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Longmont, Colorado
Monday, August 11, 2008

TIMES-CALL

Publish Date: 8/11/2008

CU ready to run

*By Patrick Ridgell
Longmont Times-Call*

BOULDER — Several good running backs at Colorado football camp are eager to impress coaches. Today's scrimmage offers their first big chance to turn heads, and there's no time like the present.

"Definitely," head coach Dan Hawkins answered when asked if it's important the backs play well today if they want to play in September.

"We want to get out of the gates and get going, start sorting it out. We don't want to sit around and figure out where we are in Week 3. Guys need to show up and make plays."

It's been awhile since CU's running backs have captured the amount of attention as its current crop. The situation in camp is taking on a life of its own.

Darrell Scott, obviously, has been the man many flock to see. Fellow freshmen Ray Polk and Rodney "Speedy" Stewart are easy to notice, too.

Meanwhile, CU's leading returning rusher, Demetrius Sumler, is showing he deserves carries. Kevin Moyd is also making plays in practice. Running backs coach Darian Hagan and offensive coordinator Mark Helfrich say all three freshmen could play in 2008, meaning there could be quite a list clamoring for chances.

Coaches will start wading through it today. The urgency the backs feel to perform in this scrimmage varies.

"It's a practice," Sumler said. "All of us are trying to impress coaches, but again, that's a practice. We all are just going to take it one play at a time, one day at a time, and see how it falls.

"Coach Hawkins is big into playing multiple running backs anyways, so I don't think we're vying for one spot."

Said Stewart: "I'll shine when it's my time to shine."

As a 5-year-old playing football on a team of 8-year-olds, Stewart said he was dubbed "Speedy" when coaches told him to race the team's fastest kid. Stewart won. The nickname stuck.

Stewart relishes attention, Hagan said. The others?

"Darrell don't care for the spotlight," Hagan said. "Ray wants to be away from the spotlight. Rodney wants it. Rodney is one of those dudes that wants the ball, he wants attention. He has a quiet swagger about himself."

Hagan said Stewart has "unbelievable quickness," pointing to a run Saturday in which he jumped and cut to create separation from a linebacker to go 60 yards.

"If I could compare him, everybody always says (NFL running back) Darren Sproles," Hagan said. "But he has



University of Colorado running back Ray Polk, left, runs a drill against Corey Nabors during Buffaloes practice Tuesday in Boulder. **Kirs Horvath/Times-Call**

unbelievably quick feet, stop-and-go like I used to have.”

Polk, who turned down Michigan, Arizona State, Washington, Oregon State, and even Oklahoma State, where his father’s cousin is the running backs coach, to come to Boulder, said he prefers the shadows. In this case, that shadow comes from Scott’s commanding presence.

“It’s great,” Polk said. “I love it. It’s really nice because there’s not all that pressure, obviously.

“The other thing is you can come into a program that’s hyped about one person, and surprise. I hope to do that. I hope to be that running back that comes from the shadows.”

Polk, for anyone who wonders, has heard of Marcus Houston and Bobby Purify. Houston was one of the nation’s premier recruits in 2000, while Purify was just a pretty good recruit. Purify finished his college career third at CU in rushing yards.

“From what I’ve seen, Darrell is a great player — a great running back — I think he will perform,” Polk said. “That’s perfect for me because I can sit back and compete with him and raise my game up a little bit. I think we both can learn from each other, in the way we do things.”

EXTRA POINTS: Today’s scrimmage is scheduled to start at noon on the practice field just north of the Dal Ward Center. It’s the first of three CU has scheduled. Another is next Sunday in CU’s final open practice. Hawkins said it’ll include about 120 plays. CU is staying off Folsom Field in camp so its new sod can take root. ... Drew Hudgins’ season-ending injury is creating more reps for others on the defensive line. Hawkins said CU wants to go into every game with 10 defensive linemen ready to go, including five tackles and five ends. ... Freshman guard Max Tuioti-Mariner returned to practice Sunday night after having fluid drained from his left knee Saturday. Linebacker B.J. Beatty (calf) also returned Sunday night.

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Hawkins to Buffaloes: produce or else

CU coach wants plays made in first scrimmage

By B.G. Brooks

Sunday, August 10, 2008

Potential playmakers on the University of Colorado football roster take note: Starting today, Buffaloes coach Dan Hawkins is taking names.

CU is scheduled to play its first scrimmage of preseason camp this afternoon (noon-3 p.m.) at the lower practice fields, and Hawkins said his staff will plunge into it with this outlook:

"We're trying to shove these guys into game mode. . . . Sometimes you scrimmage and just learn to run plays; we get enough of that in practice. We're looking for playmakers."

That describes the team's overall needs. But on offense, it especially pertains to the skill positions and a handful of highly touted freshmen.

CU's stable of young running backs is as well-stocked as it has been in years, with freshmen Darrell Scott, Ray Polk and Rodney Stewart joining sophomores Demetrius Sumler and Brian Lockridge to form a core grouping likely to see the most duty.

Hawkins is eager to see how Scott, Polk and Stewart perform under game conditions, with a play clock running in the team's no-huddle, up-tempo offense.

"We're trying to push the depth chart issue right now," Hawkins said.

"There are those guys, really, when the lights come on, or you start playing, they just go to that next level. We want to get out of the gates fast and get going. We'll start sorting it out (today). . . . So, guys need to show up and make plays."

But, given the relative inexperience of his returning tailbacks, the bulk of the carries today and in a pair of subsequent scrimmages can't go to the freshmen.

Sumler, the team's leading returning rusher, carried 100 times for 335 yards and four touchdowns in 2007, while Lockridge took just 38 handoffs, gaining 213 yards and scoring once.

"Those guys aren't seasoned veterans," Hawkins said. "We don't have a guy like (former running backs) Hugh Charles or Byron Ellis back. You can't say, 'Oh, we know what they can do; they don't need to do a whole lot.' Those guys (Sumler, Lockridge) need to play."

Hawkins nevertheless recognizes that even a 120-play scrimmage isn't an ideal opportunity to complete

a thorough evaluation.

"Never," Hawkins answered. "Receivers, quarterbacks, running backs, tight ends - there's never enough balls to go around."

Which freshmen back might redshirt won't be clear until after the last scrimmage (Aug. 23) or beyond, requiring "a while to sort itself out," Hawkins said.

Also drawing attention will be a pass rush that needs improvement. Defensive end Drew Hudgins, a 2007 junior college transfer, suffered a season-ending knee injury Friday. But junior Jason Brace and redshirt freshman Conrad Obi have had productive camps behind right-side starter Marquez Herrod.

Behind senior Maurice Lucas on the left side are redshirt freshmen Lagrone Shields, Kevin Cooney and Tony Poremba.

"Ideally, with the D-line, you'd like to go into each game with 10 guys --- five tackles and five ends," Hawkins said. "It's kind of like hockey; you jump over the boards, run out there and get going."

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cu football

Loss of Hudgins summons depth

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

Article Last Updated: 08/10/2008 11:27:23 PM MDT

BOULDER — Losing a player to an injury is always a blow, but Colorado has enough depth on the defensive line to overcome the loss of senior Drew Hudgins for the season to an ACL tear in his left knee, coaches said Sunday.

Hudgins, a junior college transfer, said he will petition the NCAA for a sixth year of eligibility. Otherwise, his Division I career would be over before it even got started. He has not played a down at CU, having missed the 2007 season after tearing an Achilles tendon during preseason conditioning.

Before going down on Friday, Hudgins was expected to battle sophomore Marquez Herrod and others for the starting job at right defensive end.

"I feel really bad for Drew, but I think we'll be OK," defensive line coach Romeo Bandison said. "With one less guy, there are more repetitions to go around. Everybody has a chance to shine."

Herrod figures to be challenged by junior Jason Brace and redshirt freshmen Conrad Obi and Eugene Goree.

"Coaches are looking for guys that play their gaps,"

said Obi, an athletic 6-foot-3, 260-pounder from suburban Atlanta. "But you also have to make plays."

Another in the mix could be Will Pericak, a true freshman from Boulder High School. Pericak (6-5, 245) was recruited as a tight end but moved to defense early last week.

"We first had Will for a few minutes, and he picked up things fast," Bandison said. "Things just seem to come natural to him."

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Bufs quicker on their feet

Walters notices improvement in mental aspect of game

By Kyle Ringo
Monday, August 11, 2008

The voting is just a formality. Go ahead and call Ryan Walters a captain of the Colorado football team.

He is one of eight fifth-year seniors on the roster, and he might be the most universally respected in that group. Coaches love him because he knows his stuff, plays the game hard and serves as a mentor to younger players -- on and off the field. His teammates love No. 15 cause he's a laid-back guy in the locker room and a sledgehammer between the lines.

If he's not elected a team captain when the Bufs vote later this month, it will be the biggest upset the Bufs have been involved in since the 2001 team beat No. 1 Nebraska 62-36.

Walters is trading paint on helmets, skinning his elbows and putting grass stains on his pants once again after missing all of spring practices following shoulder surgery. He sat out a few times this week with a tight hamstring but could play if the season started today. He said the shoulder is completely healed and ready to jar opponents' jaws once again.

He is content to allow young safeties such as Vince Ewing, Patrick Mahnke and Anthony Perkins to use his practice time against what he says is the best collection of offensive talent in the program since he arrived in 2004.

While watching the action from the sidelines, he has noticed a few things about his defense, which faces its first true test of training camp today when the Bufs scrimmage for the first time in training camp at noon on the practice fields. Walters said guys are playing faster this season and he's not talking about foot speed. They are mastering the mental gymnastics of calls and assignments more and more like second nature. It's probably a nuance only a player or coach with full knowledge of the playbook would notice.

"It's so important to have that experience out there," he said. "This is the third year under our belts and even the young guys, it seems like they've been here awhile. Just knowing what you're doing and knowing the scheme and the concepts of the defense allows you to play a lot faster."

Sophomore defensive end Marquez Herrod understands the point precisely. Herrod is competing for the starting job at his position on the right side. He is looking forward to the first significant playing time of his career after two years of learning and making plenty of mistakes.

"I know the defense a lot more, and once you learn the defense you can just play a lot faster," Herrod said. "Not knowing the defense hinders you. You have to think and stop playing."

The Buffs met the first goal in defensive coordinator Roin Collins' hierarchy of goals last season by stopping the run. They finished 31st in the nation, allowing 128 yards per game. They hope to build on that in 2008 and fix other shortcomings that led to them finishing among the bottom half of Bowl Subdivision teams in scoring defense (78th), pass defense (103rd) and total defense (64th).

Walters said they're off to a good start, but he has noticed some lackadaisical effort at times.

"That will improve," he said. "It's early in camp and people's legs are a little wobbly right now. We'll work through that and get that little half step here and there to make the play."

Notable

Sophomore running back Brian Lockridge will be held out of practices until he is fully recovered from hernia surgery. Lockridge said he began working out too soon after surgery in the spring and has never fully healed. ... True freshman lineman Max Tuioti-Mariner returned to practice Sunday night after missing the three previous practices with a minor injury. ... The afternoon practice ended a little early when coach Dan Hawkins told place-kicker Aric Goodman if he could make a 48-yard attempt, everyone could leave immediately. Goodman drilled the kick after teammates screamed at him, adding a little more pressure. ... The Buffs worked for about two hours under the lights Sunday night in an effort to familiarize their body clocks with playing at night and playing under the lights. Two of their first three games will be played at night. ... All scrimmages this month will be on the practice fields because the new turf in Folsom Field needs time to take root.



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