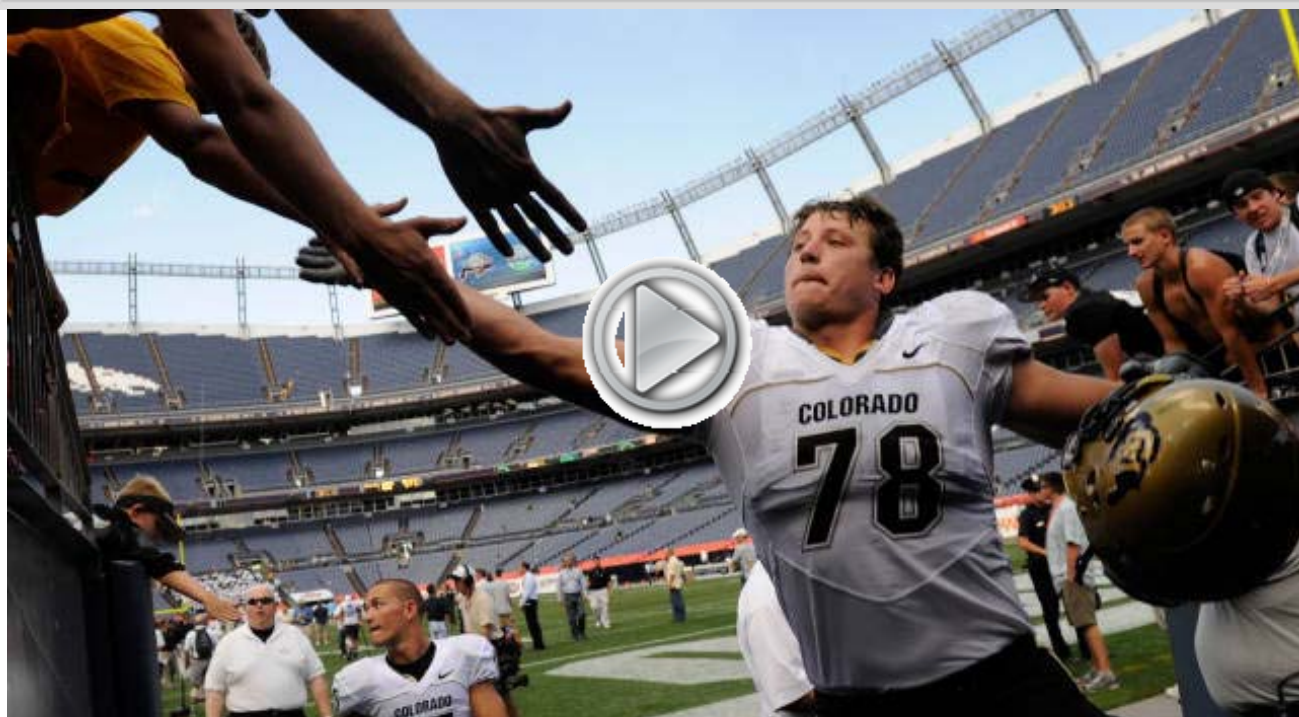




More congratulations are in store for Nate Solder (78) after the 2011 NFL Draft.
Photo Courtesy: CUBuffs.com



04/28/2011 B.G. Brooks, Contributing Editor

Brooks: Solder Ready For Whatever NFL Draft Brings

(Last Of Four Stories On The Buffs And The 2011 NFL Draft)

BOULDER - Last Friday, Nate Solder's world was far less complicated than it will become over the next 24 hours. Perfectly cast in the role of "local kid makes good," Solder accepted an invitation six days ago to speak to about 200 elementary school students at an assembly in Buena Vista.

His message flirted with football (how could it not?), but it centered mostly on the other things that Solder practiced and came close to perfecting at the University of Colorado - citizenship, hard work, academic excellence and setting/meeting the highest

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standards. There might not be any finer example at CU or on any other campus of someone who diligently put the "student" in student-athlete during an athletic career.

08/24/2010

Solder also played left tackle well enough during his three seasons at the position (he was a tight end until his sophomore year) to become a consensus All-America selection as a senior. Now, he is an odds-on favorite to be a first-round selection in the 2011 NFL Draft, a three-day affair that opens with Thursday's first round.

Ever the party animal, Solder will watch it with his parents and a few close friends at their horse ranch in the Leadville-Buena Vista area. In the frenzied months prior to the draft, he's stayed typically low-key and not allowed himself to become ensnared in the hype. If there is a favorite among the 32 franchises, he's wisely keeping it to himself.

"I don't want to play favorites right now," he told me last week. "I don't want to get my hopes up or be disappointed. I won't do that; wherever I end up will be great - and I don't want to betray that feeling."

His is a premier position in the NFL, and his size (6-foot-8, 319 pounds) and freakish athleticism make him a "must see" commodity for teams craving a QB protector. Dallas (ninth pick) has shown a keen interest in him, as has Indianapolis (22nd pick). But Solder knows all pre-draft interest is susceptible to draft day wheeling, dealing and that old fallback of "taking the best available player" that can demolish all pre-draft prognostications.

A couple of tackles - Southern California's Tyron Smith, Boston College's Anthony Castonzo - appear as highly regarded as Solder, but some draft watchers contend Solder's overall physical attributes and solid citizenship make him the more enticing pick and better long-term prospect.

Solder, though, isn't tracking the speculation. "I don't really have a feeling about it," he said. "I have no control over the whole process. All I know is that teams know almost every detail about you - and I wasn't real shocked about that. My approach to it all has been to just be real honest in all of my dealings with (the different teams). I won't undersell or oversell myself or my abilities."

Solder has looked to several former or current NFL left tackles for career pointers. During former CU guard Brad Bedell's stint on the Buffs staff, Bedell frequently mentioned ex-NFL greats Jonathan Ogden (Baltimore) and Tony Boselli (Jacksonville) as players Solder might emulate.

Ogden, Solder told the NFL Network, is a player "I've been watching for a long time. He's a big guy that moves great. He's a Hall of Fame guy, he's a good guy. That's the kind of guy that I want to be."

When time permitted over the last several seasons, he's scrutinized current NFL left tackles Joe Thomas (Cleveland) and Jake Long (Miami). "There are a number of guys I like watching, but I think those two guys are pretty good players," Solder said.

Every NFL left tackle on his radar shares physical traits that makes Solder so highly regarded, and he acknowledged that he will enter the league "with a lot of skills to be great. But working on the commitment to be great, all the details, working on those is going to be my approach."

Wherever he lands, Solder's NFL goals include winning a Super Bowl and being a consistently durable player. He told the NFL Network, "You're going to have a guy here that's going to be your All-Pro left tackle 15 years down the road. And if that's what (teams) want, then I'm the guy for them."

Solder's four-year CU career offers an insightful look at his durability. Of a possible 2,542 offensive plays from his sophomore through his senior seasons, Solder played 2,540.

Those two plays he missed in three years?

"I don't remember them," he said with a laugh. "Probably at the end of a game, I guess, when we threw in some second-string guys. I really don't remember coming out for any length of time . . . we had a lot of close games; there's wasn't a lot of time for starters to rest."

Solder's number of career sacks (five) and pressures (21) allowed were as impressive as his play total. Of his QB pressures, 14 of that total occurred during his sophomore season. Of his career sack total, two were yielded in last season's game at California - his only game of allowing multiple sacks.

As a senior, Solder became the first CU offensive tackle since Stan Brock (1979) to earn consensus All-America honors, and he's expected to be the first CU interior offensive lineman selected in the first round since New Orleans took guard Chris Naeole with the tenth overall pick in 1997.

Solder grasps what it will mean to be a potential first-rounder, calling Thursday "life-changing . . . it's going to be unreal." In the days leading up to it, he planned to keep "working out and staying busy - and not sitting around watching TV, listening to everything that's being said about the draft and where (draftees) are going. You can drive yourself crazy doing that."

Once the draft begins, he's been told he won't be waiting long for that life-altering telephone call. The best guesses - and "best" in this case can be miles and miles from reality - have him being selected in the first round's No. 22-23 range. That might make for a nervous night at the family ranch, but rest assured, he can afford to wait it out.

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Bufs' Nate Solder unsure of which NFL team will draft him

Left tackle likely to be first CU first-round pick since Brayton in 2003

By Kyle Ringo Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 04/27/2011 07:34:46 PM MDT

Four former Colorado football players could be selected in the NFL draft over the next three days beginning tonight when Buffs All-American left tackle Nate Solder is expected to be taken in the first round. Cornerback Jimmy Smith is also a possible first-round pick.

The made-for-TV draft has altered its schedule once again this year with those big television ratings in mind. Only the first round will be conducted tonight beginning at 6 p.m., locally.

The second and third rounds will be televised Friday night and the final four rounds will take place during the day Saturday.

Colorado hasn't produced a first-round draft pick since former defensive lineman Tyler Brayton was picked by Oakland with the final selection of the first round in 2003.

If both Solder and Smith are taken in the first round, it will mark the first time two Buffs have been first-round selections in the same draft since 1997 when former offensive lineman Chris Naeole was picked 10th overall by New Orleans and former wide receiver Rae Carruth was picked No. 27 overall by Carolina.

"It's extremely exciting," Solder said. "I'm just kind of looking forward to getting with a team and having a little more structure in my life. It's kind of too many question marks right now. I'm excited to have some of those questions answered I suppose."

Former CU cornerback Jalil Brown is expected to be taken at some point in the final four rounds of the draft on Saturday and former wide receiver Scotty McKnight is considered either a late-round pick or a post-draft free agent addition to one of the 32 NFL teams.

For players such as Solder and Smith, today will cap nearly five months of rugged training, travel, workouts and interviews with just about every team in the league.

The reward will be life-changing contracts that will pay them enormous sums, taking them from the peanut butter and jelly and Top Ramen existence of a college student to budgets that can pay for personal chefs if they desire.

Solder and Smith are likely to be in the league for several years at a minimum and could play for 10 years or more if myriad factors go right for them.

Brown and McKnight will likely enter the league with much to prove and will be paid far less for their services initially.

Solder has been rated anywhere from a top-10 pick -- possibly going to Dallas at No. 9 -- to later in the first round. He made personal visits to Dallas, Indianapolis, Washington and the New York Giants in recent weeks leading up to today.

Solder will watch the draft with family and invited guests tonight in Leadville with cameras from the NFL Network and ESPN on hand to capture his reaction to being selected.

Solder insists he is probably more confused than anyone about where he might go in the draft because he has had so many conversations with different NFL coaches, general managers and owners.

"I'm in the no-man zone," he said. "I don't know anything."

Smith and Brown did not respond to messages left for them Wednesday. McKnight said he plans to watch the draft with family and friends at his parents home in Southern California.

McKnight left CU as the program's all-time leading receiver, and despite four years of success in the Big 12 and a solid pro timing day in February at CU, there are doubts about his ability to produce similar results at the highest level of football.

"I'm excited to move forward in the process and have a sense of stability in where I'll be competing to play next year," McKnight said. "I feel I've done everything I could possibly do up to this point to put myself in position to succeed. I can't wait to celebrate with my family, whether it be after getting drafted or signing as a free agent, then moving on and getting to work."

Smith is one of the most intriguing cases to keep an eye on in the entire draft, not just from a CU perspective.

The consensus seems to be that Smith possesses unmistakable first-round skill. However, teams have questions about his character spawned by off-the-field situations before and during his time at CU, including failed drug tests and underage drinking tickets.

Those issues could cause him to slip into the second round on Friday, but he is not expected to fall further.

Colorado hasn't had more than two players picked in any draft since 2006 when five former Buffs were taken.

If Smith, Brown and McKnight are drafted, they will be the first players signed and developed at Colorado under former coach Dan Hawkins to be drafted. Solder was committed to the Buffs prior to the firing in 2005 of former coach Gary Barnett.

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