



New football coach Jon Embree is anxious to take it to the field -- and he will on Friday.
 Photo Courtesy: CUBuffs.com



03/10/2011 B.G. Brooks, Contributing Editor

Brooks: Finally For Embree, Spring (Practice) Has Sprung

BOULDER - Finally, Jon Embree's first spring football practice as a head coach is mere hours away. "I hear it coming," he said with a chuckle the other day in his office at Colorado's Dal Ward Athletics Center.

Named CU's 24th head coach in early December, Embree and his staff have been laying the groundwork for installation of a new offense, retooling the defense and upgrading the mostly below average footwork that has haunted CU's once-spectacular special teams.

Obviously, the workload is daunting. The program has not experienced a winning season since 2005. Nonetheless, Embree won't allow all that needs to be done in 15 spring practices to dilute what he considers the teaching of foundational football or his players' opportunity to show him they can play.

"In a normal spring you'd probably have 10 days of installation on offense and defense . . . we're doing six," he said. "Instead of installing 25 plays and the next day installing another 25, we're going to spend a couple of days on the first 25, because I want to make sure that everyone gets evaluated."

Embree wants his post-spring depth chart formed by competition, not a lack of comprehension. Players will be given ample time to absorb

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2011 Spring Practice Schedule		
Date	Time	Notes
M 11	4-6 p.m.	Open: Shorts/Helmets
M 12	11 a.m.-1 p.m.	Open: Shorts/Helmets
M 13	11 a.m.-1 p.m.	Open: Pads-NT
M 14	4-6 p.m.	Closed: Pads

unfamiliar nuances. "I want one kid to move ahead of another because he's better - not because it took one of them a little longer to pick something up," Embree said.

"It's a new language. It's all great in the comfort of the classroom, but then you're on the field and you just got hit in the mouth and you're trying to think and the coach is yelling at you and you're back in the huddle and you've got to hear the play . . . I want to make sure they have a chance and I want to teach. I want to make sure we're doing a good job of fundamentals."

Pay close attention to the fundamental part. Football is a tough undertaking, and Embree believes toughness - physically and mentally - has been lacking. Much of what he hopes to begin instilling from March 11 through April 9 (spring break is March 21-25) centers on reacquiring that edge.

"My impression is that this is a team that has some talent but is very inconsistent," he said. "We talked about this with the seniors . . . we look at the scoreboard w-a-a-a-a-y too much. We've got to learn to just play the play in front of us. We're not as mentally tough as we need to be, but we've made good strides and we'll get there, we'll get there."

"From a team standpoint, I want to start developing our mindset as far as being a physical football team. And then from a unit standpoint, offensively I'd like to see us be able to have two or three runs that we can just dial up and go - whether there are eight men in the box, whatever. I want to be able to do what we have to do to get the necessary yardage."

The Buffs averaged 3.6 yards a carry and 137 rushing yards a game in 2010 - next-to-last in the Big 12 Conference.

Specific spring objectives on offense will be establishing the base pro-style, West Coast offense - as well as base sets for third down, short yardage and goal line. Exiting spring drills with a starting quarterback identified also will be critical. The three main candidates: senior Tyler Hansen, junior Brent Burnette and redshirt freshman Nick Hirschman.

Defensively, Embree said he is unsure whether the Buffs will primarily use a 3-4 or 4-3 front: "Everybody kind of does something like that on third down, but I don't know if we'll be doing that or not." His main objective on defense will be "identifying who can play where, so we have flexibility to be in a three-down front or a four-man front" and forming a better pressure package for passing downs.

He also wants to upgrade the obvious: "We want to be good against the run, but I want a defense that hits you and gets turnovers. We've got to get turnovers."

CU broke even in the turnover department last season, yielding 19 and getting 19. That ratio tied the Buffs with Baylor for sixth in the Big 12. In rushing defense, CU finished fourth, allowing 140.2 yards a game.

Embree's special teams goal again falls into the obvious category: "I want an idea of who's comfortable punting and who can put it through the uprights. And I just want to have a good idea who the 15 to 16 guys are who we can count on from a coverage and protection standpoint."

His spring punting/placekicking candidates - sophomores Justin Castor and Zach Grossnickle - will concentrate on just one of those duties each. Grossnickle punted last season (35.7 yard average), Castor's only field goal attempt was blocked.

Said Embree: "Let's get good at something. You know, instead of being average at two things, let's be really good at one thing."

The only pre-spring position change involves linebackers Evan Harrington and Tyler Ahles moving to fullback - a critical spot in the pro-style West Coast offense being installed. Junior Ray Polk, who signed in 2008 as a running back, stays at free safety - the position he's played for two seasons. Junior defensive lineman Nick Kasa will be utilized as he was last season, either inside or out in a third-down pass rush situation. But he will remain on defense.

There will be spring experimentation with players the coaching staff considers "hybrids" - players who might fit at two positions. Embree wants his best players on the field. If a safety can play linebacker in an emergency, and the safety is better than the backup linebacker, Embree wants him to play regularly. "I want to evaluate some guys from that standpoint, again trying to keep our best

M 15	4-6 p.m.	Closed: Pads
M 17	4-6 p.m.	Closed: Pads
Spring Break (March 19-27)		
M 28	4-6 p.m.	Closed: Pads
M 29	4-6 p.m.	Closed: Pads
M 31	4-6 p.m.	Closed: Pads
A 1	4-6 p.m.	Closed: Pads-NT
A 2	TBA	Open: Scrimmage/Pads
A 4	4-6 p.m.	Closed: Pads
A 5	4-6 p.m.	Closed: Pads-NT
A 7	4-6 p.m.	Closed: Shorts/Helmets
A 9	6 p.m.	Open: Spring Game
CU is allowed 15 practices over 34 days per NCAA rules (not including spring break); sessions break down as follows, tentatively: three in shorts (no contact), four in pads (no tackling (NT)), four in pads (tackling allowed 50 percent or less of the time), four in pads (tackling allowed throughout). The primary location will be the practice fields north of Boulder Creek; the spring game will be at Folsom Field (other scrimmages on the practice fields).		

players on the field instead of just using the next guy," he said.

Players will be asked to "learn the whole play" instead of only their assignments. Embree believes that also will aid the staff in player evaluations and allow them to keep the best players in the game.

A spring game format will be determined nearer to Saturday, April 9. It will be played at night, but Embree will "see where we are from a health standpoint" before establishing how it's played. "I'd like to divide it up (two teams), but if not, we'd do offensive vs. defense," he said. "If it's that way, I don't know about the scoring format; I've always hated 'you get two points if make 'em punt' . . . I'm not good enough at math to do all that stuff.

"We'll figure out what we can do to make it fun. Ideally, we'll have a game. It may not be at the pace because you're giving them a little longer time in between (plays) and change of possessions so guys just aren't worn slick."

From the time of his hiring through off-season conditioning work, Embree had 10-minute individual meetings with all returning players and has been meeting separately with the Buffs seniors. With the rest of the team broken down by classes, assistant coaches have been meeting with the underclassmen, three assistants per class.

Embree's focus with the 2011 seniors-to-be has been on leadership. He's had them read *The 21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader: Becoming the Person Others Will Want to Follow* (John C. Maxwell). Underclassmen have read *17 Essential Qualities of a Team Player: Becoming the Kind of Person Every Team Wants* (Maxwell).

"It's been really good; it's brought them closer together as a team," Embree said. "They're finding out more things about themselves. The thing I like about it that this will help them in life; this isn't just about football, it's about being successful in life and how that translates from the field to off the field."

Throughout the winter months and the new off-season program introduced by Director of Speed/Strength and Conditioning Malcolm Blacken, Embree said he has sensed "a commitment, hunger and sense of purpose."

"I feel like it's a team - and they've said it - that didn't really know each other," Embree said. "They don't really know each other; it's surprising but it isn't. That explains how you don't necessarily have success sometimes in situations where you should have success. You've got to be a team; you've got to have a guy you know you can trust and count on, and vice versa.

"They've asked for little things, like bringing training table back, to staying in the dorms together during two-a-days. They seem to have fun around each other. In the first few times I went through the locker room, it was like walking into a church. Guys were just sitting in there. I'm walking in unannounced, and I went in (last Tuesday) and it sounded like a locker room - guys laughing, having fun with each other, talking, interacting . . . it was good to see that."

By all accounts, Blacken's off-season program was a welcome departure from what players had been through in previous winters. "Players can't stop talking about how happy they are with the direction that's going," Embree said, adding that many players have gained weight but it's not noticeable because they are "leaned out."

"We're probably not as big as we need to be, but I think the changes we've made in a short period will translate into confidence," Embree said. "I think you'll see guys with more confidence, talking about feeling stronger. I think we'll have better balance and flexibility than we've had in the past, which will help us. I really feel great about what's happened down there.

"I'm not into measuring numbers - *he benched this, he benched that*. Great. Is it functional strength? I just want guys who can play football. I don't know how you can compare this to what has happened (in the past) but to me it doesn't matter. Those results will be determined on Saturdays - whether or not we're doing the right things."

In tailoring his 15 spring practices, Embree consulted Louisiana State Coach Les Miles (he has CU ties) and was hoping for a conversation with Oregon's Chip Kelly ("We've been playing phone tag.") before drills began. But the bulk of Embree's organizational ideas are his own, gleaned from his experiences and those offered by a veteran staff.

"I guess it's just how I am as a person - what's our clearly defined goal for the team, then how do we achieve that goal?" he said. "That's how I look at everything in life really. So, the goal is to be physical, can we run it, can we force turnovers? Then I'll try to tailor spring ball to those things and make sure we have enough opportunities and decent situations for everybody to get that accomplished.

"One thing about being in this chair is that you're always kind of going ahead . . . I'm sitting here with all these papers getting everything ready for two-a-days (in August) - how we want to practice, the things we need to do so that when we come out of spring ball I can go back and plug in what we need to do on those days and start us as a staff being prepared for that. Then players are going

to know what to expect and how we do it. I think players, if you give them a clear objective and show them how to achieve it, that'll go a long ways.

"We have 29 practices before Hawaii in the fall (Sept. 3, Honolulu), and that's where we can do a little more (installation) than what we'll do in the spring. I just want them to get fundamentals and see who can pick up the basic stuff, what they can't learn, and if it's not a good fit then we won't run. I just want to make sure we can get our guys out there to play and have a chance.

"Like I told those guys, there's no such thing as 'Hawk's guys' and 'Embo's guys.' They're all University of Colorado Buffs and I'm happy with all of them. I want to do everything I can to make sure that they have a great experience . . .

"I challenged the seniors on what's your legacy going to be? How are you going to be remembered? You've got this time frame to write the story; how do you want it to end? I'm happy with them because they're giving me everything they have. That's all I can ask."

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Spring Injury Status				
Pos	Player	Injury	Notes	Spring FB Status
TE	Matt Bahr	shoulder	had postseason surgery to mend chronic injury	OUT
OL	Blake Behrens	shoulder	had postseason surgery to mend chronic injury	OUT
C	Mike Iltis	knee	suffered a torn ACL in the season finale at Nebraska; underwent surgery	OUT
OL	Max Tuioti-Mariner	knee	continues to rehab following multiple surgeries	OUT
OL	Shawn Daniels	foot	suffered a fracture against CSU; had surgery (Sept. 17)	FULL GO
DB	Vince Ewing	knee	suffered a torn ACL late in the first scrimmage (Aug. 12)	TBD
QB	Tyler Hansen	spleen	suffered a ruptured spleen vs. Texas Tech (clean hit) on Oct. 23; could have played in a bowl game	FULL GO
TB	Brian Lockridge	ankle	suffered a sprain against Georgia; tests indicated muscle tear; had surgery on Oct. 15	FULL GO
ILB	Jon Major	knee	suffered a sprained/torn MCL against Texas Tech (Oct. 23), rehabbing without surgery	FULL GO
DB	Parker Orms	knee	suffered a torn ACL on the third play of the opener (CSU, Sept. 4), had surgery (Sept. 24)	TBD
DB	Anthony Perkins	knee	suffered a sprain at Missouri, re-evaluation indicated torn ACL; had surgery Oct. 22	TBD
DE	Chidera Uzo-Diribe	big toe	suffered broken toe in winter conditioning; surgery in February	OUT

SHOW MENU



Embree: CU didn't play hard in '10

Coach didn't like what he saw when reviewing old film

By Kyle Ringo Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 03/09/2011 11:59:41 PM MST

When he wasn't hiring a coaching staff, recruiting new players or meeting with members of his current roster this winter, Colorado football coach Jon Embree was usually holed up somewhere watching film of the Buffs in 2010 and trying to identify problems he would need to correct in 2011.

Spring practices begin Friday at 4 p.m., and Embree met with reporters Wednesday afternoon to answer some questions and provide a preview.

It became more of a review.

Embree was straightforward and honest when asked what his film review of the Buffs' 5-7 season told him.

"What shows up to me on tape was we didn't play hard," Embree said. "That's really what showed up on tape. We let the scoreboard affect how we played way too much. Instead of focusing on the next play. You can't look at the scoreboard. Your job is to beat the guy across from you that play no matter what happened good or bad before it."

Colorado produced a fifth consecutive losing season and former coach Dan Hawkins was fired, leading to Embree taking over at his alma mater in early December.

Embree's instincts following player interviews and film review tell him he needs to make things tough on the Buffs this spring to find out who really wants to be a part of the program and who doesn't.

He said he doesn't plan to install much of the offensive playbook this spring because he wants players understanding their responsibilities and playing with confidence and no excuses.

He said he plans to teach players how to practice this spring so they know what kind of effort and attention to detail will be required of them in the fall and beyond.

"If you throw a lot at guys and it takes them awhile to pick it up, then you may not get your best players," Embree said. "I want to see who can play and then we can go back and teach them and get it going."

Embree said scoreboard watching and not giving 100 percent at all times weren't the only issues that came through on film.

"We're awful at situational football, at understanding what the situation is," he said. "So we will start that this spring. We're starting it the first practice about understanding the situations and what it means and why you have to do certain things and think. We don't know how to play the game within the game. We just showed and played last year. It's like recess."

One game film irked Embree most. Not surprisingly, it was the final game Hawkins coached. The Buffs surrendered a 28-point fourth quarter lead at Kansas and lost.

Embree said his players had the misfortune of him watching that game film on the same morning of a team-run day. He said they paid the price even though the game had been in the books for months.

"If you're up that much, and the coaches were kidnapped and it's just the team out there playing, you've got to find a way to make one play, make two first downs on offense, make them kick the ball one dang time. Just make them kick it once," he said.

Embree said his primary focus in reviewing film of last year was to see who played hard and who didn't. He looked most

closely at effort and body language. But ultimately Embree says every player will start with a clean slate this spring.

He said there are no starters or reserves at the outset. He issued a depth chart with players listed at their positions alphabetically.

"I tried not to over-evaluate because if you do and you go in with too many opinions, then you`re not really going to let guys compete like they need to compete," Embree said.

Notable

Embree said the Buffs will use a 4-3 as the base defensive scheme but they will also change looks at times and adjust to what opponents do offensively. ... Mike Iltis, Shawn Daniels, Anthony Perkins, Parker Orms, and Chidera Uzo-Diribe are expected to miss some or all of spring ball recovering from injuries.

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Off-field issues haunt ex-Buff Smith

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

Posted: 03/10/2011 12:01:25 AM MST

Scotty McKnight wasn't the only former Buff to bring a famous face with him to Colorado's pro timing day Wednesday.

Cornerback Jimmy Smith, who is expected to be a first-round or early second-round selection in the NFL draft in April, had his agent Drew Rosenhaus accompany him to Boulder.

Smith was one of three Buffs who participated in last month's NFL Scouting Combine in Indianapolis and didn't need to participate in all of the testing, but he chose to do some of it after some questioned tightness in his hips during drills at the combine.

"Just that for a bigger cornerback that I can open up my hips and break on the ball, deep balls and short routes," Smith said when asked why he chose to do some position specific drills. "I think I did well, but the altitude got to me a little bit."

Smith said he has enjoyed the entire process of preparing for the draft so far. From his workouts and managing his diet to meeting with teams and answering questions and all the testing. He said it is something he has looked forward to for most of his life.

Smith found out early in the process that teams don't invest millions in players without doing their homework and when they look into your past, everything comes to light.

During his CU career, he was in trouble multiple times for off-field issues, such as underage drinking and a failed drug test. He has been asked about those issues dozens of times over and says he has done his best to answer any question a team might have about his habits and maturity.

He said it has been a little frustrating that so much attention has been focused on those minor off-the-field issues with less emphasis on what he did on the field.

He was a starting cornerback in the Big 12 conference for most of three seasons in Boulder and opponents generally shied away from throwing in his direction.

"It's obvious that everybody knows that I made some mistakes," Smith said. "But people think I have bad character, which I think is a misconception because I think it's bad decisions not bad character."

"When I go talk to the teams, it's just a situation where I explain to them that I was young and made some immature mistakes, but I'm past that now and I'm ready to be a professional."

Rosenhaus predicted Smith will be taken in the first round in April. He said after gathering facts and speaking with Smith about his time in Boulder, most teams are satisfied with Smith's character.

"Jimmy has owned up to some of the mistakes that he has made in the past," Rosenhaus said. "He hasn't hid from them, he hasn't run from them. He's embraced them and he's addressed them. I've been an agent for 23 years and he's as good a guy as you could possibly want to be around. He's a great person. He's got excellent character and he's a hardworking guy. It's not going to be a factor the more teams get to know him."

Solder shines

Perhaps the best moment of the day was provided by left tackle Nate Solder, who opted to do some offensive line drills for scouts who made the trip to Boulder.

One of the drills, led by Denver offensive line coach Dave Magazu, called for Solder to begin in a three-point stance and pull down the line of scrimmage and burst through two cones on the ground to block a linebacker.

The part of the linebacker was played by former Buff Matt Russell, who won the Butkus Award at CU in the 1990s and is now a scout for the Denver Broncos.

Solder, who is 6-foot-9 and 320 pounds, pushed Russell around easily the first few times they performed the drill and pancaked him on accident the final time.

Seeing Russell fly through the air and hit the turf caused uproarious laughter in the CU practice bubble from more than 100 people in attendance.

"On the last one, I said, 'Now look, you`re pulling. You`re going to hit me from the side. Don`t launch me,'" Russell said. "The next thing I knew I was like 10 feet off the ground."

Solder said he was just happy Russell wasn`t hurt.

"He said it`s just a footwork drill, don`t try and blow him up or anything, and it`s just kind of the way it worked out," Solder said. "I did not mean to knock him down. Everyone kind of got a kick out of it. I hope he got a laugh out of it."

Solder doesn`t have any further workouts scheduled, though he said he could do individual sessions with teams in the next month. He said he is eager to learn where he will be playing and living for at least the next four or five years.

"I`m really looking forward to knowing what team I`m going to and getting settled and getting prepared for the season," he said.

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Former CU Buff Scotty McKnight impressive at NFL timing day

Colorado wide receiver might have worked his way into April NFL draft

Kyle Ringo Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 03/09/2011 03:23:59 PM MST



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Former Colorado wide receiver Scotty McKnight might have made himself an NFL draft pick today with an impressive and somewhat surprising performance in front of representatives of at least 19 franchises at CU pro timing day.

McKnight had some help from his best friend from childhood -- New York Jets starting quarterback Mark Sanchez -- who threw passes to him during the portion of the session in which scouts were able to grade McKnight's route running and pass catching. He didn't drop a ball and proved to be faster than most believed him to be ahead of time.

First-year coach Jon Embree and most of his staff were on hand to watch along with many current and former Buffs. Embree, who spent the past five years in the NFL and has plenty of experience evaluating college prospects, said he was impressed by McKnight.

"I thought he made some money today," Embree said. "I thought he put himself in position to get drafted. I think he's a guy who people are going to be happy they have him."

"... I'd be shocked if, A, he didn't get drafted and, B, he didn't have a career in the league."

It was easily the most well-attended pro timing day in Boulder since 2002 with tackle Nate Solder and cornerback Jimmy

Smith expected to be among the first 40 players selected in the April draft and cornerback Jalil Brown expected to be drafted at some point.

McKnight was one of seven former Buffs who worked out for scouts, joining defensive lineman Marquez Herrod, tight end Luke Walters, longsnapper Joe Silipo and the other three.

Solder, Smith and Brown all were invited to the NFL Scouting Combine last month in Indianapolis where they participated in all the sprints, drills, lifts and jumps. Each of the three opted to participate in only a handful of those same tests today as well as some position specific drills.

But McKnight was the story of the day because he returned to Boulder this week after several months working out in Orange County, Calif., hoping to prove himself beyond the record-setting numbers he produced during his four seasons on the gridiron in Boulder.

McKnight ran three 40-yard sprints and each was timed at less than 4.5 seconds, which was perhaps the most eye-opening part of the day for scouts, who might have thought McKnight was too slow for the pros. He also broad jumped more than 10 feet and bench pressed 225 pounds 13 times, 11 more times than he could do at the end of last season.

With anxiety built up for the day, McKnight spent a near sleepless night at a local hotel. He was up at 5:30 a.m. and couldn't wait to get to the Dal Ward Center and begin his day of tests and interviews.

"I thought I did great," McKnight said after the workout portion of his day was over. "...I think I did everything I possibly could to erase any doubts about speed or athleticism. I think that's out there that I can compete with anyone in those phases.

"And then creating separation and catching the ball in traffic, I think I answered that today. I feel like I did get myself drafted."

Embree and former Buff linebacker Matt Russell, a scout for the Denver Broncos, said it was beneficial for McKnight to have Sanchez throwing to him but not because Sanchez somehow enhanced McKnight's ability.

Both men said the familiarity with Sanchez probably helped McKnight relax and perform. They said it also helped scouts get a better evaluation having a quarterback participating who could make all the necessary throws.

Sanchez said it was "a no-brainer" decision for him to travel to Boulder and participate with McKnight, who has been his best friend since they played Pop Warner football together growing up in Southern California. Sanchez obviously has a biased opinion, but he believes his friend did very well.

"I don't think it could have gone any better for him," Sanchez said. "His drills were great. His numbers were awesome. ... All the stuff that he's been working towards these last few months, it all just came to fruition today. He deserves it because he did a great job this entire process."

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CU Buffs WR McKnight has good pro day for scouts

By Jeff Legwold
The Denver Post

Posted: 03/10/2011 01:00:00 AM MST

BOULDER — Whatever the NFL's inquiring minds eventually decide about the professional fate of Colorado wide receiver Scotty McKnight, they gathered one piece of valuable information Wednesday.

The guy can handle his business when the pressure's on.

"I would have liked to have gone to the Senior Bowl, to the combine, but I didn't," Mc-Knight said. "I didn't get invited. Some guys get more than one opportunity. For me it was one shot. This was my shot. I think I made the most of it."

CU's all-time leader in receptions (215) and touchdown catches (22) was not invited to any postseason all-star game or to the NFL scouting combine in Indianapolis. So, with personnel evaluators from 19 teams at CU on Wednesday to see potential first-round selections Nate Solder and Jimmy Smith, McKnight gave his draft

status a significant lift.

"Scotty had a good workout," Broncos director of college scouting Matt Russell said. "He showed some things, did all he could do."

McKnight's height was measured as 5-foot-10 1/2 and his weight was 182 pounds, which is considered undersized for most NFL wide receivers.

However, he showed more speed than expected, running his 40-yard dashes in 4.46 and 4.48 seconds, to go with quality work in agility drills.

McKnight enlisted a little help from one of his childhood friends, New York Jets quarterback Mark Sanchez, to make the most of his day. Sanchez arrived just before McKnight was scheduled to run routes and threw a variety of passes to McKnight, who went through the workout without a bobble or drop.

"He was determined to do well and he did," Sanchez said. "He's a versatile guy. He can run every route. He's quick, he's fast, he's strong. He's really smart and he really cares about the game. He loves playing. I knew a ball wouldn't hit the ground today, and he didn't disappoint."

Since completing his CU career, McKnight has spent much of his time training in California

with Solder, Texas A&M linebacker Von Miller and Washington quarterback Jake Locker.

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Football

[View slide show of Colorado football players running drills for NFL scouts March 9.](#)

"I just had so much confidence in the work I did," McKnight said. "I was doing it all right and it kind of gave me the confidence to believe that I controlled everything I could, now it was just up to me to show it. Not get nervous, not get tense, just go out and show through."

Footnotes.

Solder, an offensive tackle, did only position drills Wednesday with new Denver O-line coach Dave Magazu running the workout. Smith, a cornerback, did position drills and the vertical jump (37 inches Wednesday).

Smith said he has addressed some off-the-field questions about him with teams. He has a private workout for a team today and will visit with the Detroit Lions on Friday.

"It's obvious everybody knows I made some mistakes," he said. "People think I have bad character, which I think is a misconception because I think it's bad decisions, not bad character.

"But when I go talk to the teams, it's a situation, it's just me explaining to them I was young, made some immature mistakes, but I'm past that

now. I'm ready to be a pro-fessional." . . .

CU cornerback Jalil Brown ran the 40 in the low 4.4s. He ran 4.50 at the combine. . . .

Pro timing also was conducted at Colorado State, with 11 former Rams working out.

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cu football

CU Buffs ready to begin spring football practice under Embree

By John Henderson
The Denver Post

Posted: 03/10/2011 01:00:00 AM MST

BOULDER — While looking through his fingers in disdain at Colorado's lack of accountability last year, it's hard to tell if first-year coach Jon Embree was more disgusted as a coach or as an alumnus.

Beyond trying to overcome the lack of speed, an 83rd-ranked defense and the loss of the Buffaloes' best players, Embree spent much of the offseason getting a grip on last year's 5-7 season.

"What showed up to me on tape was we didn't play hard," Embree said Wednesday. "We let the scoreboard affect how we played way too much."

Embree isn't waiting until Friday's start of his first spring practice to change it. He already has made a difference in position meetings and the

recently completed two-week offseason training program.

"It was one of the hardest things I ever had to do," said senior quarterback Tyler Hansen who, like every other returning starter, must fight for his job.

Sessions went from 6 to 7:15 a.m. and accountability was paramount, whether it was being late for class or false starts. Either the player, his side of the ball or the team must bear crawl 100 yards, log roll 100 yards and somersault 100 yards. Then they jog. They do six of those or 30 minutes, whichever comes first.

"One thing they've learned is if they're going to get punished," Embree said, "don't eat lunch."

Accountability counts in meetings too. Fall asleep? Don't pay attention? Get set to sweat.

"It's harder than some of my classes," senior offensive lineman Ryan Miller said. "There are so many variables of a single defense you have to know every nook and cranny of."

Embree won't label the Buffaloes' talent level, although he does say they didn't run very well. He says accountability will make up for a lot of flaws — such as blowing a 28-point lead in the fourth quarter at last-place Kansas.

"Three of the times I did watch those games, it was a Tuesday or a Thursday, which was team running and I would go down there and just go off on them," Embree said. "It made me so mad

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because there were so many chances. I don't know how many travel, but the fact is that not one guy on that plane could make a play."

Six players will miss spring camp because of injuries: offensive linemen Blake Behrens (shoulder), Mike Iltis (knee) and Maxwell Tuioti-Mariner (knee); defensive back Anthony Perkins (knee); fullback-tight end Matt Bahr (shoulder); and defensive end Chidera Uzo-Diribe (toe). Tailback Brian Lockridge (ankle) and DB Parker Orms (knee) will be limited. Tailback Trea' Jones and wide receiver Kendrick Celestine quit the team.

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CU spring football

When: Friday through Thursday (except Wednesday) and March 28 through April 9 (except April 3 and 8).

Open practices: Friday, 4-6:30 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday, 1:30-3:30 p.m.; April 2 scrimmage, TBA; April 9 spring game, 6 p.m.

Where: Primarily practice fields north of Boulder Creek. Spring game will be at Folsom Field.

Season opener: Sept. 3 at Hawaii.

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Solder has pro-day moment against fellow ex-Buff Russell

By Jeff Legwold
The Denver Post

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Matt Russell was an All-America linebacker at Colorado, winning the Butkus Award as a senior as the nation's best at the position.

And Wednesday, the 37-year-old college scouting director for the Broncos showed he's still willing to stick his nose into the action when it's needed.

In a quality pro-day moment that spoke volumes about a prospect's potential, Russell, with a blocking shield, stepped in front of the 6-foot-8, 307-pound, soon-to-be-first-round-pick Nate Solder.

Solder, who could well be the first tackle off the NFL draft board next month, went through position drills at CU's pro day with Russell serving as the aiming point for the blocks. Safe

to say Solder did not take it easy on his fellow alum.

Solder knocked Russell off-balance on several plays in what is usually a routine contact drill, blasted Russell hard enough to send a hat flying and on Russell's last play in the drill, Solder lifted Russell off his feet and sent him flying.

"On the last one, I said, 'Now look, you're pulling, you're going to hit me from the side, don't launch me,' " Russell said. "Next thing I know I'm 10 feet off the ground."

Asked how, among the scouts and personnel executives from 19 teams on hand, he ended up with the job of defender in a blocking drill, Russell said with a laugh:

"I volunteered for it, and then threw in the towel shortly thereafter."

Former Colorado defensive end Marquez Herrod then stepped in as the defender to help Solder finish the drill.

"It's just a footwork drill, and they kind of said, 'Don't hit him too hard,' but I was moving fast," Solder said of his hit on Russell. "I'm not trying to knock the guy out or anything."

Reminded that Russell was one of the more decorated players in the school's history, Solder simply smiled and said:

"That's a good notch on my belt. No, I appreciate the help and was just trying to do the best I

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could."

All in

Blog: All Things Broncos



The Denver Post's NFL reporters post analysis, notes and minutiae on this blog devoted to the Denver Broncos.

flexibility in his hips, which allows him to block a variety of pass rushers, including those who are a great deal shorter than he is.

Solder said he will spend the next month or so with his family and just wait and see where he ends up.

"It's been great," Solder said. "All I wanted to do was just take every opportunity to show what I can do. I look forward to the next step."

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good fun to be sure for Russell, who saw knee injuries cut short his NFL playing career — and for Solder on what was really just a day of confirmation.

Solder really has no major questions to answer for scouts. He has the size, athleticism, reach, intellect and approach everybody in the NFL wants in future left tackles.

The only criticism people have had during Solder's postseason work, which included the Senior Bowl and scouting combine, was that he may need more lower body strength to anchor against some of the more powerful pass rushers.

But that's minor when most of those same scouts believe he will easily add weight to his frame and strength to his game. He has extraordinary

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