



Rip Scherer (center) makes his point with his Cleveland Browns quarterbacks.
Photo Courtesy: CUBuffs.com



03/11/2011 B.G. Brooks, Contributing Editor

Brooks: Scherer Has Solid Plan For QBs, Future Recruiting

BOULDER - Football coaches march into spring practice eager to teach, hopeful that players are just as eager to learn. Rip Scherer, a consummate teacher, cruised into Colorado's spring drills hoping the guys at his position can't wait to unlearn.

Scherer is CU's new quarterbacks coach. He's been on more college campuses than ivy. His resume lists 11 college stops, a couple of them as head coach, and NFL stints at two places. He's as well-traveled as Greyhound.

Landing in Boulder might have surprised him more than anyone else. Prior to getting hired, he'd had no personal contact with his new boss, Jon Embree. The story, as Embree tells it, goes like this: In his search for a QB coach, Embree spoke with five different people in the NFL and Scherer's name was dropped by all five.

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Said Scherer: "I'd like to know who those five guys are and send them a thank you note."

One of the Fab Five might have been Steve Marshall, hired by Embree as CU's offensive line coach. Another could have been Eric Bieniemy, hired as CU's offensive coordinator/running backs coach. Marshall and Scherer worked together with the Cleveland Browns for two years, and Bieniemy was on the Minnesota Vikings staff with former quarterbacks coach Kevin Rogers - a former college teammate of Scherer's. Bieniemy and Scherer also had swapped notes at the NFL Combine and Senior Bowl.

As for his other three secret admirers, well, Scherer appreciates their votes of confidence, which initiated a welcome return to the college game after his former boss at Carolina (John Fox) was hired as the Broncos head coach. Denver was the only job Fox could have taken that wouldn't have included Scherer. Fox

retained Broncos offensive coordinator/QB coach Mike McCoy, who had been on Fox's Carolina staff before moving to Denver. Scherer was McCoy's replacement at Carolina.

The Rip Scherer File		
Years	School	Position
1974-75	Penn State	Graduate Assistant
1976	N.C. State	Assistant Coach/QB
1977-78	Hawai'i	Assistant Coach/RB
1979	Virginia	Assistant Coach/QB
1980-86	Georgia Tech	Offensive Coordinator/QB
1987	Alabama	Offensive Coordinator
1988-90	Arizona	Offensive Coordinator
1991-94	James Madison	Head Coach
1995-00	Memphis	Head Coach
2001	Kansas	Co-Offensive Coordinator
2003-04	Southern Miss.	Offensive Coordinator
2004-08	Cleveland Browns	Assistant Head Coach
2009-10	Carolina Panthers	Assistant Coach/QB

"The reality of it was that coming from the NFL after six years, there weren't many places I could go . . . because of not having a spread offense background," Scherer said. "This fit on both ends. I've been a coordinator or a head coach for most of my career, from time I was 25 or 26."

Scherer's head coaching experience (James Madison, Memphis) might have turned another rookie head coach in another direction. Not so with Embree, whom Scherer described as "very secure in his own skin. I had former head coaches on my staff; I think it's helpful. And I think you become a better assistant coach after being a head coach. You appreciate what he's going through; his seat's a lot different than the rest of ours.

"I know now I have a better appreciation of some of those difficult decisions he has to make. He wants to use J.D. (Brookhart, former Akron head coach who is CU's tight ends/special teams coach and passing game coordinator) and me as a sounding board for things. It takes a confidence on his part and a trust in those people he's hired."

Although Scherer concedes it is unusual in coaching to be hired by a "stranger," he adds, "You know the six degrees of separation? In this business, you're probably not more than two or three removed from somebody who has a relationship with somebody."

So the Buffs get a QB coach who knows his way around and, frankly, seems a little tired of being a transient. College coaching isn't the most secure of professions, but the NFL might be worse. Scherer, who also is Embree's assistant head coach, calls this "a good situation, coming in on a front end of staff, particularly one that has all the ties and associations (with CU) this one has."

Scherer hadn't spent much time in Colorado, visiting Boulder once when his daughter was scrutinizing the CU Law School, another time as a member of the Kansas football staff under former coach Terry Allen in 2001. "We got drilled (27-16)," Scherer recalled.

But he vividly remembers his introduction to the state. That came in the fall of 1989 when he was the offensive coordinator on Dick Tomey's Arizona staff. Intrigued by CU's I-bone, Tomey contacted former coach Bill McCartney and arranged to send the Wildcats offensive staff to Boulder to study the Buffs offense during a bye week in Tucson.

"I don't know how Tomey pulled it off," said Scherer, "but we flew up on a Monday night and spend the next three days with (Gerry) DiNardo, (Gary) Barnett and Mike Barry, sitting in meetings, watching how they practiced - everything. We (Arizona) were running the Flex-bone, so there were some option elements already in our offense. But the I-bone was a different enough concept to be surprising."

UCLA was more than surprised. The Bruins, ranked No. 22, visited Tucson on Oct. 14, 1989 and were hammered, 42-7. The Wildcats obviously borrowed a good concept and put it to good use, but that's a page from Scherer's past that won't be revisited.

Embree is installing a pro-style, West Coast offense at CU, which Scherer believes will benefit the Buffs in the recruitment of high-caliber prospects at his position.

"I think we've created a niche for ourselves in recruiting," Scherer said. "We're going to try and go nationally and recruit the top quarterback that we can every year. I think for a young player who has aspirations to play at the next level, when you're in this kind of offense you're more readily prepared and there's not many of us doing it."

College offenses, he contends, are cyclical, with the spread and its variations the current rage. "It'll cycle back to this, but we'll be on the cusp of it, the front edge," he said. "We create an alternative for a top flight quarterback that has projected ability to move on beyond college. It's an opportunity to be better prepared.

"From a pro perspective, scouting a spread quarterback and projecting him as a pro style quarterback is a difficult thing to do. Look at Tim Tebow (Broncos), Cam Newton (formerly of Auburn) . . . they're talented guys but their learning curve and adjustment curve is so much greater because of just the difference in the style of play."

Scherer pointed out that 18 NFL teams "run a West Coast offense of some sort. I think you can sit in front of a high school kid and his parents - not that that should be the only reason that a guy comes to Colorado or anyplace else - but the fact is, it gives us a little different niche. The NFL's not changing; the NFL's not going to the spread offense. I think it will allow us to get our foot in the door of some of the top prospects in the country."

In Embree's first recruiting class, one cobbled together at the 11th hour, CU signed two quarterbacks - junior college transfer Brent Burnette and incoming freshman Stevie Joe Dorman. Before Scherer accepted Embree's offer, they both watched tape on Burnette and Dorman. Scherer believes both "enhance the position" and is anxious to see how Burnette competes during spring drills. No other players who ended the 2010 season at other positions will be given spring looks at quarterback.

Scherer is asking scholarship returnees Tyler Hansen (senior) and Nick Hirschman (redshirt freshman) and Justin Gorman (walk-on redshirt freshman) to erase much, if not all, of what they were accustomed to at their position in the previous regime's offense. It's a challenging unlearning/relearning process that will require much longer than 15 spring practices to complete.

From game experience and leadership standpoints, Hansen - as a returning starter - has an edge. From a technical standpoint, Hirschman - as perhaps a more shapeable, prototypical prospect - might have an edge. The athletic Gorman is an acknowledged dark horse, but Embree has let it be known that he'll run an equal opportunity camp.

Scherer calls the two scholarship returnees at QB "great kids who are excited to learn. I wasn't here in the past so I don't know what went on. But for whatever frustrations they had, their focus is on looking forward.

"Tyler knows he has a one-year window. Some of the football stuff we've been able to do within that eight-hour (off-season) time frame we have, he's shown a great aptitude. He learns quickly . . . he's played in a lot of games.

"They're both coming from different perspectives. Nick was not as entrenched because he hadn't been in that offense, so it's easier for him to wipe the slate clean. With Tyler, it's more association . . . there's going to be a lot more dissimilarities than similarities, just in terms of how we approach it.

"One of first observations I've challenged Tyler with is to play more disciplined in the pocket. That's his challenge. I know the want-to is there. Some guys are resistant, but he's embraced what we're doing. That makes it easier to transition to what we're asking of him.

"The thing Tyler has to learn to do is when to use his feet, when not to use his feet. Sometimes when you're a guy that has running skills as a quarterback you're too quick to rely on them. His adjustment, his challenge is to learn to play from within the pocket. I don't want to handcuff him and take away his ability and instinct to make plays off rhythm. That's a real advantageous skill set to have - if you can balance it out.

"Nick, at first sight, is more of a true in-the-pocket guy - athletic enough to avoid trouble and keep himself alive. He's not just a tackling dummy back there. But it appears to me that with his body type (6-3, 225), he's at least has that and looks to be a guy who can stand in there."

Scherer calls Burnette (6-3, 205) "more of a pocket guy - at least that's how it look on his junior college tapes. His team (Western Arizona) ran some spread and shotgun, so there's still going to be a learning curve. But I think his forte is to play from the pocket."

And that will be the spring directive for all his players, no matter the systems they've played in the past. The offense will be new for everyone, but even more of a seismic shift at Scherer's position.

"Anytime you go from a spread offense to a pro-style, it's different for everybody, but more different for the quarterback," he said. "It's a whole different perspective for the quarterback to take the ball from center and go back three, five or seven steps, put your foot in the ground and make a decision - as opposed to standing back there and kind of sorting things out."

Scherer has tutored enough quarterbacks and coordinated enough offenses to know that efficiency at the position cannot be undervalued. He also knows the statistic that matters most is in the W/L column.

"I've coached (QBs) all my life and I always understood the value of the position," he said. "But after being in the NFL, it hits you right over the head. It's a quarterback-driven game. If he's productive - and that might be being smart with the ball or throwing for 350 yards - but if he's productive, then you have a chance to win every week.

"I've seen games where everyone else plays well, that guy plays poorly and you get beat . . . a couple of bad decisions, bad choices, it makes a huge difference. That's the challenge. Everything begins with that guy - if you're a running team, a spread team, whatever, it all evolves around that position."

Scherer knows his stuff, knows what he's getting into. He's been around the block that his boss is eagerly stepping onto, which should be beneficial for both. Fits are everything, and this one seems perfect.

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Embree's Buffs set for spring practice

First-year coach begins first spring practice with Buffs today

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

Posted: 03/11/2011 12:10:43 AM MST

Grading film is one thing. Coaching players live on the field, making quick evaluations and corrections with clear communication is an entirely different story, and it's one that begins for the new Colorado football coaching staff today with the kickoff of spring ball.

Coach Jon Embree vowed to make it "hard to be a part of this program" when he was hired in December.

He has been true to his word through the winter months and the strength and conditioning program, as well as handling disciplinary issues that cross his desk.

It has been a no-nonsense approach toward every aspect of the program that one player described this week as "a lot more professional."

It will be more difficult from here as Embree and his staff seek to instill a toughness and resiliency that clearly has been lacking within the program in recent years.

Embree said players have responded well to changes he has made to this point and there is a different energy around the program.

He said it was most evident earlier this week when the offensive and defensive lines squared off with weightlifting competitions in the Dal Ward Center.

"It was good to see the team coming together, guys pulling for each other," Embree said. "That was one of the most disappointing things; I didn't feel like they were a team. When I went in the locker room when I first got here, it was like a ghost town and now you go in there, guys are in there laughing, having fun, watching TV, talking, communicating, just spending time together; learning about each other."

Embree and his offensive assistants will install the basics of a West Coast system this spring trying not to cloud players' minds with too much information in order to find out who has the physical skill and the heart to help lead the team to wins next fall.

Over the summer and in fall camp, coaches will determine how to put those players in the best position to succeed.

"It's going to be tough. It's going to be intense. It's going to be hard work, a lot different than it was," quarterback Tyler Hansen said.

Hansen is coming back from a ruptured spleen that ended his 2010 season prematurely in the seventh game. He is fully healthy and brings the most experience into a battle for the starting job with junior Brent Burnette, a mid-year transfer, and redshirt freshmen Nick Hirschman and walk-on Justin Gorman.

This off-season has been different for players because they haven't had a playbook for most of the winter. They only just started familiarizing themselves with the new offense and defense they will begin to learn today. But the challenge has them excited.

"I like it a lot," Hansen said of the offense. "I don't have to run the ball as much, take as many hits and we're getting the ball off on time. Stuff like that. It's good stuff."

Embree has made it clear no one will be rewarded with a starting job based on their experience alone. Each player must prove themselves to coaches.

There are some areas where there isn't much experience returning anyway. One of those spots is at cornerback where two seniors from last season are headed to the NFL. Another is center, where last season's starter, Mike Iltis, is sidelined with a knee injury until fall camp.

"The big issue is we're going to have to replace two proven playmakers in Jimmy Smith and Jalil Brown," defensive coordinator Greg Brown said. "Behind that, there weren't a lot of guys who stepped in at that corner spot for the last two or three years because of the play of those two guys. So corner is a large unknown right now and it probably will still be an unknown going all the way into the fall."

Brown also plans not to overload his defenders with too much information this spring and let them play and compete. He said he will design the defense around his players' capabilities once he knows what he has.

"We're evolving right now," Brown said. "There is no way of knowing where the thing is going to end up. Our focus right now is on spring ball and just trying to line up and play it straight and see if we can win some one-on-one battles let alone trying to out-scheme somebody."

The last time Embree was on the football field coaching players was Dec. 5 in East Rutherford, N.J., when the Washington Redskins lost 31-7 to the New York Giants.

Embree was the tight ends coach in Washington last season, but he left the stadium that day with CU athletic director Mike Bohn headed for his future leading the Buffs.

Today he returns to the field.

It's the next step in his plan for bringing his alma mater back to respectability.

When he stepped off a small plane in Broomfield late that night back in December, one of his first comments was how he couldn't wait to get back on the football field and how far away spring football seemed at the time.

"I am more excited for the players because they have really gone above and beyond this past off-season as far as what they have been asked to do and what they have done," Embree said.

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5 questions for CU spring football

By Kyle Ringo Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

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The top five questions the Buffs hope to begin to answer when spring football practices begin today:

1: Will someone establish himself as the one to beat for the starting quarterback job? Senior Tyler Hansen has the most experience but it's a brand new system for everyone involved. Junior transfer Brent Burnette and redshirt freshman Nick Hirschman have a real opportunity here.

2: Who fills the void created by Mike Ittis' injury at center? Ittis believes he will be back at full strength in time for the start of his senior season after suffering a torn ACL in the season finale last year. At least three young players figure to get a crack at center, including Kaiwi Crabb, Gus Handler and Daniel Munyer.

3: How will the running game develop? The Buffs will run a West Coast offense and plan to feature a power running game, adding a fullback to the offense. Rodney Stewart ran for more than 1,300 yards as a junior but it's time to find out if he is suited to this new system. If he isn't who is?

4: Who fills the void at cornerback left by departed seniors Jimmy Smith and Jalil Brown? Deji Olatoye and Parker Orms will probably miss all or most of spring ball with injuries, creating more opportunities for players like Jered Bell, Jonathan Hawkins, Makiri Pugh, Paul Vigo and Josh Moten. There are plenty of options here, just not many with much experience.

5: Can Justin Castor and Zach Grossnickle be depended on at place-kicker and punter or will coaches be looking to freshman Will Oliver in the fall? Castor is the only player listed at place-kicker on the pre-spring depth chart. So it looks like it's his job to lose. He will also challenge Grossnickle for the punting job.

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Friday, March 11, 2011

'Depth chart' is wide open at Colorado

By Ted Miller

While Colorado's pre-spring "depth chart" -- players listed alphabetically in position groups -- isn't terribly informative, it does send a clear message: Nothing will be given; all starting jobs must be earned.

Oh, you have a pretty good idea that guys such as running back [Rodney Stewart](#), offensive guard Ryan Miller, receiver [Paul Richardson](#), defensive end Josh Hartigan and nose tackle Will Pericak -- among others -- are good bets to earn starting jobs.

But new coach Jon Embree is hoping to challenge returning starters and reserves alike with what figures to be a tough, physical spring that might weed out a few pretenders, starting Friday and running through the spring game on April 9.

And, really, considering that no first- or second-team All-Big 12 player is back, it's not like anyone should feel comfortable as the Buffaloes prepare for Pac-12 play.

What did Embree see when he watched the Buffaloes on film? Well, consider this rather stark pre-spring quote from the [Boulder Daily Camera](#).

"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."

Is there anything worse a football player can do than not play hard? The answer is no.

Some guys won't be able to play hard due to injury. Here's the list Embree [provided reporters](#), per the Denver Post: 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. Iltis started at center and Bahr was the No. 1 utility back in 2010.

It doesn't appear that spring will be much about X's and O's. Scheme can wait. Embree wants to figure out who can play.

Here are some thoughts before things get started.

Quarterback: [Tyler Hansen](#), who is coming back from a ruptured spleen that ended his 2010 season, is the front-runner because he's got experience and has been productive at times. His competition, JC transfer Brent Burnette and redshirt freshman [Nick Hirschman](#), have no experience.

Running back: The big question is what's the pecking order behind Stewart, who rushed for 1,318 yards in 2010. At 5-foot-6, 175 pounds, it probably wouldn't be good for Stewart to get 25 carries per game over a 12-game season. A power-back complement would be a good thing. One possibility, redshirt freshman [Trea' Jones](#), quit the team.

Receiver/tight end: The Buffaloes are in pretty good shape here, with four of their top-five receivers back. UCLA [fans might remember](#) Paul Richardson. As a true freshman, he caught 34 passes and was second on the team with six TD receptions (both numbers would have led UCLA). Tight end [Ryan Deehan](#) earned honorable mention All-Big 12 honors after catching 25 passes, and there are some young guys who bring athleticism to the position.

Offensive line: Tackle Nate Solder is gone but four starters are back from a group that was fairly mediocre in 2010. The Buffaloes gave up 21 sacks, which would have ranked fourth in the Pac-10, and rushed for 137 yards per game, which would have ranked eighth. The 3.65 yards per carry is pretty uninspiring.

Defensive line: The Buffaloes will be using a base 4-3 after using a 3-3-5 in 2010, so there's a need to add bodies up front. Eight of nine players listed on the final depth chart are back, including Pericak, who earned honorable mention All-Big 12

honors, and Hartigan, who led the defense with seven sacks.

Linebacker: Leading tackler Michael Sipili is gone as is B.J. Beatty, but Liloa Nobriga's work filling in for middle linebacker Jon Major, whose season ended after seven games with a knee injury, boosts experience at the position. The spring "depth chart" lists only eight linebackers.

Defensive back: This will be an area of hot competition, though injuries -- Perkins, Orms -- will be an issue this spring just like they were in 2010. Two cornerbacks spots are open due to the graduation of standouts Jimmy Smith and Jalil Brown, and the play at safety wasn't exactly stout last fall. You'd expect new coordinator and secondary coach Greg Brown -- formerly of Arizona -- to do some mixing and matching this spring.
