

Ambrose says his CU Buffs DBs will aim high

New secondary coach brings big expectations

By Kyle Ringo Camera Sports Writer
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It should be a relatively seamless transition this spring for members of the Colorado secondary, but that doesn't mean life with a new coach will be easy.

Ashley Ambrose has high expectations.

Ambrose will get his first chance to work on the field with CU defensive backs Saturday when spring practices begin. The former All-Pro with 13 years of playing experience as a cornerback in the National Football League, came to Boulder two years ago to learn from former secondary coach Greg Brown as an intern in the program.

Now he wants to take what Brown built over the past four years before moving on to Arizona to become co-defensive coordinator and improve on it.

"I expect our guys to be the leaders of the defense," Ambrose said. "I always shoot for the top. I raise the bar, and they already know that. That's one thing about me. I'm a very prideful guy. I'm a guy who is very competitive and that's what I want them to be. I don't want them to shy away from anything."

"We're going to be very aggressive. We're going to go after the ball and we're going to do what it takes to lead the nation and be the best secondary."

Not every guy with the experience as a player that Ambrose has is willing to humble himself and work as an intern for one year, let alone two. Some believe they paid their dues on the field and don't need to do so in the coaching ranks, too. Ambrose embraced his opportunity to learn at Colorado and it paid off.

Now he hopes to take a talented and experienced group of safeties and cornerbacks and turn them into a ball-hawking unit that wreaks havoc on offenses. The core group includes senior cornerbacks Jimmy Smith and Jalil Brown and safeties Ray Polk, Anthony Perkins, Patrick Mahnke and Travis Sandersfeld, all of whom have plenty of game day experience.

"What I hope to accomplish is for my guys to be more physical, to make more plays," Ambrose said. "I mean last year we could have had way more interceptions. We're going to focus on catching the ball, forcing fumbles and just causing turnovers. I expect our guys to be the leaders of the defense."

One of the primary tasks for spring ball for Ambrose will be figuring out which other players are ready to step off the sidelines and into the fray next season. CU needs another cover guy or two for its nickel and dime packages after losing senior cornerback Cha'pelle Brown and senior safety Ben Burney.

The possibilities include redshirt freshmen Deji Olatoye and Paul Vigo, both of whom are long and athletic playmakers in the mold of Jimmy Smith. But veterans such as Steven Hicks and Jonathan Hawkins have waited several years for this opportunity and shouldn't be counted out.

Ambrose said he doesn't plan to change much. He played under Brown at the pro level and believes in what Brown taught the players at CU. Ambrose said there will be some minor tweaks and some different tactics used on the practice fields and in the film room, tidbits he picked up during his journey through college and the NFL.

"I had a lot of guys that really helped me prepare and paved the way for me to do what I'm doing now," he said. "I feel very prepared and ready to do this and excited to tell guys the knowledge that I have from the game."

Ambrose was originally scheduled to become the wide receivers coach at CU this year. He spent all last season as an understudy to coach Dan Hawkins at the position, but when Brown left in December, Hawkins allowed Ambrose to choose offense or defense. He went with what he knows best.

He also began off-campus recruiting for the first time in December. He is responsible for the southeast section of the country. He is responsible for signing wide receiver Keenan Canty from New Orleans, but also felt the downside of the process when Canty's teammate, quarterback Munchie Legaux backed out on the Buffs at the last minute to sign with Cincinnati. Ambrose also built a strong relationship with cornerback Jered Bell of Ontario, Calif., once Brown left.

He said his first few months of recruiting went well and give him something on which to build in the next year and beyond.

"That's the whole thing, getting your name out there, letting people see who you are and who you represent and building a relationship with you," he said. "It was awesome, seeing kids families and getting a chance to bond with them."

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Buff's offensive backfield full of intrigue

By David Ubben

[Rodney Stewart](#) shared carries with former blue-chip recruit turned CU transfer [Darrell Scott](#) and [Demetrius Sumler](#) last season. After Scott denied rumors last month of a return to Boulder and Sumler left the program, Stewart's spring could determine how many carries he gets in the fall after tallying 198 last season. [Brian Lockridge](#) and Corey Nabors are the only other two running backs scheduled to take part in spring practices, but Lockridge carried the ball just 12 times as a sophomore and Nabors is a former walk-on whose experience is mostly on special teams.

Junior quarterback [Tyler Hansen](#) showed flashes of greatness last season, throwing for more than 250 yards in three of the Buffaloes final four games, including 269 against Big 12 North champ Nebraska. This year, he'll get to throw to [Toney Clemons](#), a Michigan transfer who coach Dan Hawkins has lauded since Clemons' arrival.



The chemistry between the two that begins this spring could determine how much damage Colorado can do in a Big 12 that should be stocked with solid defenses again in 2010.

An added bonus: All spring practices will be open, beginning with Saturday's two-hour practice at 10 a.m. Just don't get caught with a cell phone, pet or a camera, unless you're also a fan of Hawkins' bad side.

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