

CU Buffs seniors savor Folsom memories

By Kyle Ringo Camera Sports Writer
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When asked to relive a favorite moment on Folsom Field, every Colorado football player has a different story to tell as the end of his senior season draws near.

For some it's a win, others cite a tackle or a touchdown.

Some point to a laugh shared with, or at the expense of, a teammate.

The 15 seniors on this year's team who will play their final home game Saturday afternoon (12:10 p.m. no television) against Kansas State are no different.

Well, maybe linebacker B.J. Beatty is an unusual case.

He points to a moment earlier this season when he swears he was about to have a heart attack as the most special point of his career beneath the Flatirons.

Beatty forced a fumble at the end of the Georgia game Oct. 2 and fellow linebacker Jon Major recovered it in CU territory, preventing a game-winning field goal attempt and sealing the Buffs' victory.

Beatty stood on the sideline with teammates as the CU offense ran out the clock and felt his chest pounding.

"I thought I was going to have a heart attack. I didn't think it was real. For like that minute that that clock was ticking down, I seriously had to convince myself that just happened," Beatty said. "It felt so surreal and the environment was so fun and it being my senior year and going and doing something like that really was special to me."

Left tackle Nate Solder has been in Boulder for five full seasons now.

He came to CU as a tight end recruited by former coach Gary Barnett's staff. Former coach Dan Hawkins converted him to the offensive line and he is expected to be an NFL draft choice next spring.

Solder has started 34 consecutive games, dating back to the start of the 2008 season, but he pointed to last week's win over Iowa State as his favorite moment in Boulder.

"Everyone talks about running out behind Ralphie and how special it is," Solder said. "The first time I fully experienced that was last game coming out there and there were so many past football players and Buffaloes that were there. I kind of got teary eyed and choked up a little bit. It was amazing. Maybe I got that out so I don't have to do that this coming Saturday."

This senior class, while small in number, includes a mix of individuals who collectively have experienced just about everything student-athletes can encounter at the college level.

Solder is everybody's All-American, a player who has achieved at a high level on the field and in the classroom.

There is the stud recruit in Travon Patterson, who never quite managed the same level of stardom in college as he did in high school but still managed to contribute to two programs because of a transfer.

There is linebacker Michael Sipili, who overcame cultural, academic and legal hurdles to succeed in an environment drastically different from the one in which he was raised.

There are current and former walk-ons Joe Silipo, Cameron Ham, Corey Nabors and Keenan Stevens who battled everything their scholarship teammates did and paid their way to do so, just hoping to earn opportunities on game day. Each has achieved that and then some.

There is a rarity among them, too.

Tight end Luke Walters already experienced senior day last year only to learn later from the NCAA that he had been awarded a sixth season of eligibility after losing two previous seasons because of injury.

There is a once-lightly recruited wide receiver named Scotty McKnight, whom everyone doubted initially but who will leave with a handful of the program's most significant receiving records.

And there is the starting quarterback who came to Boulder on a whim five years ago to play for his dad.

Cody Hawkins was undefeated throughout his high school career and has experienced more than enough losing and heartache in his time here to balance the scale.

The group has no plan for anything out of the ordinary this week.

The seniors might not even meet as a group before they find themselves in the black tunnel before the game listening for their names to be called so they can run onto the field to meet their families.

"We can do all the little things we want, but at the end of the day we want to walk out of here in our last game on that field as winners," Beatty said. "That's our biggest plan."

Most will never play again beyond this season. Fun-loving cornerbacks Jalil Brown and Jimmy Smith, who have miles of maturity between them and their freshman seasons, will join Solder with an opportunity to play professionally.

"I'm not like sad. I'm excited because I know it's a good future coming and I get to go out one last time and play my butt off for one last game," Smith said.

Smith struggled to recall his favorite moment at Folsom, not because it escaped him but because there were so many from which to choose.

"I think one of my favorite moments is seeing people do the chest bump and fall on our team," he said. "Once coach Hawk got chest-bumped and cut his nose. That was funny. I think every time Jalil slips and falls on the field and we come back to the sideline I think that's hilarious because he just falls. I think he is the clumsiest person ever. There are just so many funny moments on Folsom.

"As far as memorable moments, I think I will never forget my first touchdown (2007 against Nebraska). It was just picture perfect for me. And the moment we beat Oklahoma. Actually, I take that back. Iowa State, goal-line stand, 2008. That was like second top memorable moment."

The week leading up to senior day and the final home game can be difficult for some players.

For others it doesn't get tough until game day actually arrives.

McKnight said he poked fun at former teammate Cody Crawford for crying two years ago, but now he won't rule out the possibility of doing so, too.

McKnight might be one of the wisest players to come through the CU program in recent years because he was mature enough to listen to older teammates and learn from their experiences.

He enjoyed each day and all the little moments. He even found a way to appreciate the parts that some dread, remembering advice from players who came before him such as Dusty Sprague, Patrick Williams and Crawford.

"It was two weeks ago, period 18 of practice, I was running over here and looked up at the mountains, no clouds in the sky and I was like, 'Wow, I'm going to miss this place a ton when I leave,'" McKnight said.

Coach search update

Colorado officials are expected to announce the members of the football coach search committee today. Colorado is

looking for a replacement for Dan Hawkins, who was fired last week.

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