



Growing pains emerge for CU's offensive line

Buffaloes' youthful unit must mature for active Mountaineers

By B.G. Brooks

Originally published 03:06 p.m., September 12, 2008

Updated 08:53 p.m., September 12, 2008

Jeff Grimes' desire to field college football's most physical, most dominant offensive line is as fervent now as when he arrived at the University of Colorado. But there are times - like now - when other priorities ascend on his list.

Last weekend against Eastern Washington, Grimes' young guns - he started one senior, a true freshman, a redshirt freshman and two sophomores - misfired most of the game.

Although there was no lack of effort against a defensive line that surprised the Buffaloes with its speed, Grimes was surprised by how much technique and fundamental line play his unit forgot or discarded under the Eagles' pressure.

CU's line difficulties, which contributed to quarterback Cody Hawkins being sacked twice and harassed three times that much, "weren't due to preparation; it was guys getting rattled early and losing technique," Grimes said.

"That's maybe the worst thing that can happen to an offensive lineman - just going out there and playing wild and trying to survive and reverting to the way you did it in high school."

The good news: The Buffs survived 31-24. The better news: They got an extra week of practice before West Virginia visits Folsom Field Thursday (6:30 p.m., ESPN).

"It's very embarrassing to play like that; I'm just glad it wasn't on national TV," sophomore right tackle Ryan Miller said of an Eastern Washington experience he termed "very humbling."

Grimes' body count isn't as promising as it was in early August, before guards Mike Iltis (knee) and Erick Faatagi (academics) were lost for the season. A one-game suspension last week erased guard Devin Head, as did a shoulder injury to center/guard Keenan Stevens, but both will be available next week.

Their absences pushed true freshman Max Tuioti-Mariner, who had not played in a game since his junior season in high school (a knee injury cost him his final year), and Blake Behrens, a redshirt freshman with one previous start on his resume, to the forefront, where they played like, well, freshmen.

Opposite Miller at left tackle was converted tight end Nate Solder, playing his second game at his new position.

Center Daniel "Girthy" Sanders, the lone senior, might have felt he had been assigned day-care duty, but he shrugged off the inexperience factor.

"We've just got to stay at a steady pace of working upwards instead of being up and down," he said. "We didn't play too

well at all. We were getting Cody hit almost every play. We've got to come back out and do what we know we can do."

Doing it against West Virginia is a stout assignment.

The Mountaineers play a 3-3-5 defense, an uncommon scheme that allows pressure from various positions. Grimes, though, is familiar with it from his days at Brigham Young, having prepared his line annually to confront New Mexico's "wilder" version of the 3-3-5.

Plus, BYU used the same defense, "So we saw it every day in practice," Grimes said, comparing it to "a Chinese fire drill; guys were all over the place."

But, Grimes added, his familiarity with the scheme only means he has a teaching base.

His players must absorb and execute, and he still wants them to "set the tone physically" as well as "feeling the burden of the team on their shoulders. If we don't do our job, if we don't protect, it doesn't matter. . . . I want the offensive line to always feel that burden."

© Rocky Mountain News



CU report: Driving discouraged for CU-West Virginia game

By B.G. Brooks

Friday, September 12, 2008

School officials are encouraging faculty, staff, students and visitors to consider transportation alternatives for the CU-West Virginia game at Folsom Field on Thursday (6:30 p.m., ESPN).

Because of game-night traffic, walking, riding a bicycle or taking public transportation is suggested. No game parking on campus will be available for the general public.

Information: cubuffs.com/gameday.

Black it out II

Colorado students are asking the student body and CU fans to wear black to the game Thursday night. A similar call was made last season for the CU-Florida State game, won 16-6 by the Seminoles.

FSN plans

FSN Rocky Mountain is planning a special half-hour report 30 minutes before the game Thursday. It will feature hosts **Tim Ring** and **Alanna Rizzo**, with former CU players **Joel Klatt** and **Jay Leeuwenburg** analyzing West Virginia's offense, and **Marc Stout** interviewing Buffaloes coach **Dan Hawkins**.

© Rocky Mountain News

[Print page](#)[Close window](#)

Longmont, Colorado
Saturday, September 13,
2008

TIMES-CALL

Publish Date: 9/13/2008

Hagan: RB Sumler not being forgotten

CU starter figures to see more action against W. Virginia

*By Patrick Ridgell
Longmont Times-Call*

BOULDER — Don't read too much into the fact Demetrius Sumler carried the football only twice last Saturday.

That comes from Colorado running backs coach Darian Hagan, who blamed himself for Sumler, CU's starting tailback, not getting his hands on the ball more often last week against Eastern Washington.



CU starting tailback Demetrius Sumler had only two carries against Eastern Washington last Saturday.

Joshua Buck/Times-Call

Hagan said he expects Sumler will get more opportunities when CU hosts No. 25 West Virginia on Thursday (6:30 p.m., ESPN).

"He should have been in there more," Hagan said. "It was just communication. That's bad on my part."

Hagan is one of the CU coaches who works games from the coaches' boxes above the field. He said he wanted to get Sumler in the game more, but that message, on a few occasions, did not reach whom it was intended to.

Sumler said he understood.

"It was just something with the headsets," Sumler said. "There's a lot of stuff going on. I think they just didn't get it communicated at times."

Hagan said Thursday's starter will be dictated merely by the play that's called, and no one should read much into who that starter is. Hagan said he wants to give the most carries to the running back who's performing best.

Darrell Scott leads CU with 24 carries through two games for 93 yards. Another freshman, Rodney Stewart, has 13 carries for 76 yards and a team-best 5.85 average.

Sumler has 12 carries for 41 yards.

Hagan said Scott improves with more activity.

"Darrell's style is, as you get him more involved, the better he gets," Hagan said. "With Speedy (Stewart), when he gets in there, it's in there, it's instantaneous. I'm comfortable playing all three of them. They're going to get better each week."

BREAK TIME: Following Friday's practice, the team dispersed until it reconvenes for a Sunday afternoon practice. Several Buffs called this a good time for a break.

"It's nice," receiver Scotty McKnight said. "Your body needs a rest, especially after not having that day off after playing on Sunday (Aug. 31) and then getting right back into it and playing on Saturday."

Said safety D.J. Dykes: "We have a quick game this week. It's not like a regular week. This Thursday is going to be upon us quicker than people realize."

Some Buffs are leaving town. McKnight, who has a few friends playing for USC — including Trojans quarterback Mark Sanchez — is returning to his Southern California home this weekend to attend tonight's big game between Ohio State and USC. McKnight is going with his father, grandfather and an uncle. Scott and CU receiver Josh Smith are also attending the game.

Others, like Dykes and linebacker Jeff Smart, are going to stay in Boulder and relish the time off their feet.

"I'm going to take some time to rest and relax," Smart said.

Several coaches left town Friday to recruit, including Dan Hawkins, who was not at Friday's practice.

MAKING PROGRESS: Wide receiver Jason Espinoza, who looked last spring like he'd be CU's punt returner this fall, said he hopes to return to practice in about a week.

He broke his right collarbone in August camp and has been using a bone stimulator 20 minutes a day to expedite the healing process. He said the muscles around the broken bone are weak from being in a sling so much.

Espinoza is a walk-on redshirt freshman from Alamosa.

His summer schedule saw him wake up each day at 6:30 a.m. to lift, then attend class from 9 to 10, then work for a Boulder landscaping firm from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. He'd attend player-organized 7-on-7 drills the nights they were held.

He left work early on Wednesday to catch punts from punter Matt DiLallo.

"I was really crushed about (the injury) because ... that was the hardest I ever worked," he said.

Josh Smith has taken over the punt return duties and is averaging 19 yards per on six tries. He returned one 51 yards against Eastern Washington to set up a touchdown. He also has fumbled twice.

Espinoza said the job is not waiting for him.

"I have to work my way in and earn my spot back," Espinoza said.

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