “we’ll see how that shakes out.”

He did acknowledge Wheatley would be “pretty good at it.”

Wheatley, who’s healthy after undergoing his fourth wrist surgery since last November, and sounds like he might stump for the chance.

“I did it my sophomore year and did it pretty well, I think, considering I was running for my life half the time,” Wheatley said. “I wouldn’t mind doing it. I’m back there catching punts, too.

“I’d love to see me and Hugh back there because, you know, whichever way you kick it, you’re probably wrong. ... I’d love to do it if they give me a chance, but it’s not up to me.”

Patrick Ridgell can be reached at pridgell@times-call.com



Veterans welcome competition

CU receivers expect challenge from freshmen

By Ryan Thorburn
Friday, August 10, 2007

Colorado's veteran wide receivers have been reading and hearing all about their freshmen challengers and even watching film of their morning practice sessions to see how the new kids are progressing.

Challenge accepted when the newcomers and veterans take the field together today for the Buffs' first combined team practice in full pads.

"I like that the freshmen have come in and they're making their presence felt," said junior Patrick Williams, who is currently penciled in as the starter at the 'X' receiver spot. "We need to have a good competition at our position."

At this point the Buffs are tired of reading and hearing about their 2006 statistics — the 2-10 record, the 116th-ranked passing offense (118.5 yards per game), the 107th-ranked scoring offense (16.3 points per game).

Alvin Barnett, who has been sitting out of practices this week to focus on summer school, is the returning player who had the most production last season. That would be a meager 21 catches for 232 yards and one touchdown.

Williams had 19 catches for 242 yards and one touchdown. Cody Crawford had 15 catches for 222 yards and no touchdowns.

And Dusty Sprague — who was the first sophomore to lead the team in receptions since Michael Westbrook with 46 during the 2005 campaign — finished with just 11 catches for 179 yards and no touchdowns last year.

The feeling during CU's two-a-days is that it's time for the established wide receivers — no matter who is named quarterback — to put up some better numbers or get ready to head to the sideline.

"You've just got to control what you can control and play hard," Sprague said when asked what he takes away from last season's struggles.

Obviously, Dan Hawkins' decision to throw Bernard Jackson — who was third on the depth chart at this time last year — into the starting lineup after the season-opening loss to Montana State made it an uphill march for the offense. The talented, but inexperienced signal-caller completed only 49.3 percent of his passes and finished with seven touchdowns and seven interceptions.

Now Jackson is one of the seniors hoping to contribute as a receiver. He will also be in the mix as a kick

returner and possibly even under center in some situations.

"It was a tough situation for Bernard to be in," Williams said. "I feel that Bernard has so much talent and it was almost a thinking game for him. He was worried about messing up, I feel like. Bernard is one of the most explosive, if not the most explosive, players on offense that we have. I'm glad they're going to use him everywhere."

The Buffs promise they're going to be a more aggressive offense this fall. Hawkins would like to establish a smash-mouth ground game so he can call more of the brilliant vertical passing plays the nation saw Boise State executing under pressure in its Fiesta Bowl victory over Oklahoma.

"My ideal offense is you pound it, you have a physical running game, and you launch it," the second-year CU head coach said. "I think it adds to the mentality of your team that you're going to be on the attack and you're not going to sit back."

Despite the upgrade in talent and competition at wide receiver — freshmen Josh Smith, Scotty McKnight, Markques Simas and Kendrick Celestine all look promising so far — the Buffs are going to open the 2007 season with a quarterback who has not taken a snap at this level.

Redshirt freshman Cody Hawkins and junior-college transfer Nick Nelson are competing for the starting spot during camp. Dan Hawkins said he probably won't name the starter until the week of the Colorado State game, which will be played on Sept. 1 at Invesco Field.

"Time will tell," Sprague said when asked about the possibility of enduring more on-the-job growing pains from the quarterback position. "Both these guys have been around football a lot. Cody grew up with it and Nick has been at a Juco already, I think that's going to help out. September 1st will tell, right? We'll see once they get out there against CSU."

It will be just as interesting to see which players stay in the game at wide receiver.

"If I'm not the one who is going to be making the play, if Dusty's not going to be the one making the play, then let Josh come in and make it, let Kendrick and Markques come in and do their thing," Williams said. "I want our team to be successful. Of course I want to be out there helping. But if I'm out there and we're not moving like we should be, then let the best man come out there and play."



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Hawkins against continued text ban

By Ryan Thorburn

Friday, August 10, 2007

CU L8R?

The news spread quickly to the Colorado practice fields on Thursday evening — perhaps even via some text messages — that the NCAA's board of directors took no action toward overriding the text messaging ban between coaches and potential recruits it approved in April.

The issue will be brought back to the membership for another vote at January's annual NCAA convention, which means the rule that went into effect Aug. 1 will remain in place.

At least 30 schools must request an appeal in writing to force the committee to reconsider. It sounds like CU will be one of those schools if head coach Dan Hawkins has a say in it.

"It's like Jurassic Park when the guy says you can't stop nature. To some degree you can't stop technology," Hawkins said after the Buffs' second practice session ended. "To me, if you want to ban text messaging, ban phone calls."

The NCAA is considering other proposals, including the possibility of allowing coaches to text message recruits after they have signed a national letter-of-intent.

Hawkins believes there will be ways for some coaches and high school players to get around the ruling, which will make the recruiting trail even tougher to navigate for some.

"Now kids are all going to get their phone to where they can get e-mail on the phone. So guys are going to send something to their e-mail so they can get the e-mail on the phone," Hawkins said. "So now the kid that can't afford to get e-mail off his phone, he's going to get short-changed."

Hitting the books

Four key players — wide receiver Alvin Barnett, quarterback/wide receiver/kick returner Bernard Jackson and offensive linemen Erick Faatagi and Keenan Stevens — were still absent from the practice fields on Thursday as they continued to focus on classroom work.

The summer school sessions at CU finish today with final exams, which means the above could be in pads with their teammates this afternoon if everything goes well.

"There's always danger. There's danger even with guys that are even out here practicing," Hawkins said when asked if any of the missing players could become academically ineligible. "That's the issue you face a little bit when you have summer school during the first week of camp. It just so happens those guys are taking more classes than everybody else. That's why we're putting more emphasis on those guys going to school. So they have to."

Faatagi appeared to be well on his way to cracking the starting lineup. When asked if missing practices was hurting the junior-college transfer's status, the head coach responded — "It's obviously not helping."

Life's a beach

Hawkins gave Nick Nelson some advice that seems to be paying off for the Mission Viejo, Calif., product in his competition with Cody Hawkins for the starting quarterback job.

"In the spring he was just pressing so hard, particularly the first two weeks," Hawkins said. "I said, 'Hey, Nick go home over break and lay on the beach and relax and just play. Nobody's deciding anything out here, just play.'"

"And he was better the last two weeks of spring ball, and I think the whole summer he's just much more comfortable with the guys."

Dan Hawkins doesn't plan on making a final decision at quarterback until just before the opener against Colorado State. But with either Nelson or his son under center, the position appears to be in better hands than it was in 2006.

Fair game

Nelson took a good hit while running with the ball on Thursday. The CU quarterbacks are not wearing different colored jerseys during camp to designate them off limits from contact, but there is supposed to be an understanding during live drills that they are not to be subjected to hits behind the line of scrimmage.

"Maybe I'm just old school. I don't know if we have to put, whatever, a yellow jersey on them," Dan Hawkins said.

The Daily Hawkism

Dan Hawkins affectionately called his crop of talented freshmen receivers the "Three Amigos" on Thursday, a throwback nickname Denver Broncos fans are familiar with.

One reporter joked that it's better than the "Three Stooges."

"That would be me and two other guys," Hawkins said. "I'd be Moe I guess."

Notable

The Buffs will only have one practice today beginning at 4 p.m., but it will be the first combined session with the entire team and it will also be the first in full pads. ... The best hit of the day was offensive lineman Ethan Adkins knocking defensive end Marquez Herrod to the ground during a two-on-two blocking session. At least until the next period when Herrod got his revenge by bull-rushing the freshman into the grass. ... A light but steady rain cooled off the second practice and helped the defense force two turnovers, including a nice interception of a Nelson offering by safety Lionel Harris.



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Young Giants

By Jeff Graham Colorado Daily Staff Writer
Thursday, August 9, 2007 9:38 PM MDT

Attending just one Colorado football practice, one is often likely to eavesdrop on many conversations and opinions exchanged between anxious fans ready for a new football season. Take Thursday for example.

Standing and watching light 11-on-11 workouts, one bystander turned to another and said, "I will tell you one thing, it's good to see some big bodies out there."

Two of those biggest bodies happen to be freshmen offensive linemen, Ryan Miller and Sione Tau. At 6'8", 320 pounds and 6'8", 310 pounds respectively, Miller and Tau are the two biggest players listed on CU's roster. They also happen to be just two of eight incoming freshman that offensive line coach Jeff Grimes expects to be in the mix come the start of the season.

For an offensive line that had just a handful of able bodies in the spring, the addition of these newcomers is a welcome sight for Buff fans and coaches alike. Added with the lack of returning experience, both Grimes and Hawkins have made it clear to these athletes that playing time is a possibility for them all and expect many to compete for starting positions.

"Normally, your bringing those guys in and letting them sit in the back and learn from the older guys, we're not in that position, we're in a position where were saying 'hey get right up here and do it,'" Grimes said.

Being less than a week into an extensive fall camp, Grimes said he is getting about what he expected from his young players and hopes to see things start to sort themselves out by the middle of next week.

"They are the right kind of guys in that they are willing and competitive and eager and they all want to play because we've told them, 'come in and we need lineman so we are expecting you to come in and compete for a job,'" Grimes said.

Learning how to work at the college level and figuring out the intricacies of a new playbook are just a handful of the obstacles standing in the way for these young Buffs, but as far as the coaches are concerned they expect them to be ready.

"We have put all of our offense in really fast, we've got 80 to 90 percent of our offense in four days and their heads are spinning right now and they are not caught up to speed in terms of knowing what to do which means we are not seeing what they are fully capable of. But I think we will see more of that in a about a week to ten days."

Miller, a highly recruited lineman from Columbine High School in Littleton is expected to be one of those players breaking into a starting role, but at what position remains unclear. This first week Miller has seen time at both the tackle and guard positions and said where he ends up is not of his concern right now.

"You know, no and that doesn't bother me right now," Miller said. "If I am ready to play I am ready to play. I am going to work my butt off so I can play."

Returning lineman with significant game experience include, junior Daniel Sanders, seniors Edwin Harrison and Tyler Polumbus; all of which coach Grimes has said have a had a positive impact on their younger counter parts.

"I would say the older guys are doing a nice job in terms of leadership right now, they are showing the young guys how to work," Grimes said.

From helping them find their way through the halls of Dal Ward to positioning tips on the field, both Tau and Miller welcome the added support of guys who have the experience.

"All those guys are just taking the young guys under their wing. They are looking down and they are bringing us up; big brother is watching out for us," Miller said.

Tau, a transplant from Honolulu, Hawaii has had to quickly adapt to the thin air of Colorado, but said so far things have gone surprisingly well. As is the case for most freshmen, catching up to the speed of the college game is the biggest change and is no different for this young giant.

"Tell you the truth I thought I was going to pass out the first day of practice, but I think I did pretty good," Tau said. "Tempo, is the main difference, tempo. It's like bam, bam, bam it's so fast and you have to think on your feet."

Things will only continue to get more difficult as camp goes along for Miller and Tau. Starting Friday both newcomers and returning players will be combined and full pads will be donned. With the first scrimmage scheduled for Sunday, both seem to be ready.

"Bring it on let's go, let's knock some heads. Let's go to war," Miller said.

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cu football

Freshman corner Wright flashes ability

Hawkins has hope for first-year DBs

By Tom Kensler Denver Post Staff Writer

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Boulder - Preseason camp is less than a week old for Colorado, and the newcomers don't go against the veterans until this afternoon. But freshman cornerback Anthony Wright hasn't wasted any time in making an impression.

Wright, a 6-foot, 185-pounder from Compton, Calif., batted away several well-thrown passes during Thursday's morning session. He displayed enough speed to hang with the fleet freshman receivers that have been the talk of camp.

"It felt good," Wright said after the two-hour practice. "I've been studying my playbook to get better. Before I had a little trouble with some of the calls."

Wright comes from excellent bloodlines. His cousin Mike Richardson was a starting cornerback on the 1985 Super Bowl champion Chicago Bears and played seven NFL seasons.

But what jumped out at CU secondary coach Greg Brown was Wright's production on offense. In his past two seasons at Compton High School, Wright combined for 2,188 yards rushing and 15 touchdowns.

"Anthony brings some good things to the table," Brown said. "The guy has ball skills; he made big plays in high school on offense. That's something you like to see (in recruiting). When you look for defensive backs in high school, it's hard to even catch them on film."

"So one of the things you look for is, 'Is he productive on offense? Does he have vision, can he outrun angles?' If somebody has an angle on him and he can outrun them, then you know he's got legitimate speed."

Wright's pass breakups on Thursday did not go unnoticed by head coach Dan Hawkins, who also saw solid play from other freshman corners. Hawkins is looking for more depth at the position.

"He's doing a nice job," Hawkins said of Wright. "(Northglenn alum) Anthony Perkins is showing up. Lamont (Smith) has really quick feet. I definitely think there's some talent there with the freshmen, some guys with a chance to contribute."

Wright said he felt a bit sheepish about the attention he received Thursday. Players don't go in full pads until this afternoon's first combined practice with the newcomers and

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veterans.

"Tomorrow I go against the older dudes, so we'll really see what I've got," Wright said.

Footnotes

Hawkins must really be impressed with freshman wideouts Kendrick Celestine, Markques Simas and Josh Smith. The coach referred to them Thursday as "The Three Amigos." Hawkins joked it's not yet an official nickname, but certainly one that would resonate with area fans because of the Broncos' Three Amigos (Vance Johnson, Mark Jackson and Ricky Nattiel) from the 1980s. ... Wright's cousin Richardson was one of 10 Chicago Bears to have speaking roles in the "Super Bowl Shuffle" video, and CU linebackers coach Brian Cabral also was on that Super Bowl team. ... Perkins is a grandson of former Dallas Cowboys star running back Don Perkins.

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

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NCAA

Ruling against text messages not destined to be last word

By Tom Kensler
Denver Post Staff Writer

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MDT

Colorado football coach Dan Hawkins spoke out Thursday against the NCAA's decision to uphold a ruling banning coaches from using text messages in their contact with recruits.

The NCAA board of directors decided not to overrule a text- messaging ban it approved in April. Instead, the board sent the ruling back to its membership for another vote at January's annual NCAA convention. In the meantime, the rule banning text messages, which went into effect Aug. 1, will remain in place.

"If the boss says 'no,' it means no," Hawkins said. When asked if he was upset about the ruling, Hawkins said: "I'm not necessarily surprised. ... But the reality is, it's the same as phone calls. Once you sit down and discuss the rationale, I think it will be a little more feasible."

Hawkins also pointed to a financial disparity in the text-messaging ban.

"What I don't like is, you have people with money and they're all going to get their phone to have e-mail, and that's legal. So coaches are going to send something to their e-mail on their phone.

"Now the kid who can't afford to get e-mail off his phone is going to get shortchanged."

Hawkins, a proponent of text messaging, has likely used that vehicle as much as any coach to keep in contact with recruits.

"I keep saying, it's like 'Jurassic Park,' when the guy says you can't stop nature," Hawkins said. "To some degree, you can't stop technology. To me, if you want to ban text messaging, ban phone calls."

At least 30 schools must request an appeal in writing to force the committee to reconsider the ban.

It takes a simple majority to overturn the ruling, but the committee took no vote and sent it to the full membership.

There is precedent for overturning board rulings at the convention. It has happened twice since 2006, when the NCAA adopted a new appeals process. But schools also voted four times not to change the rules.

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When the ban was approved in April, the board uncharacteristically indicated it was willing to reconsider the issue, possibly next year.

Many football coaches and assistant basketball coaches balked at the original decision.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

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