



Ben Burney's showing on Pro Timing Day impressed scouts from several NFL teams.
Photo Courtesy: CUBuffs.com



04/25/2010 B.G. Brooks, Contributing Editor

Browns Betting Burney Is Back In One Piece

BOULDER - Injuries have been as much a part of Ben Burney's football career as his helmet and cleats. No wonder when he reflects on his various surgeries, he chuckles and says, "Humpty Dumpty is back together."

Despite knee injuries in high school and multiple shoulder injuries at the University of Colorado, Burney never lacked for confidence or doubted his ability. He believes he can play in the NFL, and the Cleveland Browns will give him the chance; Burney signed a free agent contract Saturday night and will participate in the Browns' minicamp beginning Thursday.

"I'm very excited and realize just how blessed I am," Burney said Sunday. "After all the surgeries, with me getting this chance, it's like a big sigh of relief. I'm ready to go."

Burney is one of four former Buffaloes players who have signed free agent contracts, with another getting a tryout this week. Tight ends Riar Geer (Denver) and Patrick Devenny (Seattle) and long-snapper Justin Drescher (Atlanta) also were picked up Saturday, with linebacker Marcus Burton scheduled to attend the New York Jets minicamp on Thursday. If he impresses, he'll stay.

Burney, of Lone Tree, Co., impressed scouts a couple of months ago on Pro Timing Day, turning in the day's best performances in three of the five categories - the vertical jump (39 inches), the 40-yard dash (4.38 seconds) and the short shuttle (4.10 seconds).

Cleveland had a scout there and showed interest, along with scouts from the Broncos, Redskins and Saints. But the best post-draft opportunity, Burney said, is with the Browns, who drafted corner Joe Haden (Florida) and safeties Larry Asante (Nebraska) and T.J. Ward (Oregon).

Burney, a 5-foot-11, 195-pounder, will audition with Cleveland at free safety. He finished the 2009 season as CU's fourth-leading tackler (73 total, 45 solo) and tied for the interception lead (two, one for a touchdown) with three teammates. He also registered seven third-down stops, four tackles for zero yards, four passes broken up, two forced fumbles and two quarterback pressures.

Given the time he spent in operating rooms and in rehabilitation, it was natural for Burney to thank "everybody that helped me get back into shape . . . It just shows as long as you have enough faith and work hard enough, you can do it."

Burton (6-0, 260) will take that attitude into his tryout to the Jets: "I'm just going to lay it all out and see what happens."

Geer grew up a devout Broncos fan, but over the past couple of months he was given little indication that the love was reciprocal. That changed when the team of his childhood dreams called Saturday.

"I would have loved to be drafted, but that was more wishful thinking than anything else," Geer said. "I knew I wasn't a first- or second-rounder, probably a fifth-rounder at best.

"But with me going to the Broncos and staying in Colorado, everything worked out perfectly. I don't feel bad at all about not being drafted."

Geer (6-4, 258) will join former Buffs tight end Daniel Graham with the Broncos. In addition to Graham, a nine-year NFL veteran, Denver's roster includes Marquez Branson (one year) and Richard Quinn (two). The team traded Tony Scheffler to Detroit during the run up to the draft and didn't select a tight end through seven rounds.

Geer's only previous interaction with Graham has been shaking his hand at a couple of past CU spring games that Graham attended. But Geer noted, "I hope I can learn from Dan . . . he'd be a great player to learn from. He's won some Super Bowls and has done such a great job in the league. Your goal is to become a great player like he is."

Geer, who made 36 of his 87 career receptions last season (974 career receiving yards and 11 touchdowns), let it be known among his friends and family that playing for the Broncos was a lifelong dream. But he said no one from the team approached him at the East-West Shrine Game or the NFL Combine in Indianapolis.

"I really thought they had no interest at all . . . but I guess I found out (Saturday) they did," he said, adding the confirmation came during a niece's birthday party.

"Being a free agent, I know every day, every time I go on the field, I've got to compete and work hard. It's not going to be easy, but I'm up to the challenge. I'll learn the playbook and prove to them they made a good choice."

Geer said his parents were "very excited" and his mother was "twice as nervous as I was . . . she was freaking out. They're a big part of me getting to where I'm at and they're happy to see me succeed. It's what I wanted since I was a little kid."

If Geer was taken aback by the Broncos' call, Drescher had more than a strong inkling the Falcons had his number - and were planning on using it. The team informed him prior to the draft that he was high on its list of potential free agents, and not long after the final round was in the books, his telephone was ringing.

"(Saturday) morning, they called and said, 'Be ready,'" Drescher said from his parents' home in Southlake, Texas. "When the draft was over, they called back and said, 'You want to be a Falcon?' I said, 'Yessir,' and then it was, 'Welcome to the Falcons.'"

"Four or five" other teams also had contacted him, Drescher said. "They were out there, but I know it's about finding the right spot and being lucky."

Drescher (6-1, 230) is a specialist who could find his NFL niche and enjoy a lengthy career. He was the Buffs' long snapper for the past four seasons - only the third player in school history to hold the job for his entire career. His competition in Atlanta is likely to be Joe Zelenka, an 11-year veteran from Wake Forest.

"They said for me to come in and compete," Drescher said. "All I can ask for is an opportunity. I'm pumped. It's nothing I ever thought of dreamed of and it still seems farfetched. But I'm going to give it all I've got."

Devenny (6-3, 240) promised to do the same for the Seahawks, now under the command of Pete Carroll. Devenny has a roundabout tie with the former Southern California coach. When he was a freshman at Granite Bay (Calif.) High School, he was mentored by senior linebacker Dallas Sartz, who was recruited by Carroll and signed with the Trojans.

"I heard a lot about (Carroll) from Dallas, good things like him being a players' coach . . . he was a guy I admired and always wanted to play for. USC was a little high on the chart for me coming out of high school, but it's weird the way this has worked out," said Devenny, who came to CU as a quarterback but switched positions in his first spring drills and wound up with 27 career receptions (270 yards, five TDs).

Within five minutes after the draft concluded, Seattle was in contact with Devenny. Before he was called, the Seahawks had used their sixth-round draft choice on tight end Anthony McCoy, who played for Carroll at USC. Seattle's roster also includes four other veteran tight ends.

"All I know is that they're all really good and I have a lot of respect for them," Devenny said. "I knew that my getting drafted was a long shot, but I'd heard before the draft that (Seattle) wanted to see film on me. So I was kind of following what they were doing in the draft.

"I'm really excited for the opportunity. I need to be in the best shape of my life and go in and prove myself."

(CUBuffs.com will update the list of former Buffs signing free agent contracts as needed.)

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SHOW MENU



Former CU Buff Riar Geer headed to Denver Broncos

Devenny, Drescher also picked up by NFL teams

Camera staff report
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:04/25/2010 04:58:47 PM MDT

Three former Colorado football players were picked up as free agents after the NFL draft ended Saturday and one of them won't have to go far to meet his new teammates.

Former CU tight end Riar Geer signed with the Denver Broncos -- the team he rooted for while growing up in Grand Junction.

"Everything worked out perfectly for me," Geer told the Grand Junction Daily Sentinel. "This is a dream come true."

Former Buffs Patrick Devenny and Justin Drescher are also headed to the NFL. Devenny, a tight end, signed with the Seattle Seahawks, while Drescher, a long-snapper, is headed to the Atlanta Falcons.

Geer isn't the only former Buff tight end on the Broncos' roster. The 6-foot-4, 258-pounder joins Daniel Graham in Denver. Graham is a nine-year veteran out of CU.

Marquez Branson and Richard Quinn round out the Broncos' tight end group.

Devenny is also going to a squad loaded with tight ends. The Seahawks have five others on their roster, including sixth-round pick Anthony McCoy who played for new Seattle coach Pete Carroll at USC.

Drescher faces less competition, but plays a niche position. The Falcons' current long-snapper is 11-year veteran Joe Zelenka.

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Top free agent signings: 10 players who can make an impact

April 25, 2010

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There were two kinds of phone calls received by lower-tier NFL prospects on Saturday afternoon: ones in which a team notified a player he had been selected last in the draft and others testing the waters to gauge interest in signing as a "priority" free agent.

Players generally like getting the former call because it is an honor to be drafted, even late on Saturday. But being a free agent does provide more freedom to choose the ideal situation. While late-round draft picks are typically fighting long odds to make a roster, a priority free agent can often choose between several teams interested in bringing him into their offseason program and seek the best opportunity.

The best player agents actually set up team needs boards before the draft and update them throughout the event to see where their clients would have the best chance of making a team. They know that getting a chance to play leads to much more money down the line than the \$10,000-20,000 offered up front to coveted free agents.

Here are 10 reported free agent signings since the end of the draft that seem to present not only great opportunities for players to make rosters, but to potentially make impacts as rookies:

WR Freddie Barnes, Bowling Green State; Chicago Bears: Forget the slow 40-yard dash time (4.67 seconds). His crisp routes and sure hands will convince QB Jay Cutler to find him whenever possible.

SS Barry Church, Toledo; Dallas Cowboys: If Gerald Sensabaugh doesn't watch out, the prolific and durable Church might take his strong safety job in 2011.

FS Bryan Evans, Georgia; Cincinnati Bengals: Cincinnati needs depth at both safety spots, and Evans' athleticism gives him a great chance of making the team.

TE Riar Geer, Colorado, Nathan Overbay, Eastern Washington and Michael Palmer, Clemson; Denver Broncos: It's not very often that a team brings in three highly rated free agent tight ends. Tony Scheffler is gone, and the team might want to get younger (meaning Daniel Graham could be fighting for a roster spot) behind 2009 second-round pick Richard Quinn.

NT Travis Ivey, Maryland; Kansas City Chiefs: Could push veteran free agent Shaun Smith for playing time on the nose in the Chiefs' three-man line.

OLB Simoni Lawrence, Minnesota; St. Louis Rams: The undersized but strong and active 'backer will be a special teams demon and potential Pisa Tinoisamoa-type starter.

DT Andre Neblett, Temple; Carolina Panthers: Athletic big man is a potential starter at the nose tackle position in the next couple of seasons.

TE Colin Peek, Alabama; Atlanta Falcons: Gives the Falcons a blocker on the line and a fair receiver to move the chains.

FS Terrell Skinner, Minnesota Vikings: The team isn't thrilled with the play of starters Tyrell Johnson and Madiou Williams, so Skinner could play some special teams as a rookie and challenge for time in 2011.

WR Blair White, Michigan State; Indianapolis Colts: An Austin Collie clone who seems to be a perfect fit for the Colts as a potential fourth receiver. Will be a factor as a returner and on coverage units.

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