

# Ahles, Harrington switching from LB to FB

## Seniors competing for starting spot in Embree's offense

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

Posted: 02/27/2011 11:12:11 PM MST

The head coach of the Colorado football program the past five seasons was a former fullback who phased the position out of his offense over the course of his time here. Now, that he's gone, one of the first orders of business when the Buffs hit the field for the start of spring practices next week will be re-establishing the position and developing players there.

First-year coach Jon Embree told his players when he met with them in December that he was open to discussing position changes if anyone felt they needed a change. He also informed them his offense would rely on a hard-nosed running game and would require a fullback. He sought volunteers to give it try.

Senior linebackers Tyler Ahles and Evan Harrington volunteered and have been preparing for spring as members of the offense this winter. They will be coached by offensive coordinator and running backs coach Eric Bieniemy. Under the old regime, when fullbacks were used in the offense, they were coached by the tight ends coach.

Ahles is the bigger of the two at 6-foot-2, 240 pounds. Harrington is 5-11, 220 pounds.

Why would two veterans who have spent their entire college careers as linebackers opt to switch sides and positions just when they are poised for their best shot a plethora of playing time?

"I had a couple of the coaches come up to me and kind of tell me what they thought about it. They told me it was a good move, and I took that into a lot of consideration," Ahles said. "Then just my experience playing on offense in high school makes it something I'm comfortable with and I like doing. I'm excited to get over there."

This isn't the first time Ahles has worked at fullback in his career in Boulder. Former coach Dan Hawkins went looking for players who could be used in short-yardage situations last year and he gave Ahles and others a shot before deciding to have two former offensive linemen -- Matt Bahr and Scott Fernandez -- switch to the tight end/H-back group. Each earned a few opportunities there during the season.

Embree and his assistant coaches are implementing a West Coast offense in Boulder, beginning this spring and they need true fullbacks to make it effective. Ahles and Harrington both hope to fill the job.

Players have been studying film of what the offense will look like throughout the winter, but last week they had their first meetings with position coaches in advance of spring and are now getting an idea of the new terminology and what the play book will look like.

"I like the mentality of offense, just taking the ball down the field and putting it in the end zone," Ahles said. "I'm excited about getting the ball a little bit, too. Hopefully, I can play a role in that phase."

During his senior year of high school five years ago in San Bernardino, Calif., Ahles played an H-back role and rushed 18 times for 277 yards and two scores. He also caught 18 passes for 312 yards and three touchdowns. There will surely be some rust, but he's confident he can be productive in the new CU offense.

While Ahles had to change numbers from his former No. 58 to No. 47, Harrington was able to keep the No. 49 jersey he was issued when he joined the program last year as a junior college transfer.

Harrington played his high school ball in the Washington D.C., area before traveling all the way across country to play junior college ball in California. He was a high school running back in addition to his linebacker duties. He rushed 93 times for 650 yards and 10 touchdowns during his senior season in 2006.

If Harrington wins the competition, he will obviously be the starting fullback in 2011, but unlike Ahles, he has two years remaining to play his final year of eligibility, which means he might be a candidate to redshirt next fall and be the starting

fullback in 2012.

But those decisions are still months away.

Right now, it's all about making the transition, learning the offense and perfecting techniques neither player has used in years.

"We've been running together and competing together at all the workouts, and that's what every position should need is competition," Ahles said. "To have a guy like him out there with me every day is just going to make me better."

Obviously fullbacks and linebackers do a lot of knocking heads and Harrington and Ahles will now be assigned to put some of their closest friends on the team on their butts in practices. There already has been plenty of talk about who is going to do what to whom when practices begin March 11.

Ahles already is known as one of the more vocal players on the field.

"Obviously, I've been playing with those guys, some of them, for four years," Ahles said. "So it's going to be a lot of fun. I have a great relationship with those guys and getting to play against them instead of with them is going to be a lot of fun."

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nfl draft

## NFL loving Solder's commitment to excellence at left tackle

By Jeff Legwold  
The Denver Post

Posted: 02/28/2011 12:02:58 AM MST

Updated: 02/28/2011 06:20:50 AM MST

INDIANAPOLIS — There are always forks in the road, choices to be made as the years go by.

Nate Solder had one of those in his football life, an either-or decision to get from where he was to where he is. And where the Denver native and Buena Vista product is at the moment is near the top of the 2011 NFL draft class.

"I had a choice, and I've always told people it was my choice. And it was," Solder said. "Basically they told me I could be just an all-right tight end or I could be a great tackle. I chose to be a tackle.

"My reaction to that was I wanted to be the best I can be."

Solder has done a good enough job thus far at being the best he can be at offensive tackle that when the NFL draft rolls around

April 28, he may be the University of Colorado's highest pick since the New Orleans Saints used the 10th selection on Chris Naeole in 1997.

After arriving at CU as a 6-foot-7 1/2, 245-pound tight end, Solder caught three passes in 12 games in his redshirt freshman season in 2007.

"And that was the point where they said you can stay where you are and be pretty good," Solder said, "or you can move and be something more. I'm always going to want to be something more."

Solder has since grown into a 6-8, 319-pound NFL left tackle- in-waiting. And few positions on the field, beyond the quarterbacks they protect, are valued as highly in pro football as a left tackle with the size, reach, quickness and flexibility that Solder has.

"That is easily one of the most important positions on the field," said John Elway, the Broncos' executive vice president of football operations and a Hall of Fame quarterback. "The guy has got to pass block, and because of that you want him to be your most athletic lineman. He doesn't have to be the strongest, but he has to be the best athlete because he has to block the best pass rusher.

"As a quarterback, you have to trust your left tackle, because that's your blind

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side. You can't adjust to the rusher on that side, and you can't see him coming."

Solder was a three-year starter for the Buffs at left tackle and allowed just five sacks in 1,400 called pass plays in those three seasons. While the NFL is filled with hulking linemen, what separates players like Solder as left tackle prospects is the athleticism they maintain as they continue to grow.

Several scouts in Indianapolis this past week for the NFL's scouting combine said Solder could be the first tackle selected in the April 28-30 draft because he kept the athleticism of his former position at tight end in his current one as a tackle.

"You want to know can they adjust, how did they handle failure?" said Titans coach Mike Munchak, a Hall of Fame guard. "In the meetings, on the field, did he show recovery skills when things didn't go so well? That and all of the physical things you need — quick feet, big reach,

intelligence."

Solder, who graduated last May with a degree in biology and earned one of 16 postgraduate academic scholarships awarded by the National Football Foundation, has shown all of the above so far.

He was one of the fastest offensive linemen at the scouting combine, has impressed officials from a wide variety of teams in face-to-face interviews and measured out with an 81-inch arm span.

"I'm just such a competitive guy in everything that I do, there's not one guy I don't want to do everything better than him, at every single level," Solder said. "And that plays out in a lot of ways. You know if I've got to smash him into the ground to shut up his mouth then that's the way I'll do it.

"But I want to succeed in all of this. I'm living the dream right now and hope to live it some more."

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## Comparison shopping

*Four offensive tackles were selected in the first round of the 2010 NFL draft. How CU tackle Nate Solder's combine performance compares. (Note: Bench press is repetitions of 225 pounds):*

NATE SOLDER

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Height: 6-foot-8. Weight: 319 pounds.

40-yard dash: 4.96 seconds.

Bench press: 21.

Vertical jump: 32 inches.

Standing broad jump: 9-feet-2.

TRENT WILLIAMS

*(Selected No. 4 by Washington Redskins)*

Height: 6-4 5/8. Weight: 315.

40-yard dash: 4.88.

Bench press: 23.

Vertical jump: 34 1/2.

Standing broad jump: 9-5.

RUSSELL OKUNG

*(Selected No. 6 by Seattle Seahawks)*

Height: 6-5 1/2. Weight: 307.

40-yard dash: 5.17.

Bench press: 38.

Vertical jump: 32 1/2.

Standing broad jump: 8-9.

ANTHONY DAVIS

*(Selected No. 11 by San Francisco 49ers)*

Height: 6-5. Weight: 323.

40-yard dash: 5.36.

Bench press: 21.

Vertical jump: 33.

Standing broad jump: 8-3.

BRYAN BULAGA

*(Selected No. 23 by Green Bay Packers)*

Height: 6-5 3/8. Weight: 314.

40-yard dash: 5.20.

Bench press: 26.

Vertical jump: 27 1/2.

Standing broad jump: 8-2.

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Sunday, February 27, 2011

## Nate Solder has an impressive combine

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By Matt Mosley

I know that most mock drafts have indicated that offensive tackles won't go off the board in the first 15 picks, but that doesn't mean we have to believe them. Take a guy like Colorado's [Nate Solder](#) for instance. Perhaps he was inspired by the Buffs' upset win against the Longhorns in men's basketball Saturday.

Whatever the case, I don't think he'll be there when the Giants select at No. 19. There's always a run on offensive tackles, and it will surprise me if a team in the top 15 doesn't take Solder or USC's [Tyron Smith](#), who didn't work out Saturday because of fluid on his knee.

Todd McShay and Kevin Weidl put together [a nice report on some of the offensive linemen](#). I'm a little disappointed not to see Baylor's [Danny Watkins](#) mentioned, but we'll cut them some slack. Here's what they wrote about Solder:

"The 6-foot-8, 319-pounder displayed remarkable speed and explosiveness for a massive left tackle prospect" said McShay and Weidl. "The 10-yard split is the most important part of the 40-yard dash when evaluating offensive linemen because it shows the initial burst and explosiveness that translates to their responsibilities in the trenches, and Solder had the top 10-yard split (1.62 seconds unofficial) among all offensive linemen and the fastest 40 (5.05) in the offensive tackle group.

"Solder also proved his short-area explosiveness by turning in a broad jump of 9-foot-2, tops among all linemen, and he showed adequate flexibility and solid lateral agility during drills."

I've seen some mocks with Solder going to either the Giants or the Eagles at No. 23, but I don't think he'll be available at that point. And surely the legendary offensive line coach Howard Mudd doesn't need a first-round pick to turn this unit around.

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