

CU Buffs Nate Solder, Jimmy Smith make All-Big 12 team

Solder is offensive lineman of the year in conference

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Colorado

senior left tackle Nate Solder and senior cornerback Jimmy Smith were named first-team members of the All-Big 12 Conference team selected by the league's coaches Tuesday.

Solder also was named the offensive lineman of the year in the conference after playing every snap of the season on offense and leading the Buffs with more than 130 knockdown blocks, twice as many as almost all of his fellow linemen. Solder played a near-perfect game against Kansas State earlier this month, according to coaches' evaluation of film afterward. He graded out at 99 percent.

"That's just a great honor," Solder said. "That's amazing because there are so many great O-linemen in this conference. It's a great conference. It means a lot."

Smith played in all 12 games on defense and finished third in tackles. Most opponents chose to avoid throwing in his direction.

Both players are expected to be selected in the NFL draft in April and, along with fellow senior Jalil Brown, are scheduled to play in the prestigious Senior Bowl in January in Mobile, Ala.

Eight other Buffs were selected to the All-Big 12 team as honorable-mention honorees. They were Brown, linebacker B.J. Beatty, tight end Ryan Deehan, defensive end Josh Hartigan, wide receiver Scotty McKnight, offensive lineman Ryan Miller, defensive tackle Will Pericak, and wide receiver Paul Richardson, who received votes as offensive freshman of the year.

Oklahoma State coach Mike Gundy was named coach of the year in the conference. OSU wide receiver Justin Blackmon earned the offensive player of the year award, and Nebraska cornerback Prince Amukamara was named defensive player of the year.

Stewart snubbed

Colorado running back Rodney Stewart was somehow left off the coaches' All-Conference team, despite being the third leading

rusher in the Big 12 this season. Coaches are not aloud to vote for their own players.

"I don't know how, and obviously I'm pretty new to all this, but I don't know how a guy like Rodney Stewart gets left off any of these," interim coach Brian Cabral said. "So I don't understand. I don't know how that happens. I really don't know how this works. Speedy's got my vote. So whatever that's worth."

According to research done by the CU sports information staff, this is the only instance in Big 12 history of a player averaging 100 yards rushing per game throughout an entire season and not being named to the All-Big 12 team.

Stewart rushed for a career-best 1,318 yards in 12 games. It is the fifth best single-season rushing performance in school history. Stewart moved into fifth place on the school's all-time rushing list with 2,744 career yards.

Still recruiting

Cabral said the staff is doing some limited recruiting this week as everyone in the program awaits a decision on who will be the next head coach. Cabral said he met with the team Monday and emphasized that players need to finish the semester "with flying colors" in the classroom. He said his primary focus now is making that happen.

"My job is to get our team through the rest of this semester," Cabral said. "They have two more weeks of classes and then finals and then on to better things."

But coaches are trying to remain in touch with recruits so the next head coach will have somewhere to start when he is hired, and if Cabral earns the job, he can continue without any hiccups. Running backs coach Darian Hagan is recruiting out of state and offensive coordinator Eric Kiesau is recruiting instate. Cabral said the goal is to make sure undecided recruits keep the Buffs in mind.

"As soon as there is someone to hand this off to, we can tell them exactly where to go, who to go to and in what order if they so choose to want that," Cabral said. "We're prepared to move as quickly, as fast as we can on the recruiting trail."

Cabral said the biggest needs in recruiting are cornerbacks and wide receivers. CU is expected to sign no more than 16 players in February and has about eight of those scholarships committed to recruits, grayshirts and transfers.

Quotable

Nate Solder on if he sees himself being around the program in the future and supporting players who come after him: "I didn't win a whole lot of games with the teams here, but I think the crap that I've been through, I love this place. I mean it man. This is a place that has touched me and will always be in my heart."

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