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Right recipe for Buffaloes

Versatile Nate Solder figures large in CU's seasonal mix

By Justin Williams
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BOULDER — Guys like Nate Solder don't come around very often. In Denver Johnson's eyes, they come along perhaps only once.

"He's really the most God-gifted guy I've ever coached — just really gifted with ability," said the new Colorado offensive line coach — who has 12 years of college coaching experience — about Solder.

It's easy to see why Johnson was immediately impressed with his long and lean left tackle. The 6-foot-9 Solder weighs in at 305 pounds yet runs a 4.8-second 40-yard dash. He has just 8 percent body fat and was recruited out of high school to play collegiate basketball.

"You just don't find a lot of guys that have that kind of height, weight and speed," CU head coach Dan Hawkins said. "He's phenomenal. He really is."

Solder is just as impressive in the classroom. The fourth-year junior boasts a 3.7 GPA and plans to graduate at the end of this school year with a degree in biology. He'll pick up another major next fall, looking to fill the requirements for veterinary school.

It's the recipe college coaches dream about, but Colorado has yet to see Solder's full athletic potential on the field. Playing and practicing at tight end for his first two years at CU, Solder made the move to the offensive line in the spring of 2008 out of an absolute desperation for depth.

He admits the transition wasn't easy — but it's getting easier.

"It's a whole world of a difference from last year to now. It's day and night," Solder said. "Last year, I felt like I was still a tight end when I was in there. This year, I feel like a tackle."

Solder figures to be the Buffs starter this season at left tackle, which entails protecting a right-handed quarterback's blind side — and it just so happens that all of the Colorado QBs are right-handed.

"You have to trust whoever you have at that position, and we trust Nate," Johnson said. "He's been producing at camp, and there's no reason to believe he won't produce during the season."

Johnson said it's Solder's "suddenness" that stands out the most on the field.

"He can come out of his stance, and he just has that snap and pop and ability to explode from a motionless stance," he added.

Solder said he's still learning the subtleties of the position but that he's gaining a firmer grasp.

"Two years ago, I didn't know how to pass block," Solder said. "There's so many things that I didn't know even went

on with the offensive line. Never playing it before, it definitely opens your eyes.”

Coaches aren’t the only ones who have taken notice of Solder’s athletic ability. Fellow offensive lineman Ethan Adkins said some of CU’s defensive players say Solder has the fastest hips they’ve ever seen.

“The guy’s just a freak of nature,” Adkins said. “I always joke around and say if Nate practiced enough at any position on the field, he could probably be starting there in no time.”

Johnson agreed, saying he has no doubt Solder could line up just about anywhere and find success. It makes Johnson that much more grateful that Solder landed on his line.

“He’s a student, an athlete and a kid with high moral character,” Johnson said. “That’s the kind of guy you want your daughter to bring home to meet you someday.

“He’s got it all.”

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Bufs select three seniors as team captains

BOULDER, Colo. — Linebackers Marcus Burton and Jeff Smart and tight end Riar Geer — all seniors — were selected as team captains by their Colorado teammates at a Sunday morning team meeting.

The team officially wrapped up its 2009 camp with the meeting to select captains, after which they had the day off to attend CU's annual welcome-back picnic for its student-athletes.

CU's last two-a-day session ended Saturday, and after another day off today for the first day of classes, the Bufs will resume practice on Tuesday.

Colorado opens the season on Sept. 6 with a 5 p.m. game against in-state rival Colorado State at Folsom Field.

Burton, Smart and Geer are all fifth-year seniors, three-year lettermen and were at the top of the depth chart at their respective positions entering fall camp.

Burton is a 6-0, 265-pound linebacker from Channelview, Texas; Geer is a 6-4, 250 pounder from Fruita-Monument High School in Grand Junction, and Smart is a 6-0, 225-pound linebacker from Boulder High School.

"The leadership throughout this team is really outstanding, so it says something special for these three to be selected by their peers to be at the top of that list," head coach Dan Hawkins said, noting that all players, not just seniors, were eligible to be selected. "All three of these guys have grown and developed their way into being in this position, so it's a well-earned reward on their parts and they will handle the responsibilities that come with it well."

Smart is the first CU captain from Boulder since Fairview linebacker Barry Remington served in the capacity as both a junior and senior for the 1985 and 1986 seasons. The last two captains from Boulder High were linebacker Phil Irwin (1970) and All-America tailback Bobby Anderson (1969). Irwin's son, Heath, also played at BHS and was an offensive guard as a senior in 1996 and served as a captain on occasion when they were appointed each game between 1995 and 1997.

Geer is the first from Grand Junction to be named a Buff captain since tackle Jerry McClurg served as a senior in 1964; he attended Grand Junction High. Since then, two others from the state's Western Slope have been so honored, defensive end Mike Pruett (Delta High School, 1969) and offensive tackle Matt Miller (Durango High School, 1978).

Burton's selection marks the sixth straight year a player with Texas high school roots will serve as a Colorado captain, as he follows Sam Wilder (OT, 2004), Lawrence Vickers (FB, 2005), Mason Crosby (PK, 2006), Hugh Charles (TB, 2007), Terrence Wheatley (CB, 2007) and Patrick Williams (WR, 2008).



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Decisions on future of CU-CSU series likely soon

 BY BRUCE PLASKET  | AUGUST 23, 2009 | 10:21 PM

With both the Colorado and Colorado State football teams undecided about who will start at quarterback in the 81st game between the two, the future of that series — and the much-debated future location of those games — could be determined before either team announces a starter for the Sept 6 game in Boulder.

Indications are the series between Colorado's two biggest schools, the revival of which was spurred by unveiled threats from state lawmakers a decade ago, will continue and is likely to return to Invesco Field.

After this year's game, the schools will be contractually bound to play only the 2010 game scheduled for Fort Collins. Both sides, however, have **hinted that they are close** to coming to an agreement to extend the series. That much is nearly certain, but the locations of games beyond 2010 is up in the air.

CSU has made clear its preference to play the game at Invesco Field in Denver, which holds over 75,000 fans and provides both schools with revenue far exceeding what can be earned in their home stadiums. CU, determined to keep six home games per year in Folsom Field, has been less enthusiastic about staging the game in Denver. Since CSU hosts the 2010 game, it would seem to be in the driver's seat in determining if that contest will be in Denver.

After 2010, the situation get a little more complicated. CU's 2011 schedule contains a road trip to Hawaii during the first week — normally the date of the CSU game. CU, however, currently has an open date in the third week of the 2011 season, so there is room for the game if the two sides can agree to it.

Don't look for the game to me moved to the late-season rivalry week where teams play for stuff like oaken buckets, apple cups and brass boots. It can't be done. CSU's Border War with Wyoming currently occupies that week, while CU is locked into the lucrative Nebraska series on the day after Thanksgiving.

The biggest indicator that the CU-CSU series will return to Denver in 2011 at the latest is a CU official's comment this weekend that an announcement is hoped for during the Aug. 31 Denver Metro Sports Commission luncheon. The DMSA essentially puts on the game, and the luncheon seems an odd place to announce that the game is not coming back to Invesco.

The DMSC may be just hoping the logjam in discussions breaks before the luncheon, but probably not.

In addition to a financial windfall amounting to several hundred thousand dollars, CSU has another reason to play the game in Denver. The Rams, who have a rather dismal all-time record of 19-58-2 against the Buffs, have nearly broken even with CU in games played in Denver. CU leads the Mile High-Invesco series by a slim 5-4 margin.

Since the 2000 season, CU is 6-3 against CSU, but only 4-4 in games played in Denver. The 2004 and 2005 games were played in Boulder and CU won both.

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Sports has winners and losers

By Colorado Sports Examiner, Mark Knudson

August 24, 8:05 AM

In sports, like in life, there are winners and losers. And it's not just about what's on the scoreboard or in a bank account. In this space, intangibles matter, too.



Stephen Strasburg is a winner. Not considered a prospect out of high school, Strasburg was told by his conditioning coach at San Diego State that he should give it up, that he didn't have the intestinal fortitude to make it in

college baseball. Wrong.

Strasburg put in the work, soaked in the knowledge offered him by his college coach, Baseball Hall of Famer Tony Gwynn, dominated college baseball and is now about to embark on a professional career. Sure, history tells us that these types of "can't miss" prospects most often do, but those guys didn't have what Strasburg has. Gwynn also made sure his ace was not overused or burned out in college. Gwynn's teachings are why Strasburg will become a superstar. If he joined the Rockies tomorrow, he'd be their best pitcher.

Scott Boras came out a winner is this, too. Despite rumblings that he was going to try to use Strasburg to try to overthrow baseball's financial structure, he ended up doing the right thing for his client and getting Strasburg signed. Maybe this guy learned some lessons after all?

Other winners include Tony Dungy, for risking his reputation to stay true to his beliefs and Donovan McNabb for putting his team ahead of his ego and helping the Eagles bring in Michael Vick. Only time will tell if Vick ends up joining them on this list.

The Rockies have been winning a lot lately, largely because of the winners they have in their locker room – people like Garrett Atkins, who handled his benching earlier in the season

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like a pro and has come back strong as ever. Troy Tulowitzki got a big contract, struggled, then reached down and found another gear and now he's better than ever. Go ahead and add the Greatest Rockie Ever, Todd Helton because he's the one who has shown everyone how to carry themselves like pros. Jim Tracy is on this list, too...duh. But don't forget Clint Hurdle. Nary a bad word after his dismissal. He'll be back and better.

Another winner is Dan Hawkins. He's finding out the same thing his predecessors did: It's hard to build a solid structure on a foundation of sand. Yet he still gets more out of his squads than the sum of the parts should allow. If he leaves Boulder, he's going to win big somewhere else. Steve Fairchild goes here, too. Don't worry Ram fans, the QB play at Colorado State will always be solid under this guy, no matter who's taking the snaps. Lump Troy Calhoun in there, too.

Speaking of snaps: Kyle Orton makes the winner list, for the way he's handled everything thrown at him, if not by him. It leads you to believe that Orton will be the same guy after a three TD game as he was after throwing three picks. I hope he remembers the way he's been treated when people start asking for favors. Chris Simms as well. He's overcome a lot, and continues to persevere.

Then there are losers. Some of them rich and famous, others who can't get out of their own way. They're noteworthy nonetheless.

We start with the obvious: Bret Favre, Ego maniac. Prim Dona. Attention Junkie. Has been. The man's got zero integrity and no values other than those that are completely self serving. Forget that November game at Green Bay. Favre won't last that long before someone breaks him in half. And what about his new coach Brad "Chilly" Childress? How can anyone in that locker room take him at his word when he told them all three weeks ago that Favre was not going to be part of their team? He pretty much lied to his two other QB's. Can you imagine your coach leaving in the middle of practice so he can go pick up his new prim Dona quarterback at the airport? Acts of a desperate man. It's sickening.

Which brings us to the act of Brandon Marshall. Congrats on your latest acquittal, B-Marsh. Your resume has those 100-catch seasons my man, but it doesn't match up with your rap sheet. A winner would lay low right now, bust his butt and have the best season of his career in 2009. You? You pout and whine like a loser. Say goodbye to that phat contract.

Jay Culter is and will always be a loser. Is the Chicago media a "9" too, Mr. George? Some people just don't know how good they had it. There's a reason Jay-G has been compared to

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Favre. Birds of a feather. And then there's Bus Cook. Agent for the jerks.

What about Tom Cable? Breaking your assistant coach's jaw? Huh? Did anyone check for the whereabouts of Tyler Brayton's helmet during all this? And why do these conflicts with head coaches keep happening to Randy Hanson? Just another day at Uncle Al Davis's place. Every circus needs a Ringmaster. How come Lawrence Phillips isn't a Raider yet? Oh, maybe when he gets out.

I don't want to say I told you so. Then again, yes I do. Goodbye Linas Klezia. Enjoy the Euro League, gunner.

Baseball's losers are no secret. There are guys like Lou Pinella, who's act is really, really old. Add Manny Ramirez and David Ortiz. Brothers in more than arms, it appears. Just fess up, Big Pill Popper. And by the way, the Mitchell Report, authored by a Red Sox employee, is not looking very stout at the moment. Maybe the Canseco Report would have been a better idea.

For future reference, everyone who wants to fire Hawkins if CU doesn't win 9 or 10 games gets on this list. Guess what, delusional Buff fan. You won't do better than Hawkins, and you'll be sorry if he leaves CU. Also on here, are all the morons who booed Orton during a scrimmage. You're the ones who make Denver

look like the "6" Jay George says we are.

(AP photo of Stephen Strasburg)



Colorado Sports Examiner

Mark Knudson

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