

# CU Buffs' RB Tony Jones thrives in new system

## Redshirt freshman responding well to higher intensity

**By Kyle Ringo** Camera Sports Writer  
Boulder Daily Camera

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Colorado football fans will get their first look at coach Jon Embree's Buffaloes in three weeks today in a scrimmage on the practice fields that is open to the public.

The first three practices of spring ball were open last month, but the doors closed on March 14 and the team has worked in front of only invited guests since. Embree said he believes some progress has been made in the seven closed practices but there is still plenty of ground to cover in the coming weeks and months leading up to his first season at the helm of his alma mater.

Embree said the first and second teams will see plenty of each other in the scrimmage slated for 1:45 p.m., and the starters will face each other occasionally. He said much of it will be game-like with the offense trying to drive the ball to score, but there will be some redzone work as well. He said some field goal attempts will be mixed in at times when drives stall or when he feels like it.

Numerous players sat out Friday evening's practice to rest injuries in hopes of being healthy enough to participate today. The defensive line has been particularly hard hit.

While some players have struggled to stay on the field this spring and others have had trouble adapting to new schemes and a more physically and mentally demanding style of practicing under new coaches, others have thrived.

One such case is redshirt freshman running back Tony Jones, who has made the most of his opportunity backing up senior Rodney Stewart while fellow senior Brian Lockridge recovers from injury.

Embree consistently mentions Jones as a standout in post-practice interviews.

"Tony Jones is doing very well," Embree said after one practice. "He is starting to show up. He needs to get stronger, but he has a good knack of finding the hole and the seam. The other thing he is doing good is he's protecting the football. Don't ever take that for granted."

Jones sat out last season as a true freshman after a sparkling senior season in high school in 2009 in which he was named the Gatorade Player of the Year in New Jersey after accumulating more than 1,600 yards of total offense and 35 touchdowns at Don Bosco Prep in Paterson, N.J.

Jones led his team to a state championship and the mythical high school national championship. Don Bosco finished atop the USA Today Super 25 poll and four other national high school polls.

It was rough to transition from such a bright spotlight at Don Bosco to relative anonymity on the bench at CU, but Jones believes it served him well even though it was hard.

"I felt sick to my stomach not playing and seeing all the guys have fun and seeing Speedy run for touchdowns and celebrating and just me being on the sidelines cheering him on and wishing I was playing," Jones said. "But you know everything happens for a reason and I'm pretty grateful that I redshirted last season and played scout team and got the feel of the college level."

Jones led the Buffs in rushing in the first scrimmage behind closed doors this spring. He ran 13 times for 76 yards, an average of 5.8 yards per carry. He also caught a pass for seven yards. Meanwhile, Stewart ran 11 times for just 26 yards and a touchdown.

Stewart is coming off a year in which he finished third in the Big 12 Conference in rushing with more than 1,300 yards. He will be one of the most experienced players on the roster in the fall and is considered by just about everyone in the

program as a lock to be a featured part of the offense.

The challenge for Jones and fellow redshirt freshman Cordary Allen as well as incoming freshman Malcolm Creer and Rashad Hall is to keep pushing for playing time anyway.

"Coach (Eric) Bieniemy always tells us that (Stewart) is going to be the key player, but he's coaching the guys that are behind him to try to take his spot or try to get him better. For us not to try to take his spot, is just not going to get him better. We know that he's going to be the key player. So we're just going to try to do anything to get him better."

Jones said he has meshed well with Bieniemy, the offensive coordinator and running backs coach. Bieniemy coaches players hard with high expectations, and Jones said it can be intimidating at times. But he believes the pressure to perform is making him a better player. He has his first chance of 2011 to show that publicly today.

"When he starts yelling, you just can't let that get to you," Jones said. "You just got to get better at it."

#### **Notable**

Embree said tight end Harold Mobley has returned from suspension but hasn't been able to do a lot in practice because he is so far behind. Mobley was suspended for academic reasons. ... Embree credited offensive line coach Steve Marshall for how quickly the offensive line has picked up responsibilities and assignments in the West Coast offense. "That's really been very encouraging cause usually that's the group you have to hold things back for," Embree said. ... Bleachers are set up at several points around the practice fields for fans who want to watch today's scrimmage. Embree said he hopes fans will come and support the players.

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Friday, April 1, 2011

## No more Hawkinses for Tyler Hansen

By Ted Miller

BOULDER, Colo. -- The "Hawkins" questions have been popular for Colorado's players since Jon Embree was hired to replace Dan Hawkins as the Buffaloes coach. What went wrong under Hawkins? How does the new Embree administration compare to the one it replaced? Etc.

But quarterback [Tyler Hansen](#) has been getting double the Hawkins questions because his career in Boulder has been marked by two Hawkinses: The one who coached him and the one he competed against, quarterback [Cody Hawkins](#).

Yes, Hansen admits, it was never comfortable trying to beat out the coach's son for the starting job.

"It was awkward at moments," Hansen said. "There were moments maybe when you'd do something good, and Coach Hawk wouldn't say anything but when Cody did it, he said something. Maybe there was a little nepotism there."

Hansen insists that it never became a problem between him and Cody. Said Hansen, "I think we handled it the way it was supposed to [be handled]. We were both positive with each other and we were friends on and off the field. But it was awkward at moments."

It was, however, often a problem for fans. And there were grumblings in the locker room at times. Both groups mostly favored Hansen. Still, Hansen ultimately triumphed. He took over the job in 2009 and only lost it in 2010 after seven games because of a ruptured spleen.

Hansen no longer has to worry about either Hawkins. Now he has to worry about Embree, who clearly doesn't want Hansen to feel like the starting job is his by default.

"[Nick Hirschman](#) is starting to figure some things out," Embree said. "The light is starting to go on. He still needs to be a little more decisive. I'd say the edge with Hansen right now is that Tyler just is a little more decisive with what to do and just the command in the huddle."

Hansen said he has no complaints about being challenged. The intensity of Embree's staff and the attention to detail as they install a pro-style offense, Hansen said, is making everyone better.

"They keep telling me, 'Keep competing,' whether that's with Nick or with myself," Hansen said.

You get the feeling that Hansen is of the mind that nothing could be worse than last season, and that's not entirely a slight on Dan Hawkins but on the uncomfortable situation. For one, a ruptured spleen hurts.

The woes, however, started well before his injury. The 2010 season started with the elder Hawkins decidedly on the hot seat - the general feeling was he would have been fired after the 2009 season if not for a hefty buyout due to an ill-advised contract extension -- and those rumors floated into the locker room, which couldn't have been a positive for the team.

"I was a little unsure of what was going to happen," Hansen said. "It was a wild ride. With all those rumors flying around, it was difficult at times. Guys were a little negative sometimes."

That's changed, Hansen said, with the arrival of Embree, who has been demanding -- and often brutally honest -- while simultaneously attempting to bring the locker room together by acknowledging the program's traditions.

Hansen put up middling numbers last fall, completing 68 percent of his passes (good) while throwing six touchdowns and six interceptions (not as good). But he's flashed potential at times, and the new offense will showcase him as a passer more than a runner, which should keep him healthy.

Hansen and his teammates are aware that most project them toward the bottom of the Pac-12 South Division in 2011. Not surprisingly, Hansen and his teammates discount those projections and claim to be confident they will be immediately competitive.

"Within this program, I think there is [confidence]," he said. "Outside, I think we've got to prove ourselves to people early in the season."

The Buffaloes play a brutal schedule: 13 consecutive weeks with nonconference games with Hawaii, Colorado State, California (an already scheduled game that won't count in the conference standings) and Ohio State. But whatever happens, they won't be able to blame the results on Hawkins.

Either one of them.

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### Colorado hoping new conference, coach sparks football revival

#### Story Highlights

Jon Embree helped rebuild Colorado as a player; can he do it as a coach?

Hire met with little fanfare nationally, but has been a big hit in Boulder

Embree's goals heading into first Pac-12 year: improve attitude, recruiting

On the first day of spring conditioning drills at the University of

Colorado, Jon Embree stood before the 85 football players he'd been hired to lead. Settling into the job he'd always hoped for at the school he'd always loved, the Buffaloes' new head coach led the early morning workout the best way he knew how.

He screamed.

Unbridled and full-throated, Embree delivered reminders of past failures and orders to push harder. He let the players know he'd been watching when the Buffaloes collapsed last season against Kansas, giving up a 28-point lead and allowing the Jayhawks to snap an 11-game conference losing streak. He knew all about the 52-7 loss at Cal and the 24-3 embarrassment against Colorado State. The former Colorado tight end had spent the last five years as an assistant coach in the NFL, where colleagues weren't shy about mocking his alma mater's football ineptitude.

So now that he'd been hired to resuscitate the once-thriving program, Embree relished the opportunity to let the Buffaloes know how he'd felt. "Watching some of those games," Embree said, "as a former player, it was flat-out embarrassing."

Now it's up to Embree to help his fellow ex-Buffs save face. His hiring last December garnered little praise from the national press (Colorado's decision **earned a "D" grade** from SI.com's Stewart Mandel). The 45-year-old Embree had never worked as a coordinator, much less a head coach. He made his name coaching tight ends, most recently with the Washington Redskins. But he had certain qualifications: He'd long considered this his dream job, and with a \$250,000 annual base salary, he could be hired relatively cheaply, vital for an athletic department that has been forced to make budget cuts in recent years.

In Boulder, however, Embree's already created a buzz. About 1,200 boosters showed up for a post-Signing Day luncheon at the Hyatt Regency ballroom, roughly triple the event's 2010 crowd. "His vision and energy is creating a lot of excitement around the program," Colorado athletic director Mike Bohn said. "He has this intense passion and competitive spirit, and that's been well-received by the recruits, by the fans, by the students, by the players, by everybody."

Embree's staff has also generated excitement. He brought in another Buffs' great, former running back Eric Bieniemy, as

his offensive coordinator. Like Embree, Bieniemy has never been a coordinator, most recently serving as the Vikings' running backs coach from 2006-10. "There's a sense of being back home," said Bieniemy, who began his coaching career at Colorado in 2001. "We're obviously in the honeymoon phase, but the connection we have to the program brings a lot of excitement." At defensive coordinator Embree hired Greg Brown, who's now in his third stint as a Colorado assistant.

While Embree and his staff will be charged with improving on-field performance immediately, their long-term success may rest on their ability to recruit the state of California. "Recruiting that state is a huge piece of what we need to do," Bohn said. The most successful Colorado teams of the late 80s and early 90s drew heavily from the West Coast's talent pool. Both Embree and Bieniemy worked as assistants at UCLA, and with Colorado moving into the Pac-12 this season, they're confident they can revive the program's California pipeline. "When you look at the best teams in this school's history, they're built with Colorado kids and California kids," Embree said. "That's how this team needs to be built."

### **SCHROEDER: Can Embree make a difference? More Pac-12 spring questions**

Whether building a team or coaching it, Embree competes relentlessly in everything he does. He tells a story of pushing his teenage daughter, Hannah, to be more ruthless in her tennis game. "I tell her there comes a time when you have to have this mindset when you go out there," he said. "You have to put your throat on the other girl's throat. You can't let her breathe."

"I say something like that, and then my wife tells me, 'You know, not everybody's like you. Not everyone wants to be like that all the time.' But I guess that's just who I am. No matter what it is, I just like winning."

Lately, that kind of intensity has been lacking in Boulder. "Under the coach we had before, it had gotten to the point where, for some reason or another, losing became acceptable," said senior safety Anthony Perkins, referring to former coach Dan Hawkins, who went 16-33 in his four years at Colorado. "In players' minds, it was just accepted that we were going to lose games. We'd get up for certain games, and then we'd have down weeks where we weren't giving it everything. That was the culture. That was the norm."

Embree has made it clear he won't tolerate that kind of attitude. "From day one, he let us know that the standards were going to be raised," Perkins said. "His first speech let us know that he expected more than what we had given."

As he screamed his way through the first day of drills, Embree acted as a sort of benevolent sadist, forcing sprint after sprint. At one point he organized the team into lines for 20-yard group sprints. He called the drill "Perfect 12s," representing the team's move to the Pac-12 conference. As each group ran, Embree and his staff counted the reps. If any player walked across the finish line, the sprint didn't count. If any player put his hands on his knees afterward, the sprint didn't count. If any player didn't go as hard as he could, failed to strive for Embree's definition of "perfection," the sprint didn't count.

The Buffs needed 12 perfect sprints to complete the drill. It took them 56 tries.

"That's when I knew," senior quarterback Tyler Hansen said, "this guy is not joking around. He's going to get us back to where we need to be."

Should Embree manage to turn around Colorado, it wouldn't be the first time he's sparked a Buffaloes' revival. When he played tight end in the 80s, Embree's teams finished 5-17 in his first two seasons. As a junior and senior, his teams went 13-12 and made a bowl game each year. Four seasons later, the Buffs were national champions.

"Being a part of a group that got this program turned around was special," Embree said. "That helped build the passion I have for this program. We were not very highly thought of. CU was an also-ran. But we built it up to where it became, in my

opinion, a top 15 program in the country."

Now, Embree will attempt to repeat history.

"Having been a part of building this program up, having a chance to go through the same thing these players are going to go through, it's on my mind all the time," Embree said. "Going through that building process, having an idea of what we need to do now, I think about those experiences every single day."

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