



Senior corner Jalil Brown believes the Buffs are ready for a long-awaited breakthrough season.
Photo Courtesy: CUBuffs.com



08/02/2010 B.G. Brooks, Contributing Editor

Brooks: CU's 'Other' Corner Set To Make Mark On Secondary

IRVING, Texas - Before they arrived on Colorado's campus in 2006, Jalil Brown and Scotty McKnight had never laid eyes on one another. It didn't take long before each was the recipient of the other's eyes, fists, forearms, shoulders ...

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Brown is a cornerback, McKnight a receiver. In terms of compatibility, that's oil and water, mustard on a white silk shirt.

Early on in their freshman camps, the line of scrimmage was the only thing that separated them - and that held firm only until the ball was snapped.

"Me and Jalil would be in full-on fights in practice that season," McKnight recalled of their hand-to-hand duels in Year 1. "We used to go at it ... I'm a tough, competitive kid. I'm not going to let anyone get the best of me."

Brown doesn't go for that either; they both gave and got on a daily basis. But after practices an odd

thing happened: On those occasions when McKnight's parents would watch drills and the skirmishes involving their son, they often called Jalil over afterward rather than Scotty.

"They'd tell him, 'Keep doing that to Scotty; it makes him tougher,'" McKnight remembered.

A little puzzled at first, Brown's response was, "Sure . . . whatever works."

Four years later, Brown, of Phoenix, and McKnight, of Coto de Caza, Calif., are better acquainted, not to mention better prepared to begin their final seasons for the Buffaloes.

Initially, McKnight's impression of his young teammate/practice adversary was this: "He was extremely raw, especially at press technique, when he got here . . . he would over-commit a lot. His technique wasn't all the way there."

Now, if Brown's technique isn't "all the way there," it's close enough to elicit this update from McKnight: "He is hands down one of the best corners in the country. Of everyone I've gone against - Aqib Talib at Kansas, guys from Oklahoma and different schools - Jalil's strength and speed are unmatched by anyone."

High praise, even if it emanates from the inside. McKnight, though, has more than a little football cred; he's second at CU in all-time receptions and should get the three catches needed to pass school leader Michael Westbrook early on.

More importantly, Brown, who was the final signee in coach Dan Hawkins' first recruiting class and initially made his mark at CU on special teams, also believes he's coming into his own as a cover corner.

He's spent the off-season trying to refine technique and honing all those things he attempted against McKnight four summers ago - jamming him at the line, back-pedaling, not over-committing to anything and reading the quarterback.

"My big thing has been harping on technique . . . I've focused on details and I think I've come a long ways," he said, adding that at 6-foot-1 and 205 pounds, he feels "very comfortable with myself."

There's also been a comfort level established with "new" position coach Ashley Ambrose, who spent 13 seasons in the NFL and was an All-Pro in 1996 (AFC Defensive Back of the Year). When Greg Brown left for the University of Arizona last winter, Ambrose was named his successor rather than stepping in to coach the wide receivers.

The transition was smooth, primarily because Ambrose had played for Brown in the NFL before working with him for two seasons on the CU staff as the defensive technical intern.

"We've gone from having a mastermind who knew the game inside and out to having a guy who played it on the field," Jalil Brown said. "(Ambrose) can tell you why you do this, how you do it, when to use your leverage and get you out of bad situations.

"When you make a mistake, he knows enough (about technique) to tell you why, why you missed a jam or a receiver. He's great at coaching players. He knows what works and doesn't . . . I don't think there's a better DB coach in the country as far as learning technique."

There won't be too many corner combos in the country better than what Ambrose fields at CU in his coaching debut. Brown and Jimmy Smith, a long, athletic senior who is included on the Thorpe Award preseason watch list and could parlay his final season into a prominent position in next spring's NFL draft.

Said McKnight: "Going against those two guys every day in practice makes going against anybody else in games much easier, let me tell you."

Jalil Brown also recognizes his running mate's value.

"I'm very fortunate to be playing with a cornerback as good as (Smith) is," he said. "I think we've both got a chance to have a good year. I don't think the quarterback can throw to one side or the other and believe he has a better chance (for a completion).

"I think he'll have to play it heads up. I think we both are going to have our fair share of balls thrown our way and have the chance to make plays. If we play like the athletes we know we are, I think we'll both have tremendous years."

Brown hopes his 2009 season was a mere warm-up act for 2010. If it is, the Buffs secondary should be solid. He was CU's leader in touchdown saves (eight), and his 15 pass deflections tied for the seventh most in a single season at the school. He also made two interceptions, a pair of fumble recoveries and was the Buffs' sixth best tackler (66, 44 solo).

In spring conditioning work, he won his position's Iron Buffalo Award for hard work, toughness, dedication and total weight lifted. But spring has spilled into summer and preseason camp opens Thursday.

After averaging four wins a season in Dan Hawkins' first four years as head coach, Brown believes the Buffs are ready to show tangible progress.

"I definitely see it . . . it's 'go' time," he said. "We've been in the system with Coach Hawk for four years; we know what he wants. All we know is what Coach Hawk is teaching. What he wants done is what we're doing; we don't know any habits that carried over from a different coach.

"Yeah, we realize the importance of this season. We've worked with that in mind - making it to the Big 12 championship (game) and a major bowl game. Some of the guys in the past kind of got into the habit of dreading the early morning workouts, running the shuttles . . . but now, I think guys know this is what's going to get us better.

"I think that whole mindset has rubbed off on the young guys. They're showing up and competing. There's a lot of competition on this team; you have to show up and just not go through the motions."

This likely will be CU's final season in the Big 12, but Brown said that possibility won't be a factor in how anyone approaches 2010: "The change is not going to affect us much at all. To even think about it wouldn't matter. We're not focused on that; we're focused on having a winning season."

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CU Buff Jimmy Smith makes Thorpe list

By Kyle Ringo, Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 08/02/2010 12:02:08 PM MDT

Colorado senior cornerback Jimmy Smith was one of 35 defensive backs around the nation to be named to the Jim Thorpe Award preseason watch list today.

The Thorpe Award is given annually to the best defensive back in the country and is named after Hall of Famer Jim Thorpe, who played both offense and defense as well as professional baseball. He also won Olympic Gold Medals in track and field.

Smith is a fifth-year senior this fall from Colton, Calif. He is a two-year starter at cornerback who has played in 35 games in his career.

A group of 10-12 semifinalist will be picked by early November. Players who have excellent seasons but were not on the preseason watch list are eligible.

The winner of the award is decided in early December and it is formally presented to the winner at a ceremony in Oklahoma City in early February. Two former Buffs have won the award. Former Buffs Deon Figures (1992) and Chris Hudson (1994) earned the honor in the early playing under former coach Bill McCartney.

Smith was not available for comment. He and his teammates will report to campus Wednesday and are scheduled to begin fall camp on Thursday with a 5:30 p.m. practice.

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Colorado faces another year of rebuilding

By **Brent Zwerneman** - Express-News

Web Posted: 08/02/2010 12:00 CDT

Colorado stunk it up overall last year, but coach Dan Hawkins at least can take heart in a veteran offensive line that perhaps will lead the Buffaloes from the abyss this season.

Colorado returns all five starters on its line, including mammoth tackle Nate Solder (6-foot-9 and 315 pounds) and nearly-as-large guard Ryan Miller (6-8, 310). Both are All-Big 12 first-team selections.

"You're playing with the same guys every day," Solder said of the importance of consistency on the offensive line. "When you have different guys, it can become jumbled."

The solid line will protect either Tyler Hansen or Cody Hawkins at quarterback — or perhaps both — as the Buffaloes once again have left open their top job for competition headed into camp.

"We'll probably get through a couple of scrimmages and give everybody a chance to compete and get going," said Dan Hawkins, Cody's father. "We're not one of those outfits that gives all of its reps to the (starters), anyway."

Receiver Scotty McKnight helped clear things up concerning the quarterbacks — at least for now.

"Tyler Hansen has been taking all of the snaps with the top team, and he's really taken control," McKnight said. "I don't think there's any doubt he's considered the starting quarterback now."

Colorado 2010 Schedule

Date Opponent Time

Sept. 4 @Colorado St. 1 p.m.

Sept. 11 @California 2:30 p.m.

Sept. 18 Hawaii 2:30 p.m.

Oct. 2 Georgia 3:30 p.m.

Oct. 9 @Missouri* TBA

Oct. 16 Baylor* TBA

Oct. 23 Texas Tech* TBA

Oct. 30 @Oklahoma* TBA

Nov. 6 @Kansas* TBA

Nov. 13 Iowa State TBA

Nov. 20 Kansas State* TBA
Nov. 26 @Nebraska* 2:30 p.m.

* — Denotes Big 12 Conference game

At a glance

2009 records: 3-9, 2-6 (fifth in Big 12 North)

Make-or-break game: Colorado fans should know right away whether Dan Hawkins finally has this ship sailing in the right direction. The Buffaloes open their season Sept. 4 against in-state rival Colorado State in Denver, a Mountain West program Colorado lost to last year in flopping to a 3-9 season. "There's a huge amount of momentum gained or lost in that game," Hawkins said. The Buffaloes are 8-16 in Hawkins' past two years, so a decent start is imperative in what's likely to be Pac-10-bound Colorado's last go-round in the Big 12.

Key players returning: WR Scotty McKnight, sr.; OT Nate Solder, sr.; OG Ryan Miller, jr.; DE Marquez Herrod, sr.; QB Tyler Hansen, jr.

By the numbers

16 - Victories for Hawkins over five seasons, compared with 33 defeats (.326 winning percentage).

23 - Underclassmen in Colorado's two-deep by the end of last season.

37 - Consecutive games receiver Scotty McKnight has at least one catch.

Find this article at:

http://www.mysanantonio.com/sports/another_year_of_rebuilding_99731959.html?showFullArticle=y

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Pac-10 rise is getting steeper by the dozen

By Chris Dufresne Los Angeles Times
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 08/01/2010 11:49:15 PM MDT

LOS ANGELES -- The 2010 college football season -- coming soon to a campus near you -- faces the daunting challenge of getting the drama of its fall and winter to match its spring and summer.

The Pacific 10 Conference, of all the sleepy gym joints, caused most of the commotion by awakening from a publicity coma to make more headlines -- good and bad -- than it had in years.

In terms of noise levels, the league went from one kazoo to 50,000 vuvuzelas.

Led by its hotshot second-year commissioner, Larry Scott, the Pac-10 aggressively tried to become the Pac-16 and nearly knocked conference alignment off its Texas A&-axis.

The big-grab play for Texas didn't work, ultimately saving the Big 12's life, but Scott certainly got everyone's attention.

Maybe he got played like a fiddle by Texas, only looking to hash out the best possible Big 12 deal for Texas (and getting it).

One insider with knowledge of the negotiations said there was never more than a "50-50" chance Texas was ever going to bolt.

"No," Scott countered Thursday during Pac-10 media day at the Rose Bowl. "I believed they were absolutely sincere."

Scott had a backup plan in case Texas didn't come -- and it's going to be called the Pac-12, probably as soon as next year. Utah is already set to join in 2011, with Colorado probably coming on board a year earlier than planned because the Big 12 wants the Buffaloes and Nebraska out in the same calendar year.

In case you didn't hear: Nebraska is joining the Big Ten in 2011.

After years as a contented, laid-back vacation destination, the Pac-10 is putting the "pro" back in proactive.

It unveiled its new logo last week -- with a probable shelf life of only one year but the graphic designer standing by to change "10" to "12."

How the conference splits into divisions is an issue Pac-10 athletic directors are going to have to hash out in the coming months. It may be a north-south divide or an east-west "zipper."

Will the California schools still play each other every year?

"Not everyone is going to be happy, at the end of the day," Washington State athletic director Bill Moos said.

While the Big Ten started Expansion Frenzy 2010 with its predatory exploratory notions, the Pac-10 ultimately stole the show -- then took it to Broadway.

Scott, at great expense -- \$1 million? -- hauled his entire coaching staff last week on a barnstorming tour of the East Coast, meeting bigwigs in New York and bigger wigs at ESPN who may have never heard of football out west.

The coaches visited the offices of The New York Times -- which historically has found little Pac-10 news fit to print -- and, on Wednesday, they and Scott rang the opening bell on Wall Street (the Dow Jones dropped 39.81 that day).

Then, it was a private charter flight back west (more \$\$\$\$), where the last tour leg ended with a final media glitz-blitz at the

Rose Bowl, the coaches at one point being trotted down the stadium steps like the Mercury astronauts.

Thankfully, none of the coaches made reporters look at their New York vacation photos.

Cheesy?

"I didn't hear any cynicism," Scott said of the tour. "... This is the beginning of a different kind of approach."

As splashes go, the Pac-10 made a cannonball into the deep end. It would have been bigger had the plan for 16 teams worked, but this seems like enough mix-it-up mayhem for now.

The Pac-10's intentions have been stated and have reverberated.

The timing of the public relations junket was awkward in that it coincided with USC, the conference's football face, recently getting hammered with NCAA sanctions that included scholarship losses and a two-year bowl ban (the school is appealing some of the penalties).

You know that old Hollywood adage, though, about there being no such thing as bad publicity. Besides, USC's downfall could be an opportunity for other Pac-10 schools to garner some independent adulation.

Did you know, for instance, that Oregon, not USC, actually won the Pac-10 title last year and is picked to win it again this year?

This conference, whose headquarters are in the Bay Area on several fault lines, is moving and shaking. There are plans for a Pac-10 TV network and notions of expanding the conference's broadcast reach to the Pacific Rim.

USC coach Lane Kiffin, by himself, seems to be good for two or three national stories a week.

Of the past, Scott said, "There had been the feeling that the Pac-10 had been a follower."

Not anymore.

The conference even raced to the forefront on correct conference membership counting, decisively declaring it will be called the Pac-12 once Utah and Colorado come aboard.

Elsewhere, with the loss of Colorado and Nebraska, the Big 12 will soon be reduced to 10 schools while the Big Ten, with the addition of Nebraska, will have 12 teams.

"I'm in communication with (Big Ten) commissioner Jim Delany about a (name) swap," Big 12 commissioner Dan Beebe joked at his league's recent media days.

The Pac-10 is no longer a punch line.

USC's sanctions even advanced a national conversation about the insidious nature of agents.

The subject dominated recent Southeastern Conference media days after it was unearthed that unscrupulous agents might also a problem in other leagues.

Alabama coach Nick Saban went so far as to compare agents to pimps, while SEC commissioner Mike Slive sounded his own clarion call.

"This is a national problem that calls for a national strategy," Slive said.

Anyone have one?

Brace yourselves, though, as this offseason may have been only a preview of coming expansion distractions.

"The music has stopped . . . for now," said Scott, who still believes 16-school "super" conferences will someday dominate the landscape.

So, enjoy this, the last year of relative calm. Enjoy some alliances as we`ve known them.

Savor the last year of round-robin play in the Pac-10, Nebraska in the Big 12 for the last go-around and Boise State`s final year in the WAC before joining the Mountain West.

Are Texas and Nebraska playing each other for the last time this season?

After 2010, will Boise State ever play Idaho again?

This is the so-far year in which the Pac-10 took college football by surprise, easily winning the offseason BCS title.

Scott: "We kind of snuck up on people."

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Pac-10 expansion: Deputy commish Weiberg on logistics of the division split

Posted by Jon Wilner on August 2nd, 2010 at 6:32 am | Categorized as Cal football, Pac-10 Conference, Pac-10 expansion, Pac-10 football, Stanford football, UCLA football, USC football

**** On the breaking news front: None to report. The league's athletic directors discussed the division split in person Friday and, best I've been able to gather, did not reach a decision. That's no surprise. Commissioner Larry Scott told me Thursday morning that resolution probably won't come October 21 ... circle the date!!!! ... when the presidents and chancellors meet in San Francisco.*

I caught up with deputy commissioner Kevin Weiberg on Thursday at Pac-10 media day in Los Angeles and hit him with a barrage of questions about the logistics behind splitting the league into divisions.

Weiberg was kind with his time and answered the questions as best he could without, of course, revealing more than he wanted.

The best way to relay the information is probably in topic-by-topic format, rather than a continuous narrative, so here goes:

** How does the league go about creating the various division and scheduling models?*

Members of the office staff, Weiberg said, are working in conjunction with a Colorado-based company (Bortz Media and Sports Group) that advises professional leagues and college conferences on, among other things, scheduling.

Any of the Pac-10/12's athletics directors can request computer models of multi-year schedules that would result from various division format.

The focus, Weiberg said, is "frequency of games."

** Are ADs asking for a minimum number of games against certain teams within a multi-year period (three in four years, for instance)?*

"There has been no minimum," Weiberg said. "It's been about the overall number of appearances against the L.A. schools."

** Will TV revenue sharing be an issue (either in the Friday pow-wow or over the course of the next three months)?*

Background: League policy calls for 55% of the TV revenue to be based on appearances, while the other 45% is split equally among all 10 teams. That means the more you're on TV, the more you earn.

While it depends somewhat on the timeframe, Weiberg said that yes, the L.A. schools tend to be on TV more often (especially USC). That means the more often you play the L.A. schools, the more often you're on TV.

Which is yet another reason — along with recruiting and ticket sales — that everyone wants to be paired with, or guaranteed games against, the Bruins and Trojans.

“It could potentially come up, yes,” Weiberg said with a look in his eyes that said, *You bet it’s an issue.*

(Note: All financial/constitutional matters require a 75% vote. With 12 teams, it would take nine schools to approve a change in the revenue distribution plan. We know USC and UCLA would vote against any change.)

** Would the rivalry games have to be changed under a Zipper Plan.*

Perhaps the biggest issue with the Hotline’s Zipper Plan (splitting the league by natural rivals) is that you could end up with natural rivals playing on the final weekend of the regular season and then meeting again a week later in the league title game.

I can understand why that’s a concern. But at the same time, history says it would happen so infrequently — natural rivals haven’t finished first and second in the standings very often — that it shouldn’t be a Zipper Plan deal breaker.

But Weiberg said the league is looking at the possibility of playing the rivalry games earlier in the season to avoid a back-to-back weekend problem.

** Will the California schools continue to play each other every year if they are not in the same division?*

My sense has always been that the league could not guarantee the four CA schools would meet every year if they were in different divisions — it wouldn’t leave a satisfactory number of dates with the L.A. schools for everyone else.

“You can build a schedule matrix in which they play virtually every year,” Weiberg said. “But there could be a miss here or there. Guaranteeing cross-division games with all four is very difficult to do.”