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Colorado's Solder, Smith, Brown should get lots of attention in NFL draft

By Jeff Legwold
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Nate Solder (Denver Post file photo)

MOBILE, Ala. — There is no question that 2010 was a difficult year for the Colorado Buffaloes.

They finished 5-7, including a five-game losing streak that became the last straw for Dan Hawkins just before he was fired. And throughout that troubled season, there were

constant questions about what was going to happen to Hawkins, to the team and to the program in the days and months ahead.

"Our whole season was just full of drama. People know how it was," Colorado cornerback Jalil Brown said. "There really were all kinds of questions about the coaches all the time, what would happen next, how it would be next week. It seemed like from one game to another, it was just following us along.

"People wanted to know what happened to the football team and when the program would win more games."

Brown and Buffs tackle Nate Solder are the only players from in-state schools who are taking part in the Senior Bowl practices and Saturday's game. Colorado cornerback Jimmy Smith also was invited but elected not to attend.

And this week, more than one scout pointed out that despite all of their struggles in the past season, the Buffs could have two early-round picks in Solder and Smith — Solder could be a top-10 pick, while Smith could be an early second-rounder or better if his workouts are top-notch — to go with a midround pick in Brown, who has great potential to rise on the draft boards in the coming weeks as well.

Brown has performed well in Mobile this week. He is the biggest cornerback to have made the trip — 6-0-1/4 and 202 pounds — and big cornerbacks routinely move up the draft board if they show speed in quickness in workouts.

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"I think I've done that. At least that's what some of the scouts and people have told me this week," Brown said. "I just have to keep it going, get to the (scouting) combine and do it again."

The national championship chase plays out to great fervor each

Blog: All Things Broncos



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team drills.

"I felt a little rusty at first, but you get it going," Solder said. "We had a tough season and you always wish it could have been better, but this is an exciting time as a player."

"I know when the season was over, after we had done everything we could do, it was just kind of nice to get past that," Brown said. "To just try to put that kind of stuff behind me and move on with my football career. That's the focus now."

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and every college football season, but in terms of the NFL draft, potential will always have as much, or more, to do with how the NFL sees a player than collegiate production does.

Just ask Tim Tebow, after all. Solder, Smith and Brown will be examples of that when the draft weekend is all said and done in April.

Solder, who had not played or practiced since the Buffs' season ended Nov. 26, has been dominant this week. He has shown quickness, strength and most of all flexibility — he gets his body in the most balanced, stable position to handle a variety of pass rushers — in both 1-on-1 and

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