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Line in state of flux

Demanding Grimes seeking best combo up front for Buffs

By Patrick Ridgell
Longmont Times-Call

BOULDER — Jeff Grimes doesn't want any of his offensive linemen getting too comfortable.

With that in mind, Colorado's offensive line coach makes his guys earn their starting spots every week. That explains some of the changes he's enacted in recent weeks. It also serves notice the situation remains in flux and more change is possible.

"I want those guys to always feel like they have to earn their job every week," Grimes said. "As a player, I remember I didn't want to feel that way. I wanted to feel like the job was mine.

"But at the same time, the best thing is for those guys to realize they have to earn their job every week. It makes them all better."

Said center Daniel Sanders: "Everybody understands, as coach Grimes always tells us, the best five play, whether we like it or not. ... There's always that other guy right behind you who's getting better at the same things and trying to progress to where you are."

Grimes started the same five through the season's first four weeks. But over the past three, he has replaced both starting guards, moved a starting tackle to right guard and inserted another tackle. Entering Saturday's game with No. 15 Kansas, CU lists Sanders, guards Kai Maiava and Edwin Harrison, and tackles Ryan Miller and Tyler Polumbus as starters.

Grimes put two true freshmen in the lineup. One of them, Maiava, told Grimes in August he'd start, and when he didn't, the coach had to help him deal with the frustration.

The other one, Miller, came to CU from a high school program that virtually never passed. Grimes figured it'd take about half the year until Miller's pass blocking would evolve enough for him to start. That's what happened. Then, in that seventh game, CU fell far behind, and Miller dealt with the first speed rush off the edge he's seen.

And Grimes has asked a fifth-year senior to change positions in midseason. Harrison not only told the coach he didn't mind making the switch; he said he just wanted to do what's best for the team.

Is this much change unusual? Not really, Grimes said.

"I've had similar things happen," he said. "Given the youth in our offensive line, it hasn't surprised me. I felt like all along, we'd be able to create some competition, which has made all of them better."

In addition to improvement, Grimes seeks versatility. Six freshman offensive linemen are redshirting. Combined with last winter's defections, that has robbed CU of the numbers up front to suit most coaches. So part of making do is knowing more than one position.



University of Colorado fifth-year senior Edwin Harrison, left, chats with quarterback Cody Hawkins during the Buffs' season opener against Colorado State on Sept. 1. Harrison has made the switch from tackle to guard. **Lewis**

Geyer/Times-Call

"I don't know if you guys know, but they get tested on every position on the offensive line," quarterback Cody Hawkins said. "It isn't just their position; it is every single position on the offensive line, so every guy within one week could step in at any position on the offensive line. I think the guys are tough and smart and they're getting coached up. They are doing everything that we ask of them, and I think it's great that the guys can bounce around like that."

But challenges remain. Harrison is boosting his stock in the eyes of NFL scouts by showing he can play another position. But when the Buffs had to pass last Saturday night, and everyone in the state of Kansas knew it, pass blocking was a problem for everyone. Harrison said he's breaking old habits and getting used to pass blocking for depth, not width.

"I'm trying to get some minor things cleaned up," he said.

Chances are CU will find itself in a similar boat again in 2007. Grimes hope his linemen will be better for it.

"As the game went on, we got into a situation where we were going to throw it and everyone knew we were going to throw it. That's when pass blocking is hardest," Grimes said. "Now you don't have the advantage of a defense not knowing what you're doing. We showed our inexperience a little bit there."

"Some guys learned a couple of lessons, and I think we'll be better for it. I told them there are going to be times to win games this year when we have to throw and everybody knows we're going throw, and we have to get it done."

Extra points: CU's injury list includes several players listed as probable. It includes Harrison (knee), corner Ben Burney (shoulder), punt returner Chase McBride (shoulder), safety Ryan Walters (shoulder) and tailback Kevin Moyd (hamstring). Head coach Dan Hawkins said he expects them to play Saturday. Linebacker R.J. Brown (concussion) remains out.

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interview - buffs cornerback terrence wheatley

Wheatley expects early call from NFL

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

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Wheatley returned an interception 35 yards for a TD against Arizona State. (Post / Hyoung Chang)

A preseason all-Big 12 Conference selection, Colorado senior cornerback Terrence Wheatley is completing a remarkable career for the Buffaloes. With 11 interceptions, including two this season, he is tied for sixth on the school's all-time list. CU coach Dan Hawkins believes Wheatley, a 5-foot-10, 185-pounder, will become a successful NFL player.

"When pro scouts come by, I just jump on the table for that guy," Hawkins said. "He is a special player."

Wheatley sat down for a Q&A with The Post's Tom Kensler.

Q: Was football your first love?

A: No, I played about everything except football. It wasn't until we moved to Texas that I went out for it. My dad worked for Nortel, so we got relocated quite a bit. I was born in California and lived in North Carolina before we moved to the Dallas suburbs. I didn't start playing football until the sixth grade, and I hated it at first. I started out as a running back and hated getting hit. By the time I was in eighth grade, I was better than everybody because I was bigger and faster. It's weird, but I was almost done growing by the time I was in eighth grade. I always wanted to try football, and in Plano, Texas, there is a lot of peer pressure to do that.

Q: You've had four wrist surgeries. Is that a concern?

A: No, except I still set off the alarm at airports because of the metal plate that's in there. I carry a medical form, but it still takes some explaining.

Q: Football is definitely king in the Lone Star State, right?

A: In Plano, football is all that everybody talks about. My high school stadium held about 15,000 fans. That gives you an idea. It definitely helped me prepare for college. When I came here, this is a bigger scale. But not by much.

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Q: In high school, you ran the 100 meters in 10.15. Did you consider a career in track?

A: I thought about it a lot, actually. I still wonder sometimes how fast I could have gone. My track coach in high school was the defensive line coach on the football team. So with some good coaching later on, who knows? In high school, track seemed like a waste of time. I hardly ever lost.

Q: Running that fast as a teen might have put you on course to post Olympic-quality times as you matured.

A: For some reason, I just didn't pursue track in college. My mom and dad both ran track at Arizona State. I just preferred football.

Q: Were your parents college sweethearts?

A: They knew each other long before that. They are from the Virgin Islands. It's a pretty small island where everybody knows everybody. You can have a car, but you'll never use it.

Q: Any hobbies outside of sports?

A: I'm actually a weather nerd. I watch The Weather Channel religiously. The thing I like about weather is it changes every day. It's never the same. I'm an economics major, which is interesting. But the economy is not undergoing any drastic changes right now. I've always liked studying the weather. When I was a little kid, I had a little weather station outside. I'd check it every day to see if it rained. And

I had a telescope as a little kid. Even now, I can look at the sky and pick out all the constellations.

Q: What are you hearing about your draft potential?

A: I'm hearing a lot of things, but mostly that I'll definitely be a first-day guy - probably in the second round, which is exciting.

Wheatley's Top 5

CU's cornerback lists his favorite TV shows of all time

1. "Family Guy"
2. "Rescue 911"
3. Anything on The Weather Channel
4. "The Jetsons"
5. "The Flintstones"

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cu football

Maiava, Miller holding the line

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

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BOULDER — If ever there was a perfect example of how football recruiting is an inexact endeavor, freshman Colorado lineman Kai Maiava could be Exhibit A.

There are always hits, misses and surprises in recruiting.

Ryan Miller, a 6-foot-7, 320-pound tackle, was the given for CU. He earned consensus high school All-America honors last fall at Columbine and was listed on every national top-100 list. The five-star tackle turned down Notre Dame and Southern Cal, becoming the plum of coach Dan Hawkins' second recruiting class. He's already starting on the offensive line.

Maiava? Don't bother to look down any past blue-chip lists. You won't find him.

Squatty for his position, the 6-foot,



Offensive lineman Kai Maiava earned his first start of the year against Oklahoma. The freshman uses his leverage to his advantage against taller defensive linemen. (Special / Nathan W. Armes)

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295-pound guard from Maui, Hawaii, received only a two-star rating from Internet recruiting sites. He was set to pick New Mexico State over Idaho and Idaho State until Colorado called during the night before national signing day in February. After Garth Gerhart, a three-star lineman from Norco, Calif., backed out of his oral commitment to the Buffaloes at the last second for Arizona State, CU gave Maiava a call.

Rated the lowest among the eight offensive linemen signed last winter by Hawkins, Maiava became the first to start.

"That's interesting, isn't it?" CU offensive line coach Jeff Grimes said. "Those two guys get things done in different ways. If you look

at them, you've got two totally different ends of the spectrum - in body type and the way that they move. Kai is a short, powerful, really quick guy. Ryan is a big, long strider with good feet.

"They bring a certain element of toughness and aggression. And they've got physical skills. They just needed a chance to get in there. They're doing great."

Maiava made his first start in the upset victory over Oklahoma. Miller earned his first start two games later, last weekend in the loss at Kansas State. CU is redshirting its other six true freshman offensive linemen.

"Me and Ryan are getting there," Maiava said. "We always tease each other about who is going to be the best. We're just trying to make each other better."

Miller said: "I love that guy. He plays with heart. He's a 'Hawaiian fury.'"

Both figure to get a stern test Saturday against No. 15 Kansas, which ranks fourth nationally in defense, in part because of a weak nonconference schedule.

As for Maiava becoming a starter first, Grimes said it helped that he played on a high school team that threw the ball. At run-oriented Columbine, Miller rarely pass blocked.

"That's been a huge adjustment for Ryan," Grimes said of pass-protection fundamentals. "In August, we felt it might be midseason before he would be ready to start, and that's what happened."

Learning to pass block has been a challenge, Miller acknowledged.

"Run blocking is always moving forward, and that's what I've grown up doing," he explained. "In pass blocking, you have to move backward and laterally, and still keep your balance. Adjusting to that has had its days."

Maiava always wanted to play for Colorado and was disappointed when the Buffs didn't offer him a scholarship early in the recruiting process. His father, Scott Mahoney, lettered three times at CU on the offensive line under Eddie Crowder (1969-71). Mahoney had been adopted as a child and didn't learn until adulthood that he was a Maiava. The name has strong bloodlines.

Kai's grandfather, "Prince" Neff Maiava, became a world-renowned professional wrestler in the 1950s and 1960s. Kai has an older brother, Kaluka, who plays linebacker at Southern Cal. An uncle, Dwayne Johnson, played football at Miami (Fla.) and is better known as "The Rock," the wrestler turned actor.

Maiava has more of a wrestler's build, but he has used it to his advantage.

"When we played Oklahoma, their defensive linemen were about 6-4. I was getting underneath them, and that was really bugging them. I wish I was 6-4, 6-5. But I don't care anymore. I know I can play at this level."

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college football

Hawkins: KU's no slouch

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

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Colorado coach Dan Hawkins watches his team against Kansas State. Next up for the Buffs: Kansas at Folsom Field in boulder. It will be the Jayhawks' first trip outside Kansas this season. (AP | Orlin Wagner)

BOULDER — Don't count Colorado football coach Dan Hawkins among those who believe No. 15 Kansas is still unproven. Film of KU's 30-24 victory at Kansas State two weeks ago was all Hawkins needed to see.

"They're very efficient and do a good job all the way around," Hawkins said Tuesday during his weekly media luncheon. "Clearly, when they beat Kansas State, at (KSU's) home, that's a pretty large statement.

"You can see on film they're very talented. What they do is very sound."

It's no surprise that Kansas (6-0 and 2-0 Big 12) has been criticized by national media, including ESPN's "College GameDay," for its schedule. The regular season has passed the midway point but in traveling for this Saturday's game against Colorado

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(4-3, 2-1), the Jayhawks will leave the state of Kansas for the first time.

For their non-conference schedule the Jayhawks stayed at home and crushed four teams from non-BCS conferences — Central Michigan, Southeastern Louisiana, Toledo and Florida

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International — by an average score of 54-6.
They buried Baylor 58-10 in Lawrence last weekend.

Hawkins doesn't worry about rankings or schedules. He said he is concerned about how a team plays. The Buffs coach said he is impressed with Kansas sophomore quarterback Todd Reesing who last year had his "coming out party" against Colorado with three touchdowns, including one rushing.

Hawkins also is impressed with the Jayhawks' defense.

"They are very solid," Hawkins said. "They have some playmakers on that side of the ball."

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CU-Kansas game info, stats, video preview

Buffzone staff

Thursday, October 18, 2007

Matchup: No. 15 Kansas (6-0, 2-0 Big 12) at Colorado (4-3, 2-1).

Site: Saturday, 3:45 p.m. at Folsom Field (53,750).

TV/Radio: ESPN; KOA radio (850 AM)

Coaches: Mark Mangino is 31-35 in his sixth season coaching the Jayhawks. His team is bowl eligible for the third consecutive year.

Dan Hawkins (59-24, 6-13 at CU)

Last Meeting: Kansas coaches made the unusual decision to pull the redshirt off quarterback Todd Reesing in the ninth game of the season at halftime of the Jayhawks' 20-15 victory over the Buffs last season in Lawrence, Kan. Reesing completed seven of 11 passes for 106 yards and two touchdowns. Reesing also ran seven times for 90 yards baffling the CU defense which had prepared all week to face a less mobile quarterback. The Buffs' only points after halftime came on a 95-yard fumble return by safety Ryan Walters.

Series: This is the 67th meeting in a series that began Oct. 17, 1903 with a Kansas victory in Boulder. This is the second oldest series involving a Big 12 Conference opponent. Nebraska is the oldest.

Stats: [View injuries, stats, history of the series in addition to live game updates during Saturday's game.](#)

Key Players: QB Todd Reesing: The sophomore ranks 14th in the nation in passing efficiency and 18th in total offense, accounting for 297 yards a game. He has thrown 16 touchdown passes with just four interceptions in 2007. He has completed 109 of 191 pass attempts for 1,652 yards.

RB Jake Sharp: The sophomore ran for 110 yards on 18 carries last week against Baylor. He caught a pass for 42 yards a year ago against the Buffs. He is part of a strong one-two punch in the backfield for KU along with Brandon McAnderson.

CB Aqib Talib: An All-American and returning All-Big 12 player. Talib is one of the best cornerbacks in the nation and serves as a team captain. He has made three interceptions this season, returning one for a touchdown. He also is used as a wide receiver on offense and has caught seven passes for 174 yards and four scores this season.

The lowdown: The Jayhawks are tied in eighth-place in the first Bowl Championship Series standings, but critics still contend the only solid opponent they have played is Kansas State two weeks ago. ... They are the second highest scoring team in the country, averaging 50 points per game and rank seventh in the nation in total offense. ... The Kansas defense is ranked No. 2 in the nation in scoring defense, allowing

just 10 points per game. It is ranked fourth nationally in total defense, allowing just 240 yards per game. The Jayhawks have allowed only seven touchdowns this season. ... The Jayhawks are 6-0 for the first time since the 1995 season. ... KU has produced at least 400 yards of total offense in every game this season. ... The Jayhawks have intercepted at least two passes in four straight games.

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DiLallo vows to get a grip on troubles

By Joshua Lindenstein
Thursday, October 18, 2007

Kicking is all about muscle memory and Colorado Buffalo punter Matt DiLallo's muscles went blank for a split-second against the Kansas State Wildcats on Saturday.

The lapse proved costly.

With the Buffs trailing 33-20 late in the third quarter at Bill Snyder Family Stadium, DiLallo dropped the ball, picked it up and had his punt blocked. The Wildcats returned the gaffe for a touchdown to make it a three-touchdown game and firmly entrench the momentum on KSU's side.

"I wasn't really focused enough," DiLallo said. "I caught the snap, but when I put it out on the drop table it kind of slipped out (of my hands)."

DiLallo had a high snap slip through his hands last season against Missouri to set up a Tiger score.

"It brought back some tough memories but you just learn from those things, and I know I can bounce back and move on," the sophomore from Wellington, Fla., said.

He's done so this week by fine-tuning his routine.

One thing DiLallo and special teams coach Kent Riddle noticed that may have helped lead to Saturday's drop was the way the punter was catching the ball. Somewhere between the first game of the season and the Kansas State game, DiLallo said, he began "grasping (the ball) instead of catching it." Rather than catching the ball with his hands side-by-side out in front of him he was catching it with one hand on top of the other and in closer to his body, which altered the rest of his routine.

He's gone to work on the JUGS machine this week, catching ball after ball with his hands in the correct position to try and retrain his muscles.

"Once he's confident with that he can just cut it loose and not even have to think about that stuff," Riddle said. "That's the great thing about Matt. He's very conscientious. He takes it seriously. It's not like, 'Oh shoot, bad luck.' That hurts him and he works his butt off to fix the problem."

The mistake at KSU put a bit of a fog over what's been a mostly successful season for DiLallo.

His average is down a little from last season — 43.7 yards per punt to 41.4. But part of that is due to the fact that he's been punting from a little better field position this year, leaving him with less room to boom the ball. He's put 13 of his 30 attempts this season inside the opponent's 20-yard line. He's also had four punts of 50 yards or more.

Riddle said differing game situations sometimes dictate to DiLallo what he has to do with the ball, such as trying for more hang time rather than distance when faced with dangerous return men like Kansas State featured last week.

"We're looking at where we put them, where are they going to have to start their drive," Riddle said. "That's more important to us than just the numbers."

Cornerback hotbed

Two of the best players on the field Saturday when the Buffs and Kansas meet will not only line up at the same position but also hail from the same hometown.

CU's Terrence Wheatley and KU's Aqib Talib — two of the best cornerbacks in the Big 12 Conference — are both from Richardson, Texas, and played against each other in high school.

Talib is tied for the Big 12 lead in interceptions with three, one of which he returned 100 yards for a touchdown. He had two interceptions against the Buffs last season. He also has seven catches for 174 yards and four touchdowns on the offensive side of the ball.

Wheatley, who has two interceptions on the season and was voted first-team All-Big 12 with Talib by the league's coaches last season, said this week that he remembered playing Talib in high school but didn't have any kind of rivalry with the Jayhawk.

Talib is a preseason All-American and a candidate for several awards.

"We think he is probably the best (athlete we've faced)," CU head coach Dan Hawkins said. "We thought he was pretty good last year and we think he is better this year if that is doable.

"When game-planning for Kansas, you have to be concerned about him but you can't let one guy cancel out one whole side of your passing game. So you just have to do a good job of throwing the ball and getting open on his side."

Mutual respect

While plenty has been made of the formidable defensive unit the Jayhawks put on the field, KU coach Mark Mangino certainly admires the Buffalo defense as well.

"Their defense is outstanding," Mangino said this week. "I really think they have some of the most talented defensive players in the conference. They have a couple guys that really jump out at you on the defensive side of the ball. Jordon Dizon and Brad Jones at linebacker are outstanding players. Their defensive line is very big, physical and quick."

Mmmm ... that's good

And finally, a little chicken soup for the Buffalo football fan's soul:

CU's two biggest rivals both checked into ESPN.com's Bottom 10 rankings of the worst teams in college football this week.

Winless Colorado State has "climbed" to No. 3 on the list, while Nebraska joined the list this week at

No. 5, the spot reserved each week for stumbling powers — or stumbling former powers.



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Patience a virtue for Sanders, TEs

By Kyle Ringo

Thursday, October 18, 2007

Colorado tight end Joe Sanders has caught one touchdown pass in his five years in Boulder, and the quarterback of an opposing team threw it to him.

Sanders played linebacker for the majority of his career, the high point of which he admits came early in the 2004 season when he intercepted a pass against Washington State in a game played in Seattle and returned it for a touchdown.

"Shoot, I was 19 when that happened," the fifth-year senior said Wednesday.

He made the switch to tight end during the offseason. It was the position he was originally recruited to CU to play and there was a need with four veteran tight ends graduating from the program in 2005 and 2006.

At 6-foot-3, 235 pounds, Sanders might be the most athletic player at the position this season, but he hasn't had a lot of passes thrown his way so far. None of CU's tight ends have. Sanders has just five catches. "The coaches are putting me in the right position to make plays on the field," Sanders said. "It's just kind of luck-of-the-draw as to who is going to get the ball on any given play."

Tight end was considered a probable team strength back in training camp, but at least in the passing game, it hasn't worked out that way. CU's four main tight ends have combined to catch just 26 passes for 289 yards, or about what sophomore Riar Geer did all by himself when he led the team in receptions and receiving yards last season.

However, Sanders, fellow senior Tyson Devree, Geer and redshirt freshman Nate Solder are making steady contributions to an emerging running game.

"I think there has been a lot of stuff going on that people don't see," tight ends coach Kent Riddle said. "Those guys have been blocking their butts off."

The tight ends and coaches are hoping to see receiving production at the position rise in the final five games of the season. In order for that to happen, tight ends will need to have better luck when it comes to avoiding injuries.

Devree leads all CU receivers with four touchdown catches, but he has missed one game and parts of two others with several concussions. Geer is hampered by knee and ankle injuries and says he is playing at about 80 percent of optimum health. He said he is hoping to avoid postseason surgery but he has been told he could require a minor procedure to clean up his knee.

The injury is significant enough that Geer said he is not running many pass routes and has become primarily a blocker at this point.

"Right now I'm kind of disappointed in the way my season has been going because I've been so unlucky with injuries and stuff," Geer said. "But I feel like I've made a lot of strides this season as well. I've gotten a lot more mentally involved in the game and I feel like my run blocking has gotten a lot better."

With Geer being used more in the running game, Sanders could finally get more opportunities for that second touchdown catch in the weeks to come. He routinely seems to get open in practices and is a dangerous threat on seam routes through the middle of the defense with 4.6-second speed in the 40-yard dash.

Riddle said Sanders is doing well adjusting to the position and will get his opportunities if he continues to work hard and stay healthy.

"I think we're getting the kind of production we're able to get right now," Riddle said. "We would always like to get more but some of that is dictated by the defense and some of it is dictated by injuries."

Sanders sees his situation as one his younger teammates can learn from. He looks back on that day in Seattle, when his big play turned things around for the Buffs. It was hard then not to think those kinds of days would come happen often.

Three years later, he's still waiting for another dogpile in the end zone.

"I'd say I'm a good example of that, someone they can look at in that light," Sanders said. "I've definitely had my ups and downs here. I'm into my senior year, and I'm finally going up again."



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