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cu football

## CU star Jimmy Smith: NFL in this corner's future

By John Henderson  
The Denver Post

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BOULDER — Outside a sun-splashed Starbucks near Colorado's campus, Jimmy Smith basks in the sun in more ways than one. He had taken his last final exam the day before and he would graduate the next day. He's about to enter a professional world that could make him very rich very fast.

Smith relishes the moment. He knows this is one of the few days over the next four months that he can afford a coffee break. His life is at a crossroads. What he does between now and the NFL draft April 28-30 will determine how rich and successful he'll really be.

There are individual workouts, six weeks at a training center, the NFL scouting combine and lots of stress. The life of an NFL draft prospect is one of constant preparation, from physical to psychological.

By appearances, he has the second one down.

"I'm very confident," Smith says, "but at the same time I'm happy and fortunate to be in this position."

Smith is wearing a Cincinnati Reds hat and red designer shoes from Creative Recs. Nursing a caramel latte, Smith couldn't be more laid-back if he were in Bermuda instead of Boulder. He's asked if he's a Reds fan.

"Matches my shoes," he said. "This is my favorite shoe line."

Excuse him if he's already angling for an endorsement. Smith is all business now, and has to maximize everything he can out of an NFL career that lasts on average only 3.3 years.

It will all start for real when he's drafted. That is the \$10 million question, the average between a midfirst- and a midsecond-round pick. Smith is not listed on any mock draft in the first round.

He's projected for the second. At first glance — or the glance fans will take — he didn't have an interception for a 5-7 Colorado team in 2010.

At closer look — or what the NFL will take — he's a big cornerback (6-feet-2 and 205 pounds) who runs the 40-yard dash consistently in the mid-4.4s. He was so respected, few opposing quarterbacks threw his way. Even with no picks, he made the all-Big 12 Conference first team.

"I had a good season," he says. "There was the touchdown against Texas Tech. Other than that, I had a pretty solid season. I did a lot of tackling."

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"A lot of teams didn't come my way, so it was difficult. I literally had only one opportunity and I dropped it."

Smith's development started last year, but it didn't just attract NFL scouts. It attracted agents. Smith took no phone calls. He directed everyone to his brother, Ryan, the football and track coach at his alma mater, Colton (Calif.) High School. That didn't stop some.

"They'd go through some of my friends," Smith said. "Like, 'I'll give you \$5,000 to get Jimmy to sign with us.'"

The friend was a teammate from last year, who told the agent to go where a lot of draft prospects would like to tell them to go. Smith finally settled on Denver-based Peter Schaffer.

"He's smart, very smart," Smith said. "You can tell he's working it at all times. He knows the game. He knows what he's talking about. He has lots of connections. He rubs elbows with the right people."

## Camp before combine

The other agents became nastier than rival coaches did when he signed with the Buffaloes out of high school.

"Every agent was throwing stones at Peter," Smith said. "At first, their approach is, 'I'd never talk bad about another agent.' Then I sign with Peter Schaffer and they're like, 'I'm not going to talk bad, but you know he lost a first-rounder a

few years ago?' I'm like, 'Yeah, I know about that. He told me.'"

Smith wasn't through with his choices. Next, he had to decide on a performance center. These are the new predraft, high-tech boot camps that prepare you for everything you'll face at the NFL combine, from the 40-yard-dash to the Wonderlic test to which salad dressing to choose at lunch.

They've become standard routine for all prospects, many of whom punt their second semester of school to attend.

And they're not cheap. The cost is about \$25,000 for the six weeks before the combine Feb. 23-March 1 in Indianapolis. However, it includes three balanced meals a day and all the massage and medical care possible.

Smith chose Athletes' Performance in Carson, Calif., which is attracting many of the big-ger names — including Nebraska's All-America cornerback, Prince Amukamara.

"When you compete in drills, you want to go against somebody's who's as fast as you are, if not faster," he said. "I figured the advantage would be competing against the top athletes at these training facilities and getting the best treatment."

It's all geared toward the combine. First, there are the tests where players' numbers translate into dollars. On random days over the last year, Smith has run 4.46 in the 40, bench-pressed 225

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pounds 19 times, had a vertical leap of 37 inches and a pro shuttle of 3.98 — all above-average scores.

Those tests, however, won't be his biggest challenge.

"It'll be the interviews," Smith said.

## It helps to be honest

NFL teams delve into every aspect of a prospect's past. They'll know which day they had an MRI and when they shouted at their position coach.

They'll also know when they had trouble with the law.

Smith is bracing for that one. He has two minor-in-possession charges, one when he first arrived on CU's campus as a freshman and one as a junior when cops raided a campus bar and asked for ID.

"I'll tell them I was young," he said. "I was 17 coming into college and in a new place. And the things I was doing, I didn't think I was necessarily doing anything wrong. I was in college."

Since then, Smith has become deadly serious, but not nearly as serious as he will these next four months. It'll be up to him whether his future is sunny or dark.

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

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