



Junior linebacker Doug Rippy has worked himself into contention for a starting job.
Photo Courtesy: CUBuffs.com



04/05/2011 B.G. Brooks, Contributing Editor

Trimmed Down Rippy Enjoying 'Breakout Spring'

BOULDER - Even when he arrived on campus in 2008, Doug Rippy looked the part. Learning to play the part was another matter, but in the spring of 2011 Rippy appears to have arrived once more - this time as a more complete football player.

"We always knew he had the ability, it was just a matter of time before he would break out," veteran Colorado linebackers coach Brian Cabral said. "He's having a breakthrough spring."

That's always good news in Cabral's world of heavy contact, where most of his "puppies" serve their scout-team time before growing and maturing into better-than-average LBs.

Granted, Rippy has grown and matured, but his move into a contender's role for the starting middle linebacker spot also has been aided by not growing anymore - more precisely, by shrinking a little.

Between the end of the 2010 season and the start of spring drills on March 11, the 6-foot-2 Rippy dropped 22 pounds. New Director of Speed, Strength and Conditioning Malcolm Blacken asked him to "get to a weight I was comfortable playing at," and Rippy ended up at a svelte 228 - poundage he

hadn't seen since his redshirt freshman season (2009).

"I ate healthier then worked my butt off in the off season," he said. "I wasn't setting out to lose 22 pounds, it just turned out different than I expected. I was thinking 10 or 15, but it just kept coming off. I feel much faster and stronger now."

Cabral was little more than a curious by-stander in Rippy's reduction.

"I didn't ask him to drop weight, but obviously he must feel comfortable at that," Cabral said. "More importantly, he probably feels good about himself. That must be a sign of commitment for him, and I think there has been a different level of commitment from him."

"When he came back from the (Christmas) break there seemed to be a sense of maturity I hadn't seen from him. I don't know what it was, but to his credit, there's been a different commitment and maturity level from then on."

Rippy, of Columbus, Ohio, played in six games last season, recording four tackles (one solo) and 23 special teams points. When Jon Embree was hired as CU's new head coach in early December, Rippy said it was evident to all that a stronger commitment would be necessary to reach the field this fall.

"The coaches just asked me to come out and play hard," Rippy recalled, adding that the past two years he "kind of struggled learning the playbook."

He's more comfortable in those paces now and has taken seriously Embree's initial challenge. "The new staff is evaluating everybody every day," Rippy said. "I think everybody had to come out with a new mind-set. It's been like an audition for everybody; you have to impress the coaches, because like they said, if you don't they'll bring in a freshman (in your place)."

Rippy had experienced that before and wasn't eager to repeat it. If Cabral wants him to learn three positions, Rippy complies. "Whatever they're asking, I'm trying to do," he said. "But I'm more used to it now . . . just 'fitting up' and knowing where I need to be. And I know my responsibilities and everybody else's; that's really helped me out a lot."

He's also seized an opportunity for more practice time with the first unit when sophomore Derrick Webb went down with a hip injury before spring break. Webb, who played the inside LB spot in seven games last fall, was to have returned to Tuesday's practice in a limited capacity. Still, Cabral said Webb wouldn't play in Saturday's Spring Game (6 p.m., Folsom Field, no admission charge).

"Rippy has taken advantage there, but he's done most of it on his own," Cabral said. "Most players have those (breakthrough) moments, just at different times. You just never know when that's going to be. I'm looking for a starting middle linebacker next year, so it's kind of nice to know I've got a candidate."

Rippy might not be as vocal as his coaches want him to become, but improving in that area could be included in his next "growth spurt."

"They're expecting me to become more of a leader," he said. "It's kind of tough not being used to it and having to play through being tired. You have to show by example. Obviously, that's what I have to do, but I'm hoping the whole team is built around leadership, not just around one person."

That role can wait a bit. Right now, noted Cabral, Rippy "has my vote as most improved . . . he's doing what he's supposed to be doing and making plays."

Good starting points for a prospective starter.

'EB' TALKS FBs: The Buffs' new pro-style offense needs a fullback - a very untrendy position in many high schools and an increasingly uncommon one on college campuses. CU has a pair of converted linebackers - seniors Evan Harrington and Tyler Ahles - competing in that role.

But Offensive Coordinator/Running Backs Coach Eric Bieniemy says no matter if the spread formation and its variations don't produce fullbacks, the position always can be filled.

"There's enough good football players out there - undersized defensive ends, undersized linebackers - that could be great fullbacks," Bieniemy said. "As long as there's football, there will be a fullback. You just have to have the ability to project them into that position. Will there be some growing pains? Yes.

"But if there's a football mind inside that body, as long as that kid possesses the attitude you want, you can convert him into a fullback."

Bieniemy said "each day is a learning process" for Harrington (5-11, 220) and Ahles (6-2, 240). "But the good thing is, they want to learn."

BUFF BITS: Tight end DaVaughn Thornton was at practice Tuesday but as a non-participant. On Monday, Thornton was taken by ambulance to an area hospital after being tackled and hitting the ground headfirst. He complained of soreness in his back and was taken to the hospital as a precautionary measure. Embree said Thornton should be back at practice on Thursday (Wednesday is an off day) and might be able to participate in Saturday's Spring Game . . . Thursday's practice will be a lighter session devoted mostly to teaching by Embree and his staff. He said the Buffs need more tutelage on what to do in specific game situations as well as paying more attention to details . . . Saturday is CU's Junior Day. Embree said 26 or 27 high school juniors from in-state and out are expected, many of them accompanied by their parents.

Contact: BG.Brooks@Colorado.EDU

SHOW MENU



Search continues to fill void at corner for Embree, CU Buffs

Inconsistency plagues candidates to replace Smith, Brown at CB

By Kyle Ringo Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 04/05/2011 11:57:04 PM MDT

One of the biggest concerns for the Colorado football program entering spring practices last month was who might step forward to claim two starting cornerback jobs left behind by Jimmy Smith and Jalil Brown, both of whom are headed to the NFL.

With only one practice remaining before the annual spring game Saturday, it's safe to say the program will begin fall camp in four months with the same question at or near the top of the coaching staff's priority list.

Almost all of the contenders have had moments this spring when they have looked capable and up to the challenge. Unfortunately, each also has had moments that have led to coaches scratching their heads in consternation and even a few glorious meltdowns.

Coach Jon Embree said no one has emerged at the position because no one has proved capable of consistency from one day to the next. Defensive coordinator and secondary coach Greg Brown agreed.

Embree said guys aren't playing their best football yet because they aren't comfortable mentally yet. That will come with time and effort.

"To be a good football player you have to know what you can and can't do physically and then make sure that you protect yourself," Embree said. "So if I can't run and I'm a corner, then I need to make sure I'm playing with good technique, using my hands and staying on top. If I can run, then I can be a little bit more aggressive. But when you're just kind of out there waiting to see what's happening trying to react, you don't do anything.

"... No one does it every play yet."

The list of candidates is a long one. It includes veterans such as Jonathan Hawkins and Arthur Jaffee, who have logged their share of playing time on defense and special teams but never have risen to the level of starter.

Transfer Makiri Pugh is another player with a little more experience.

The list also includes a gaggle of young players who have learned behind Smith and Brown for a year or two and now have to prove they can play at a high level -- players such as Deji Olatoye, Jered Bell, Paul Vigo and Josh Moten.

Players say their inconsistency is a product of learning new schemes and play calls and how to do things the way Greg Brown wants them done versus what former secondary coach Ashley Ambrose taught them last year.

They say Ambrose and Brown are similar in their methods, which makes sense because Brown mentored Ambrose, but there are subtle differences that can trip up players.

"We're all still in the learning process," Bell said. "We're all young. So that is probably one of the main reasons. We've just got to know our technique and get in the playbook a little more. That will help a lot more on the field."

Bell said Brown asks defensive backs to learn and understand the entire defense, not just their responsibilities. That has extended the learning curve somewhat.

Bell said he came to Colorado to be a starting cornerback and he has every intention of making it happen this year. He logged some limited playing time on defense last year.

"It helped a lot because confidence is a big thing when you're playing corner," Bell said. "So being on the field last year has

given me the confidence to come out and do it again, hopefully get a little more playing time and earn a starting spot."

Olatoye admits to his inconsistency, but he also says it's a product of the changes going on in the defense, play calls and techniques. He says he is confident he and several of his teammates will be playing at a higher level by the time fall camp rolls around and even more so once the season arrives.

"Our corners are getting more consistent by the day," Olatoye said. "We have our up and down days, but for the most part we try not to have too many bad plays in a row. It's really about getting in our books and watching film."

Notable

Tight end DaVaughn Thornton returned to the practice fields Tuesday but did not participate. He was taken from the field in an ambulance on Monday after a collision that resulted in upper-back and neck pain. Embree said he doesn't know if he will allow Thornton to participate in the spring game. "He wants to play. We'll just see how it works," Embree said. ...

Toney Clemons has been held out of recent sessions because of a nagging hamstring injury and might not participate in the spring.

[Close Window](#)[Send To Printer](#)

denverpost.com

THE DENVER POST

sports

Tradition returns as Embree era unfolds

By John Henderson
The Denver Post

Posted: 04/06/2011 01:00:00 AM MDT

Updated: 04/06/2011 01:04:01 AM MDT

BOULDER — The Washington Redskins' 2010 offensive playbook sits on Jon Embree's coffee table like a paperweight.

It's 2 inches thick, bigger than his players' textbook "History of Planet Earth."

As Embree embarks on his first head coaching job, his offensive philosophy may look familiar to Broncos fans. Of all the influences he has had in an assistant coaching career that spans from Bill McCartney to Mike Shanahan, his pro-set attack will have Shanahan's fingerprints all over it.

"Being around Mike, I've learned a lot," said Embree, who came to Colorado from Shanahan's Redskins staff. "Not only plays, but how to attack defenses. He sees the game at a whole different level. He really does."

The Buffs won't exactly look like Redskins Light this fall. Offensive coordinator Eric Bieniemy brought some West Coast offense principles from the Minnesota Vikings too.

Colorado ran a lot of pro set the last five losing seasons, but this year's differences will be obvious. Colorado will run the ball more (hello, Rodney Stewart), Tyler Hansen will be under center more and the tight ends will play a bigger

role.

Embree first learned a pro-style attack as a graduate assistant at Colorado in 1991, when he shared an office with five other assistants in what was then the new Dal Ward Center. He has moved down the hall, where his spacious office overlooks Folsom Field.

That was the year McCartney junked his wishbone offense for a pro set. As Embree's coaching career blossomed in the college ranks, he often studied Shanahan's offense with the Broncos.

With the Redskins, he honed in on it.

"I thought he was all about throwing it, but being around him and how he creates mismatches to run the ball was really impressive," Embree said. "I understood why he did what he did."

The pro set may seem old school to many, but college defenses are catching up to the spread. In Colorado's new league, the Pac-12, Oregon uses the spread with great success, but its biggest challenger, Stanford, uses the same offense Embree wants to run.

"I like the ability to run the ball out of it, the different ways we can run the ball and attack

Fast, convenient,
AND affordable

Save on select
Wireless*
All-in-Ones,
Photo Printers
and Lasers

Save
Today

Limited time offers

Shop Now >

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™

denverpost.com

THE DENVER POST

people," Embree said. "I don't want to say I'm a traditionalist, but having a fullback, having two, three tight ends, it gives you a chance creating some mismatches."

Football goes in cycles, and Embree thinks the spread has seen its better days. The question he is trying to answer this spring is how well his players are fitting into a new scheme. And former coach Dan Hawkins left him some weapons.

Hansen, a three-year starter, has been efficient. Stewart is a 1,300-yard rusher. Four starting offensive linemen return, and so do a couple of improving, speedy receivers.

"Our playbook's pretty thick right now, and it's going to get pretty crazy," Hansen said. "This stuff is hard to learn and hard to keep up, so this is really important for all of us."

Keep in mind that the offense might have to score like Oregon does to make up for a defense left in rubble.

"On paper, that (offense) is a great start," said Embree whose spring game is 6 p.m. Saturday. "But we ain't playing on paper. They have to relearn terminology. They have to relearn splits. They have to relearn route depths, drops. How many times was Tyler Hansen under center?"

Embree said he has installed only 30 percent or so of his playbook. When asked how much he'll have installed by the Sept. 3 opener at Hawaii, he said, "Enough."

The Jon Embree era is still five months away. It won't be enough time to install his entire philosophy. It won't be enough time to get all the players he needs. However, Embree hints that he's a traditionalist. That's what a shattered fan base needs.

A return to tradition.

*John Henderson: 303-954-1299 or
jhenderson@denverpost.com*

Get a FREE ADT-Monitored Home Security System.*

(With \$99 customer installation and purchase of ADT alarm monitoring services. See important terms and conditions below.)

Call Now! 1-877-835-8373

SECURITY CHOICE
ADT Authorized Company



*\$99.00 Customer Installation Charge. 36-Month Monitoring Agreement required at \$35.99 per month (\$1,295.64). Form of payment must be by credit card or electronic charge to your checking or savings account. Offer applies to homeowners only. Local permit fees may be required. Satisfactory credit history required. Certain restrictions apply. Offer valid for new SecurityChoice - An ADT Authorized Dealer customers only and not on purchases from ADT Security Services, Inc. Other rate plans available. Cannot be combined with any other offer. **\$100 VISA® Gift Card Offer: \$100 VISA Gift Card is provided by Security Choice and is not sponsored by ADT Security Services. Requires mail-in redemption. Call 1-888-407-2338 for complete restrictions and redemption requirements.

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™



The Chaffee County Times

Wednesday, April 06, 2011

Solder projected to be 1st-round pick

Kathy Davis
Times Reporter

Wednesday, April 06, 2011

Part of Nate Solder's journey to the April 28-30 National Football League combine, where he is projected to be a first-round draft pick, was filmed March 30-31 by crews from NFL Films and Gatorade.

Solder, 23, was filmed for the online NFL video at his home in Leadville with his parents, Ed and Peri Solder, and at Buena Vista High School where he played four years high school football under head coach Bob Marken.

"It is easy to be excited to see it happen to him because he is such a humble, good person and you want to pull for him," Marken said. The only thing that's changed since high school is that Solder is bigger, Marken said. The 6-foot-8-inch, 307-pounder ran the 40-yard dash in 4.96 seconds at the NFL scouting combine, according to The Denver Post.

"Buena Vista is a huge part of who I am and it's an honor and a privilege to call it my hometown," Solder said in an e-mail to The Times April 5 regarding his trip to Buena Vista.

The video, which will be run online at NFL.com/videos, is a series called "Everything to Prove." It is about 14 draft prospects, who they are and where they come from.

Solder is a 2006 BVHS graduate and graduated from the University of Colorado in May 2010 with a degree in biology. He was an offensive tackle for the CU Buffs for five years and worked on graduate courses during the fifth year.

Solder will be recognized April 12 as the Colorado Sports Hall of Fame Collegiate Male Athlete of the Year. He was a three-time academic first-team athlete All-Big-12 selection and recognized for having the highest grade-point average on the CU football team. He was named to the Walter Camp All-American team.

"Nate has exceeded all our dreams for him. The awards are the cream. It will give him all the opportunities he wants. He studied really hard. That's what he thinks is more important," Peri Solder said.

Steps taken by Solder after college include going to the CU pro day, where players show agents how well they can do.

He hired an agent, Mark Humenik of Athletes First, and trained for combine. Nate was invited to visit with several pro teams including the Dallas Cowboys, Kansas City Chiefs and Baltimore Colts.

He also visited with the Denver Broncos and the New England Patriots. Other teams could still call him, Peri said.

"It is a long wait and is quite political and complicated," Peri Solder said.

Solder will be the guest speaker at the Boys & Girls Club Chaffee County annual Youth of the Year breakfast April 21 in Salida. Because of limited seating, this is an invitation-only event. People interested in attending may contact Karen Dils at karend6@amigo.net or 395-8949 for information regarding invitations.

"He will fly in for two days to speak," Peri said.

The University of Colorado will honor Solder at halftime of the annual spring game, Saturday, April 9. He will have his name and number displayed on the façade of the west side of the Fred Casotti Press Box among players who had their jersey honored. Solder was a two-time first-team All-Big 12 player and the conference's offensive lineman of the year for 2010. Solder also was a finalist for the Outland Trophy.