



Bufs know slowing Crabtree a key

Tech frosh WR leads nation in multiple categories

By Joshua Lindenstien
Friday, October 26, 2007

Patrick Williams remembers how difficult the transition from quarterback to wide receiver was for him when he came to the University of Colorado.

"Running routes was just terrible at first," the CU junior wide receiver said this week. "You're running and running and running and you stop. And then you're running again. The quarterback, you might have your little burst every now and then. But it was a tough transition."

All of which is one reason, Williams acknowledges, that Texas Tech receiver Michael Crabtree has been so impressive this season.

The Red Raider redshirt freshman, quarterback for an option attack in high school like Williams, has put up numbers impressive even in an offensive scheme known for producing Playstation-like stat lines. With four games left to play, his 1,320 receiving yards are already an NCAA freshman record and tops in the country. His 88 catches, 17 touchdowns and 102 points are also best in the nation.

"He just plays with a lot of confidence," Williams said of the 6-foot-3, 208-pound Crabtree, who is from Dallas. "When the ball's in the air, he feels like it belongs to him and that's what a receiver needs."

While the Red Raiders have no shortage of talent at wide receiver — 11 have caught passes this season — it's Crabtree who has been the game-breaker. Sixty of his catches have gone for first downs or touchdowns, and 15 have gone for 30 yards or more, including three of more than 50 yards.

"For a freshman, it's almost not even fair watching it on film, to be honest with you," said CU cornerback Terrence Wheatley, who will no doubt spend plenty of time sparring with Crabtree when the Bufs take on Texas Tech in Lubbock on Saturday. "They are going to throw the ball to him a lot because he likes to compete, and when he gets it you better tackle him because he's going to try and run you over, unlike most receivers."

Until the Red Raiders' game against Texas A&M two weeks ago, Crabtree had scored two or more touchdowns in every game. But he hasn't scored the past two weeks. While he still managed to rack up 170 yards against Texas A&M, Missouri "held" the phenom to 76 yards on 10 catches.

Stopping Crabtree is more complicated than just focusing the defense's attention on him. Quarterback Graham Harrell is more than willing to spread the ball around.

Senior Danny Amendola has 71 catches for 849 yards, and three other receivers have at least 21 catches. Not to mention running back Shannon Woods' 34 receptions.

"They've got four, five, six excellent receivers," CU defensive coordinator Ron Collins said.

A key to the Buffs' 30-6 victory over Tech last season was certainly the five turnovers they forced. But no less important was the job the Buffs did tackling and limiting big plays. It's a mentality akin to containing, rather than stopping completely, one or more players.

Crabtree, for one, makes his living on yards after the catch. Missouri, however, held him to 7.6 yards per catch last week.

"If he's going to catch it, just make sure he's in front of you and just eliminate the run after the catch, which I guess a lot of people preach but they haven't been doing," Wheatley said. "If you do that, hopefully it will take him out of his game a little bit."



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cu football

CU: DeVree proves to be Mr. Clutch

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

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Tyson DeVree, scoring against Miami (Ohio), was a Western Michigan teammate of Broncos tight end Tony Scheffler's. (Getty | Doug Pensinger)

BOULDER — Although he feels a bit embarrassed by it, teammates have given Colorado tight end Tyson DeVree the nickname "T.D."

It fits his name. It fits his game.

A 6-foot-5, 245-pound senior, DeVree has

caught five of Cody Hawkins' 13 touchdown passes. That's more than double the number of scores of any other CU receiver.

"When Tyson is rolling, he's a tough guy to stop," Hawkins said.

DeVree also could be called "Mr. Fourth Down." Three of his touchdown receptions occurred on do-or-die fourth-down calls. He could become a clutch target again Saturday when Colorado (4-4, 2-2 Big 12) faces Texas Tech (6-2, 2-2) in Lubbock.

A fourth of DeVree's 20 catches this season have

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gone for six points. That should give Red Raiders safeties and linebackers plenty to think about in the red zone.

"I give most of the credit to Cody Hawkins," DeVree said. "We did a lot of work together over

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the summer. We jelled really well.

"Cody has a real good ability to read the tight end. The tight end is usually the third, and even fourth, receiver in the progression. Cody is able to work through those."

Nicknames aside, the most appropriate description of DeVree is patience and perseverance. Success and opportunities at Colorado took longer than he had hoped.

A native of Hudsonville, Mich., DeVree began his college career with two seasons at Western Michigan, where he often teamed with current Bronco Tony Scheffler in a two tight-end formation. In two seasons at WMU, DeVree caught 55 passes for 549 yards and six touchdowns. As a sophomore in 2004, DeVree earned second-team all-Mid-American Conference honors.

Things were good.

He wanted more.

"I was like 'The Man' at Western Michigan; I got a lot of balls thrown to me," DeVree recalled. "Things came pretty easy there. But I wanted to see what I could do at a little bigger level.

"Colorado plays Texas and Oklahoma and all those big schools. I wanted to step up and see what I could do against that competition."

DeVree had vacationed with his family in

Colorado, mostly annual ski trips to Breckenridge. But he didn't really know much about the CU campus or its football program.

By asking around and investigating further on the computer, DeVree found the Colorado program has always included the tight end as an important component of the offense. That philosophy dates well before the Bill McCartney era.

While the tight end position is viewed mostly as a sixth offensive lineman at some programs, Colorado considers it to be more than an after-thought in the passing game. It's not a coincidence that the program has furnished the NFL with a bevy of tight ends, including Christian Fauria, Daniel Graham, Joe Klopfenstein and Quinn Sypniewski in recent years.

"Tight ends get the ball at Colorado," DeVree said. "And pro football is a goal. That's one of the reasons I'm here."

DeVree put in a call to then-CU coach Gary Barnett. After coaches reviewed his numbers at Western Michigan, he was offered a scholarship on the spot.

DeVree sat out the 2005 season in Boulder as a transfer and honed his skills while playing on the scout team and learned Barnett's offense. Fortunately for DeVree, Dan Hawkins also loves tight ends.

"We've had years where several tight ends

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caught a lot of passes for us," Dan Hawkins said. "Football is about matchups. When you can get a 250-pound tight end against a safety, that's a matchup in your favor."

DeVree suffered a chest injury early in August drills last season and finished the 2006 season with just four catches. Meanwhile, another tight end, Riar Geer, led the team with 24 catches.

With Geer being just a sophomore this season, DeVree had to wonder if he'd ever get much of an opportunity.

"You come to a place and think you'll get all the passes," DeVree said. "It doesn't work that way."

Geer tweaked a knee in fall camp, and DeVree got more playing time.

"You've just got to be patient sometimes," DeVree said. "You just have to keep working and stick with it. I knew my time was coming."

It did.

"Tyson really worked hard to get better every day," tight ends coach Kent Riddle said. "He's a good route runner. He's got very good hands. He's capable of making big plays."

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Bufs want to avoid 'explosion' plays by Harrell, Texas Tech

Bufs want to avoid 'explosion' plays by Harrell, Texas Tech

By B.G. Brooks, Rocky Mountain News
October 26, 2007

BOULDER - Like a shooting guard who probably will get his points regardless of how he's defended, Texas Tech quarterback Graham Harrell can be counted on to pile up completions and yards.

Harrell's résumé, backed by the weekly NCAA stat sheet, confirms it. No bulletin there; The Colorado Buffaloes know it and (halfway) accept it.

What they don't accept is Harrell and his receivers, particularly extraordinary freshman Michael Crabtree, gorging themselves on "explosion" plays and transforming the game Saturday into a point-a-minute carnival.

"We can't give up big plays; he's going to complete a lot . . . which he always does. Don't give up the big play, stop the run - and we've got a shot," CU defensive coordinator Ron Collins said of Harrell.

In a 30-6 win against the Red Raiders last season, the Bufs solved, or at least surprised, Harrell and his offense, disguising their coverages and sources of quarterback pressure.

Of no less importance, they also played nastier than any 0-8 team might have been expected to play. Never underestimate the nasty factor.

"Last year, you could kind of tell they weren't expecting us to do what we did and play as hard as we did," CU senior cornerback Terrence Wheatley said. "They kind of expected us to lay down . . . we didn't and it was a little bit of a shock to the system for them."

Pivotal for the Bufs last season against the Red Raiders were three interceptions, two of them by safety Ryan Walters, and two recovered fumbles. CU's defensive staff looks wistfully at those turnovers; they have been few and far between in 2007.

"Last year, we did a decent job of disguising our coverages and blitzes, and we're better at it now," Walters said. "We don't give away what we're going to do. But we still need to get our hands on the ball."

"Throwing 60 passes a game (Harrell averages 52, completing 37.6) will put real pressure on a secondary . . . but that's a great opportunity to make plays."

It's also creates almost ceaseless opportunities to rush the quarterback, which Missouri successfully did last week in a 41-10 rout of Texas Tech. Of Harrell's seven sacks this season, three were inflicted by the Tigers, no doubt contributing to his four interceptions.

Wheatley, CU's interception leader (two), underscored the need for an intense pass rush that keeps Harrell from becoming comfortable in the pocket and settling into a rhythm with Crabtree (88 catches for 1,320 yards, 17 touchdowns) & Co.

"(Often), it looks like he is just sitting back there throwing darts," Wheatley said. "If we create some pressure, hit him a few times, hopefully, that'll rattle him a little bit. We hit him a few times last year and seemed to get a little antsy in the pocket and let a few passes go that he probably wishes he could have back."



Lm Otero © AP

Texas Tech quarterback Graham Harrell will pile up completions and yards, but Colorado knows that how well it limits him from cashing in on spectacular plays will be key in the Bufs' road game Saturday.

"I just hope we can get to him and let him know he isn't going to be completely comfortable and be able to, basically, do what he wants to do."

Missouri limited Texas Tech to minus-9 yards rushing (including sack total), shifting the entire offensive burden to Harrell.

"Even if it's Tech, it's hard for a guy to put a game on his shoulders and say, 'OK, I'm going to throw for 600 yards and win every Saturday,' " CU coach Dan Hawkins said.

Before the matchup last season, CU had prepared for a similar spread offense (Baylor), which Collins said helped the Buffs "get a good handle" on the Red Raiders. He also said the Buffs "elevated their play" in the 2006 game, much as they did this fall in an upset of then-No. 3 Oklahoma.

"We've got to be able to do that week in, week out," Collins said. "But every year brings a different deal; we're going down to their house this year. You can't script this. You've got to get out there and play."

REGIONAL GAMES Montana State at Northern Colorado

- **The game:** Noon Saturday, Nottingham Field (8,500 capacity), Greeley.
- **The records:** Montana State is 5-2, 3-1 the Big Sky Conference; Northern Colorado is 0-8, 0-4.
- **The series:** Montana State leads 13-9-1.
- **TV/radio:** No television; KFKA-AM (1310) in Greeley and KRKS-AM (990) in Denver.
- **Scouting report:** Montana State makes its first trip to Greeley since 1956 to face a reeling Bears team that has been outscored 75-7 in its past two games and was outscored 54-0 in its previous two home games. UNC nearly recorded a monumental upset at Montana State last year, losing a 13-10 decision that has become the highlight of coach Scott Downing's tenure. Montana State is allowing only 16.7 points a game, the second-lowest mark in the Big Sky, and the Bears are managing only 9.4 points a game. The Bears' school-record losing streak has reached 16 games, and they have gone 0-8 at home in two seasons under Downing.

Mesa State at Chadron State

- **The game:** Noon MDT Saturday, Don Beebe Stadium at Elliott Field (3,500 capacity), Chadron, Neb.
- **The records:** Mesa State is 8-0, 5-0 in the Rocky Mountain Athletic Conference; Chadron State is 8-0, 5-0.
- **Scouting report:** The winner of this showdown between the RMAC's only undefeated teams will have the inside track at capturing the league crown. The Mavericks, off to their best start since 1987, will try to do what no team has done by shutting down Chadron State running back Danny Woodhead. The all-time leading collegiate rusher at any level, Woodhead has led the third-ranked Eagles to 21 consecutive regular-season wins and 15 consecutive wins in league play. Mesa, ranked 18th, boasts the RMAC's top rush defense, allowing 63.5 yards a game, and has forced 24 turnovers, helping the Mavericks to forge a league-leading turnover ratio of plus-13.

Nebraska-Kearney at Colorado Mines

- **The game:** Noon Saturday, Brooks Field (4,000), Golden.
- **The records:** Nebraska-Kearney is 4-3, 3-2 in the RMAC; Colorado Mines is 5-3, 4-1.
- **Scouting report:** Mines has rolled to four consecutive wins behind the play of quarterback David Pesek and a defense that is making life miserable for quarterbacks. Pesek is the only passer in the RMAC who has eclipsed 2,000 yards, and he leads the league with a completion rate of 63.2 percent. The Orediggers defense, once the team's weak spot, leads the nation with a school-record 43 sacks. With 240 points, Mines kicker Aaron Abel is in a tie as the program's all-time leading scorer.