

CU Buffs' Nate Solder prepared to impress at combine

Former Buff projected to be first-round pick in NFL draft

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It's been a long time since a Colorado football player received as much attention following his senior season in advance of the NFL draft as offensive lineman Nate Solder.

The Buffs' former left tackle was featured prominently in the build up to the College Football Awards show on ESPN in early December just after his career in Boulder ended. He was a finalist for the Outland Trophy at the time.

He garnered more attention in January during a week of practices at the Senior Bowl in Mobile, Ala., in which he impressed scouts, NFL general managers and coaches. Through the whole process he has regularly received praise by analysts on national blogs and mock drafts, the latest of which have him being selected anywhere from No. 13 by Detroit to No. 23 by Indianapolis.

If there was any doubt Solder is the most coveted Colorado draft prospect since Chris Naeole was selected No. 10 overall in 1997 by New Orleans, it was erased earlier this month when he received personal invitations to attend private parties in Dallas hosted by NFL commissioner Roger Goodell and Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones during Super Bowl week.

Solder said he has tried to keep a level head and remain focused on training for this week's NFL Scouting Combine in Indianapolis, but if there has been a surreal moment for him it probably came in Dallas when he met Snoop Dogg, who asked if Solder was an athlete.

"It was real brief, and not a lot was said, but we got pictures and stuff," Solder said. "So it was kind of fun."

Solder will arrive at the combine on Wednesday and endure 3-5 days of medical exams, interviews, psychological and aptitude tests as well as speed, strength and agility testing.

His former teammates Jimmy Smith, who is also projected as a first-round pick by some, and Jalil Brown aren't scheduled to arrive at the combine until Saturday when all defensive backs report.

"I wouldn't say it's overwhelming, but it's a whole new world for me right now," Solder said. "You know what? I've been enjoying it a lot. There has been a whole lot of new challenges and I've been meeting great people. It's a neat experience."

Solder has been living and training in Orange County, Calif., with a large group of other draft hopefuls, including former teammate Scotty McKnight. He is represented by Athletes First, including agents David Dunn and Mark Humenik.

Solder said he knows the combine is important and has put in hundreds of hours of hard work preparing, but he believes the performances he has put on film against some of the best defenders in the nation in the Big 12 Conference over the past three seasons are what will matter most on draft day.

He said he expects to arrive at the combine weighing close to 320 pounds and in the best shape of his life.

"I don't think that I've ever been in this good of shape, but it's different than football shape because you're just really training to make the combine," Solder said. "We're not really training to be football players right now, which is kind of a crazy idea."

Colorado has produced a total of 22 first-round picks in its history and hasn't had one since Tyler Brayton was selected No. 32 overall in the 2003 draft. There have been six years in which the program has produced two first-round picks, but it hasn't happened since Chris Naeole and Rae Carruth were picked in 1997.

Solder said he will be in Boulder for Colorado's pro day on March 9, but he hopes to do well enough at the combine this

week that he will only do position specific drills when he is back at CU. He said if he feels like he can show significant improvement at pro day, he could participate in more lifts, sprints or jumps. Much depends on his performance this week.

"There is a mental endurance issue going from interviews and medical stuff, which is going to take all day, and then going and trying to perform at a high level," Solder said. "I would imagine by the end of this week, I will be exhausted, mentally more than anything."

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