



CU defensive coordinator/secondary coach Greg Brown isn't rushing into replacing corners Jimmy Smith, Jalil Brown.
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Brooks: Brown Will Take His Time Finding Pair Of New Corners

BOULDER - No need to get in a hurry, and Greg Brown won't. He's re-settling into familiar surroundings, having returned to a locale and school he wasn't wild about leaving. This is pretty close to a career comeback.

So while he's enjoying that, he'll let the competition in his area work itself out. And, yes, there's plenty of competition and ample time.

When Jon Embree was hired in early December as Colorado's new football coach, one of his first calls went to Brown, who left CU following the 2009 season for a job at Arizona as secondary coach/co-defensive coordinator. If Brown left Boulder with mixed emotions, the mixing was slight; in his heart, he knew he would miss (almost) everything about the place.

He probably could have stayed in Tucson indefinitely - or as indefinitely as can be applied in his profession. But in making a return to college coaching, CU always had been his destination spot and a coordinator's job (let's drop the co-stuff) his goal.

Embree didn't have to work overtime to pluck Brown out of the desert and plop him back in the mountains. On Brown's end, the toughest decision came in deciding to leave Boulder the season before. Making the call to return required a couple of heartbeats, if that.

Coming back as Embree's defensive coordinator/secondary coach in a third stint on CU's staff, Brown's most obvious task is the replacement of cornerbacks Jimmy Smith and Jalil Brown. Smith was in on 772 plays last season, Brown on 799 - the high mark for the defense. Not having them in the "back end" when the Buffs open this fall will be like mustard missing from the hotdog stand.

"Somebody told me that there were something like eight snaps combined when Jimmy and Jalil weren't on the field at corner last season," Greg Brown said. "Corner is as big an unproven as there is on this team, due to the fact that those last two seniors manned those spots for the last two or three years - and manned them pretty well."

Well enough that both probably will wind up in the NFL - Smith as a high-round draft choice, Brown not far behind him.

But there's a deep and well-stocked, albeit mostly inexperienced, pool of replacements. When the Buffs opened spring drills on March 11, Brown had eight corner candidates to begin scrutinizing. Six of them are listed at that position: senior Jonathan Hawkins; junior transfer Makiri Pugh; sophomores Paul Vigo, Deji Olatoye and Jered Bell; and redshirt freshman Josh Moten. Then there's a pair of experienced seniors - Travis Sandersfeld and Arthur Jaffee - who have played mostly safety but will get spring looks at corner.

Brown doesn't want to be hasty about all this until incoming freshmen DBs Will Harlos, Sherrard Harrington, Greg Henderson and Kyle Washington arrive this summer. At two of that pair are projected as corners.

"It's going one of those deals that drags through summer and into the fall," Brown said as far as settling on a pair of replacements for Smith and Jalil Brown.

Because they had another coach - Ashley Ambrose - for only one season, most of the Buffs' secondary returnees are familiar with Brown, his defensive philosophies and his expectations. Ambrose was an able replacement, but to a man the Buffs welcomed Brown's return.

"Same personality, same everything," said Olatoye, who played in six games last season. "I had a good feeling with Coach Brown when he was here for my freshman year - he recruited me. Not that I wasn't comfortable with Ashley and he wasn't a good coach, I was just comfortable with Coach Brown. I knew his coaching style and was glad that's who they decided to bring back."

Bell, who played in eight 2010 games as a true freshman at corner (his natural position) and safety, hasn't been coached by Brown. But Brown recruited him, so both know what they're getting. Said Bell: "I was pretty familiar with him. Ambrose took over, but when Coach Brown came back, I felt like nothing really changed. Only he hasn't coached me on the field like he has some of these other guys.

"There's definitely intense competition . . . everybody is competing for those two spots. These next couple of weeks are chances to shine and show the coaches what we can do."

Although listed as a sophomore, Vigo has been around awhile and wearing all available shirts. He was a member of the 2008 recruiting class but "grayshirted" and delayed his enrollment until January 2009. He redshirted that season, then played in four games last season.

Even at first glance two years ago, Brown liked Vigo's physical stature (6-foot-1, 190) and the way he ran. Last season, Ambrose noticed those same qualities and casually predicted Vigo someday (maybe sooner than later) might step in for either Smith or Jalil Brown.

"With my size and being able to run, that with being high intensity, I feel like that's what (Brown) is looking for," Vigo said. "That's what I want to bring to the game. I feel like I know the defense, the situations . . . but it's all going to come down to who makes more plays.

"We're all competing; there are a lot of guys like me who are big and physical, but they're learning, too. It's all good competition; we're all battling, we're all in it together. We all took reps behind (Smith, Brown), and it was intense competition then to be in the 'two' spot. Now, it's carrying over to this season. Basically, we're all playing hard and going at it. It's going to be high intensity at every practice."

The defense Brown is coordinating features a new line coach (Mike Tuiasosopo) and a new ends/outside linebackers coach. Veteran Brian Cabral returns to coach the inside linebackers and serve as run game coordinator. The DBs' familiarity with their coach might have lessened some of the anxiety other players felt with new position coaches.

"I would say it gives the 'back half' a little bit of an advantage," Olatoye said. "We're familiar with Coach Brown and know what he expects and how he expects it done. Having that 'back half' know that, we can communicate it to the rest of the defense . . . it's probably more of an advantage for our entire defense.

"We're experimenting with the 4-3 and the 3-4, so it's different for our linebackers and our defensive ends. But it's not too much different for the back half. There's just been some different drills, some variations on footwork."

Players Brown coached previously and those who played last season under Ambrose, a Brown protégé, "are going to be familiar with some of the concepts we decided to bring back as a staff," Brown said. "But a lot of the guys are on even footing because we've got new defensive coaches in here combining their ideas and evolving the scheme."

Overall, the group he's working with is talented, "but it's unknown, unproven right now. Nobody's got any significant experience (at corner). Some of the guys I know, but that doesn't give anybody a significant edge. This is a different day, a different era."

He'll let the competition continue as long as it takes - or as long as he can afford to wait - for the top corners to surface.

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CU Buffs' Brown happy to be home

Bufs defensive coordinator spent one season at Arizona

By Kyle Ringo Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 03/12/2011 08:26:52 PM MST



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Back in December 2009 when Greg Brown decided to leave the University of Colorado after four years as secondary coach for a chance to be co-defensive coordinator at Arizona, he said it was one of the most difficult decisions of his life.

Brown didn't much like the idea of uprooting his wife, Stacie, and daughters, Hannah and Grace, once again. He didn't like moving away from his parents, grandma and grandpa to his daughters. And frankly, he didn't really want to leave CU, he just didn't know that he would have the same kind of opportunity again.

During a phone interview after his decision was announced, a reporter asked Brown if he would like to return to Boulder for a third stint coaching the Buffs in the future, maybe as defensive coordinator or head coach.

"Wouldn't that be something," Brown said.

He never thought the opportunity would present itself one year later when Jon Embree called after being hired as head coach of the Buffs to see if Brown would like to oversee the defense and coach the secondary.

"How often does somebody get a chance to have a dream job and at the same time, come home to do it," Brown said. "That just doesn't happen. We're extremely happy and fortunate and blessed to be able to do it."

Brown's 31st year coaching football is officially underway this week with the start of spring football practices at CU. It is his eighth year coaching the Buffs in three different stints -- one in the early 1990s under Bill McCartney, then the first four years of Dan Hawkins' tenure and now under Embree.

"It's nice to have him back," sophomore cornerback Deji Olatoye said. "He knows what he's talking about. He knows his coverages very well. His coaching style is definitely more of an NFL-type coach. He expects us to get stuff done at a high intensity."

Olatoye is one of a handful of players in the secondary who were previously coached or recruited by Brown before he left for Arizona. Having that familiarity is a blessing because there are already relationships and a level of trust in place that don't exist for other members of the staff who are just getting to know their players on the field.

"For a new staff, it certainly gives us an advantage, the fact that I've dealt with these guys myself in the past," Brown said. "But the bottom line right now is the slate is wiped clean for everybody. We're looking to set the tone and say, 'Who wants to step up and be counted on?'"

It's not the only way Brown's familiarity will help the Buffs in 2011.

The fact that he spent the 2010 season in the Pac-10 Conference getting a look at each of the programs and learning what each likes to do and is capable of offensively will be "invaluable" as the Buffs make the transition to the Pac-12 next season.

"You can't beat that, seeing that up close and personal the year before Colorado goes into that league," Brown said.

The Buffs have a long way to go before they will be ready to face Oregon, USC and Stanford, but Brown likes the pieces with which he has to work. He was very impressed with the Pac-10 during his one year in the league.

"The Pac-10 is so innovative on offense and has so much speed that if you're not playing it week in and week out, you don't realize how good that league is," Brown said. "That league is a monster. Prior to that coming from the Big 12, I had said, 'OK, I've seen the Big 12 and know what's going on with the teams in this league and the style of attack.' But it's nothing like the Pac-10. When you get into that deal, they're going to challenge you to the extreme every week."

"They're so innovative offensively, schematically and they have to much speed on the field. Those are the two things you notice and really hit you right between the eyes right away are those differences between that and the Big 12. It's going to be a big challenge for our team."

So what will a Greg Brown defense look like? The truth is, he doesn't completely know right now. He said the Buffs are a base 4-3 team, but they will test other looks at times, especially in obvious passing situations.

"I think it's a little simpler," linebacker Jon Major said. "It allows us to be faster and with speed comes more plays. If you're making more plays and with more plays, you're more likely to win. You have a better chance of being successful."

Brown said his focus right now isn't on putting together the right schemes. It's about evaluating players and the overall skill level at different positions. He said once that work is done this spring, coaches will determine how to best put the players in the best schemes and situations next fall.

Brown said it will never be his defense entirely. He appreciates and expects the feedback and input of all of CU's coaches and uses some of their suggestions and influence in designing what he believes will work best.

One of the biggest influences on the defense other than Brown will be Embree, who got his start in coaching on the defensive side of the ball.

"Everybody forgets that," Brown said. "He's made his name on offense, but he coached defense. When we were here together in the early 90s, he was our defensive line coach."

Notable

Offensive lineman Bryce Givens has been held out of the first two days of spring ball and will continue to be out until the Office of Judicial Affairs decides his future. Givens was caught on video allegedly vandalizing three cars in a Denver parking garage in January. Teammates Eric Richter and Will Pericak were with Givens that night but are practicing this spring. ... Embree is holding redshirt freshman tight end Harold Mobley out of practices for disciplinary reasons, he said. Embree said he expects Mobley to practice at some point this spring. ... Mark defensive back Justin Gorman down as a possibility for holder on field goals and extra points. ... Redshirt freshman defensive lineman Kirk Poston is practicing as a defensive tackle. ... Two large signs have been hung on the inside of the fence next to the gates to the CU practice fields. One is about 40 feet long and says 1990 National Champions, the other is about 20 feet long and says 2001 Big 12 Champions. ... Today will be the first practice in pads, but tackling won't be allowed until practices are closed to the public and the media on Monday.

Jon Embree: Spring Football, Day 2

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