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Thinning LB depth will force changes

Bufs not panicking, but position change possible

By Patrick Ridgell

The Daily Times-Call

BOULDER — It was about a month ago when long-time Colorado linebackers coach Brian Cabral declared the depth among his current batch of players to be the thinnest during his tenure. And that was before he knew he wouldn't have Michael Sipili for the season's final nine games, or that R.J. Brown would suffer a concussion against Florida State that would limit his availability.

Sunday, Cabral found a new way to describe CU's linebacking depth.

"It's lesser," he said.

Cabral hardly looked Sunday like a man in panic mode. But he did acknowledge there's lots of talk among coaches that someone, somewhere, will be asked to change positions mid-season and become a linebacker, which "is a very hard thing to do." Cabral wouldn't say whom it might be, but one possibility could be senior tight end Joe Sanders, who played linebacker prior to switching positions last spring.

Sanders said in the preseason, after CU announced Marcus Burton was academically ineligible for 2007, he did not expect to change positions again. Through four games, Sanders has five catches for 48 yards. CU reported tight end Riar Geer did not play Saturday against Miami-Ohio so he could rest a knee injury. Geer's status could deter coaches from moving a tight end.

Brown did not practice Sunday, Cabral said, and more won't be known until Tuesday about Brown's status for Saturday against No. 3 Oklahoma (11:30 a.m., FSR)

So as the Buffs prepare for the opponent head coach Dan Hawkins called Sunday the most impressive he's faced in his short time in Boulder, Cabral is dealing with things the best he can.

"I'm very pleased with guys like Jeff Smart and R.J., and it looks like I may be requiring the services of Jake Duren, another walk-on," Cabral said. "They're a good group of guys. As long as they improve each week, we'll be all right.

"The key is we have to improve, and we have to stay healthy right now."

Smart impressed coaches Sept. 15 against Florida State when he relieved Brown, who plays at a different linebacking position than the one Smart does, and played well. Coaches rewarded Smart with a scholarship the next day.

Smart is a third-year sophomore from Boulder High who entertained offers from Northern Colorado, San Jose State and Kansas, plus invitations to walk on at a couple of other programs, before he decided to stay in Boulder. He might start Saturday against the Sooners. He started last Saturday when the Buffs beat Miami-Ohio, 42-0, and finished tied with Jordon Dizon for the team lead with six tackles.

"I took some visits, but I think there's more to it than just getting a scholarship or not, when you're deciding where you want to go," Smart said. "You could be going somewhere with a scholarship and not be happy. I'd rather be somewhere and just be happy and comfortable playing. I liked the coaches."

Defensive coordinator Ron Collins refused to call Smart's ability to handle multiple positions a luxury. But he described Smart's ascension to a starting role as "awesome."

"What's been awesome is that a guy like Jeff has emerged when we needed it. That's been the great thing," Collins said.

"He's a good solid football player. We've asked him to play a couple of positions and he's done that and he's made a lot of plays. He's not a big guy, not a fast guy, but he's a guy that knows his job and is making plays right now."

Duren made five tackles Saturday and figures to see more action, especially if Brown can't go.

"This is a great group of guys and linebackers," Cabral said. "I'm really proud of what they're doing and how we're doing it. As long as we keep improving, as long as we take each game to get better, we'll be OK."

Extra points: Hawkins said he'll meet this week with Sipili to discuss his future. Sipili, who learned Friday the university's Office of Judicial Affairs has suspended him from school for the semester, can seek reinstatement after the semester. He'll have three years to play three if he returns. ... Receiver Scotty McKnight suffered a concussion Saturday while making a block on Brian Lockridge's 43-yard touchdown run in the fourth quarter. He said Sunday he felt good and expects to play. McKnight leads CU with 23 catches, one shy of the mark Geer led the team with in 2006. McKnight's 291 receiving yards already exceed Geer's 261, which also led CU last year.

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Bufs vow not to be intimidated by OU

Colorado has lost 14 in a row to ranked foes

By Kyle Ringo Camera Sports Writer
Monday, September 24, 2007

Colorado football coach Dan Hawkins has a boatload of aphorisms and messages he shares with his players throughout the year. They have come to be known as Hawkisms.

Hawkins, a voracious reader, can't claim credit for all of them, but one adage he seems to be particularly fond of goes something like this: "Stay off the mountain tops and out of the valley."

It is his way of trying to keep players on an even keel focused only on each week's opponent. The next six days could test the Buffs' ability to manage their emotions to their coach's satisfaction, not getting too high or too low.

They are coming off their first shutout in nearly two years, having beaten Miami (Ohio) 42-0 in Folsom Field over the weekend. This Saturday No. 3 Oklahoma comes to Boulder for homecoming and the first Big 12 Conference game of the season.

After proving they have matured to the point where they are capable of handling an opponent like Miami, Hawkins was asked Sunday evening whether beating a ranked opponent or a heavily favored one is the next step for his program.

"We've won four games in two years so we're just trying to win a football game against anybody," Hawkins said.

Saturday's contest will be the 37th time the Buffs have faced the Sooners when they were ranked among the top 25 teams in the nation. It's the most of any CU opponent over the years.

The Buffs have lost 14 consecutive games against ranked opponents and haven't beaten a ranked team since Nov. 8, 2003, against Missouri. During the streak the closest the Buffs have come to victory was a 14-13 loss at then-No. 9 Georgia last year.

Oklahoma this week will supplant Georgia last year as the highest-ranked team Hawkins has ever coached against. Hawkins said the Sooners are as impressive as any team he has had to prepare for in his career.

"They got a lot of good everything," he said.

The Buffs traveled to Oklahoma last season and hung with the Sooners into the fourth quarter before falling 24-3. Coaches and players said that performance won't mean much this year because both teams are so different, but they do believe the Sooners will come to town expecting the Buffs to be physical

and play hard.

"They won't take us lightly," CU defensive coordinator Ron Collins said.

CU quarterback Cody Hawkins said the Buffs have plenty of respect for the Sooners for obvious reasons, but they won't be in awe of their national ranking all week.

"It's a testament to what they've done so far," Cody Hawkins said. "But as far as intimidating us or scaring us, I mean, we know that we're going to play a lot of great teams.

"Oklahoma is, they're Oklahoma. It doesn't matter what their ranking is. I mean, whether they're 0-4 or 4-0 like they are right now, they're going to be Oklahoma. ...Regardless of their ranking, we know it's going to be a really tough battle."

The Sooners are the highest scoring team in the nation through the first four weeks of the season, averaging an absurd 61.5 points per game. Quarterback Sam Bradford is the second-most efficient quarterback in the nation to this point, completing 78 percent of his throws for more than 1,000 yards and 14 touchdowns.

"They've done a nice job bringing him along from managing the game to actually making decisions and making throws down the field and being very, very efficient," Hawkins said.

The Oklahoma defense is fourth in the nation against the run, which could bring the Buffs ground game to halt after it racked up more than 300 yards against Miami. In the two previous games, CU rushed for just five yards on 51 carries.

Notable

Dan Hawkins said he has not met with suspended linebacker Michael Sipili to find out what Sipili's plans are for the rest of the semester. Hawkins said he will meet with the sophomore linebacker soon. Sipili was suspended from school for the rest of the fall semester last week for his role in an off-campus street brawl in June.



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cu football

No. 3 Sooners quickly gain Buffs' attention

By Tom Kensler
Denver Post Staff Writer

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Boulder - Asked about third-ranked Oklahoma during Monday's Big 12 teleconference with the media, Colorado coach Dan Hawkins said he hopes to use 12 players against the Sooners in the 11:30 a.m. game Saturday at Folsom Field.

"We're trying to do a little Canadian League defense and get another guy on the field," Hawkins said. "We're trying to see if we can work that into the equation.

"When I was in high school, if you didn't have enough guys and you called the other school by Wednesday, you could play eight-man football. So maybe we just call (Oklahoma coach) Bob Stoops and say we're going with 12 guys."

Colorado (2-2) can use all the help it can get in the Big 12 opener. Oklahoma (4-0) is playing as well as anybody in the country. The Sooners rank first nationally in scoring (61.5 points) and are second in pass efficiency (15 touchdowns against two interceptions; .759 completions), third in total offense (562.2 yards), fourth in rushing

defense (44.2), fifth in total defense (234.2), seventh in rushing offense (252.2) and eighth in scoring defense (11.8).

Colorado Football

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- Visit [Tom Kensler's All Things Buffs blog](#) for a behind-the-scenes look at CU sports

"I just think you have to mix it up a little bit," Hawkins said, when asked about devising a defense against Oklahoma. "Pick your poison. They have a great running game and a lot of targets (at wide receiver).

"It's hard to cut out one guy, because they have so many to go to. They spread you out, and they do a great job of creating mismatches that put you in a bind at times and get you in (open) space."

Stoops praised Colorado's defensive showing a year ago after the Sooners' 24-3 victory in Norman, and said CU is better this season because of an improved offense.

"We're watching them on tape, and they do a great job," Stoops said Monday. "They're physical, fundamental. They're sound in everything they do.

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"Offensively, their quarterback position with coach Hawkins' son (Cody Hawkins) ... He's playing well. They're different than a year ago. There's more to deal with."

Hawkins was asked if defense has been the strength of his team thus far.

"They're doing a nice job," Hawkins said. "Now, that being said, we haven't played against anybody like Oklahoma. That's a different animal."

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Local college football notes

By B.G. Brooks, Randy Holtz & Jim Benton, Rocky Mountain News
September 23, 2007

CU

Next: No. 3 Oklahoma (4-0) at Buffaloes (2-2), 11:30 a.m. Saturday, Folsom Field.

TV/radio: FSN; KOA-AM (850).

Who's favored: Oklahoma by 22.

Still searching

The Buffs rolled up 359 yards rushing Saturday, but running backs coach **Darian Hagan** says he's still waiting for the emergence of an "every-down" tailback. That, said Hagan, could come in practice this week.

Hagan said he was impressed with freshman **Brian Lockridge** (14 carries, 90 yards, one touchdown). Lockridge had a 57-yard scoring run nullified by a penalty.

"He was decisive - he wasn't right all the time, but he was getting positive yards. He doesn't think about what's happening in front of him, he just reacts," Hagan said. "When Brian got rolling and we kept feeding him the rock, those other guys (tailbacks) got better. When they got in there, they wanted to run just like him."

Moving on up

Freshmen offensive linemen **Kai Maiava** and **Ryan Miller** made their college debuts Saturday, and running game coordinator/offensive line coach **Jeff Grimes** said both performed "really well."

Grimes, though, intimated that Maiava could challenge for a starting guard spot this week. In about 40 plays against Miami (Ohio), Grimes said Maiava had as many "knockdowns" as other linemen with twice as many plays.

"The guy just went out and played hard and aggressively. Some guys are just gamers," Grimes said of the 6-foot-1, 295-pound Hawaiian.

Sipili's status

Coach **Dan Hawkins** indicated he would meet this week with **Michael Sipili** to discuss the sophomore linebacker's future. On Saturday, Hawkins said he was "surprised" at the Friday decision by the

school's Office of Judicial Affairs to suspend Sipili for the remainder of the fall semester.

Sipili, who must stay off campus this semester, will be permitted to re-enroll in January. He has not redshirted, meaning he can miss this season and still have three years of eligibility remaining.

Numbers game

84th nationally is CU's ranking in rushing offense after its 359-yard effort Saturday. Before the game, the Buffs were ranked 116th out of 119 Division I-A teams. The output against the RedHawks pushed the Buffs' average from 44.7 yards to 123.2.

He said it

"(The Buffs are) really tired of the 'new coach, new system, new players, freshmen' and all of that . . . now we're a football team and ready to go. So let's go."

Dan Hawkins, on his team's maturation through four games.

Out for the year

The Sooners lost defensive end **John Williams** (torn Achilles' tendon) for the season in their 62-21 blowout of Tulsa on Friday. Moving into Williams' top backup role in a three-man rotation will be junior **Alan Davis**, who was converted to fullback last season then returned to defense last spring.

CSU

Next: Rams (0-3) at Texas Christian (2-2), 5 p.m. MDT Saturday, Amon Carter Stadium, Fort Worth, Texas.

TV/radio: The mtn. (Channel 411 on Comcast digital cable); KLZ-AM (560) in Denver.

Who's favored: TCU by 11 1/2.

Kubiak's release near

CSU junior free safety **Klint Kubiak** was expected to remain under observation in a Houston hospital on Sunday night after suffering complications from an ulcer before a 38-27 loss at Houston on Saturday.

Kubiak felt woozy during pregame warm-ups and was taken to the hospital, where the diagnosis was internal bleeding and low blood pressure caused by a previously undetected ulcer.

Kubiak, one of the most experienced players on CSU's defense and the team tackles leader last season, is expected to be released from the hospital today. His status for the game at Texas Christian is uncertain.

The illness ruined what was expected to be a nice family weekend for the Kubiaks. Kubiak and his brother, CSU freshman quarterback **Klay**, were planning to attend the Houston Texans-Indianapolis