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cu briefs

Stewart's role clearly on rise

Posted: 10/21/2010 01:00:00 AM MDT

BOULDER — Once boasting a stable of running backs, Colorado now has a workhorse to carry most of the load.

In the past two games, junior tailback Rodney Stewart has accounted for 48 of the 52 carries (92.3 percent) by CU running backs. That does not include runs by quarterbacks or receivers.

"Speedy" doesn't mind.

"I'm pretty tough," Stewart said. "I'm pretty strong. And I've got a high tolerance for pain. So I'll be all right week to week. When you worry about getting hurt, that's when you get hurt."

Listed at 5-feet-6 and 175 pounds, Stewart doesn't fit the profile of a conventional big-back workhorse. But he drew all 18 carries by running backs against Missouri and 30 of 34 versus Baylor.

Will Jefferson, who had just converted from wide receiver to tailback, got his name called for the other four carries against the Bears. CU running backs coach Darian Hagan said he will try to get Jefferson more carries Saturday in the game

against Texas Tech.

Hagan said two players down the depth chart, redshirt freshman Quentin Hildreth and Corey Nabors, also might get a chance. But Stewart will continue to get "the bulk of the work," Hagan said. "I have no doubt Rodney can hold up."

Already one of the strongest players on the team, with a 400-pound bench press, Stewart added even more muscle mass during the offseason, Hagan said.

"That's the way he wanted it, to be the guy," Hagan said. "So we're giving him that opportunity."

Stewart ranks fifth in the Big 12 with 103 yards a game, including season bests of 149 yards against Georgia and 125 last week against Baylor. He is playing the most consistent football of his career, Hagan said, adding: "Speedy is doing a better job of concentrating and playing within the confines of our offense. The last two years, he was a freelancer."

During the past 12 months, CU has lost four tailbacks Darrell Scott (quit the team last November), Demetrius Sumler (after 2009 declined to return for fifth year), Brian Lockridge (season-ending ankle injury against Georgia) and Justin Torres (quit the team Oct. 5).

Coach psychologist.

Hagan said he has had to boost the spirits of Jefferson this week and help the young tailback



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get over his fumble into the end zone against Baylor.

"You can't let that linger," Hagan said of mistakes. "If you let it linger, then you're always going to doubt yourself. I told Will: 'Just let it go. You're not the first person that fumbled.' "

Jefferson said discussions with Hagan have helped.

"But bottom line, I fumbled, and it made the whole day awful," Jefferson said. "Up until that, I thought I had a decent day."

He had 36 yards on four carries in his first game at RB since high school.

Footnotes.

Coach Dan Hawkins ended Wednesday's scheduled two-hour morning practice 15 minutes early. "You have to cut a little bit," he said. "It's that way for everybody (at this point in the season). You're beat up. You get done what you have to get done. But you have to know their limits." . . . Junior safety and nickel back Travis Sandersfeld (fibula fracture in Week 2) practiced Wednesday and may be available for Saturday, depending on the soreness in the leg.

Tom Kensler, The Denver Post

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All Things Colorado Sports — Blogs — The Denver Post

OCTOBER 20, 2010, 1:30 PM

More CU tailbacks to see action?

By **TOM KENSLE** |  No Comments

BOULDER – I caught up with Colorado running backs coach [Darian Hagan](#)^[1] and he said he might try to get more tailbacks some work on Saturday in the homecoming game against Texas Tech at Folsom Field.

Hagan said third-stringer [Quentin Hildreth](#)^[2] and senior [Corey Nabors](#)^[3] have done some good things in practice. A redshirt freshman, Hildreth (5-feet-8, and 185 pounds) is a walk-on from Denver East. Nabors (5-9, 195) played high school ball at Rangeview and is a former walk-on.

Sophomore [Will Jefferson](#)^[4] remains the top back-up to starter Rodney Stewart, who has drawn 90 percent of the [tailback](#)^[5] carries the past two games. Guys will get in when Speedy needs to catch his breath, Hagan said.

Hagan has been part psychologist this week, trying to help Jefferson “move on” from nightmarish flashbacks of his fumble into the end zone against Baylor.

“You can’t let that linger,” Hagan said of fumbles. “If you let it linger then you’re always going to doubt yourself. I told Will, ‘Just let it go. You’re not the first person that fumbled.’”

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Expect CU Buffs' Smith to be big hit

Despite size, true freshman DB loves to make contact

By Kyle Ringo Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 10/20/2010 11:51:54 PM MDT

Throughout the final two years of his high school career in Patterson, N.J., Terrel Smith watched as teammates and rivals received recruiting attention from websites and scholarship offers from colleges while he went wanting.

He was too small for major college football in the eyes of most, though he never doubted he could play the game with anyone.

Smith always was a big hitter and never shied away from contact since his introduction to the sport before he could do long division, conjugate verbs or name the state capitals. He continued to build that reputation at Passaic County Tech where he finished his senior season with nearly 120 tackles and three interceptions and no scholarship offers.

Then while reviewing film of another prospect, Colorado coaches spotted Smith. They noted his speed and toughness and didn't mind his size as much as some because they knew the right kind of mental makeup could make up for it. They had seen it happen the previous four years with former defensive back Cha'pelle Brown.

"Size really doesn't matter. It's all about the heart I love to say," Smith said. "I could be 6-4 and don't like to hit. I love to hit and I love the challenge I have not having so much height on me. As long as you bring the wood and bring all you have, you'll be fine hitting people."

Nearly three weeks after national signing day late in February, Smith received what he always dreamed of, a chance to play major college football and prove himself. Roughly eight months later, he is ready to take another step with his first playing time Saturday in the Buffs' Homecoming game against Texas Tech.

For those who are worried about wasting a redshirt season by choosing to use Smith so late in the season, he has no problem with it. In fact, he was somewhat disappointed through the past seven weeks believing he was going to miss his chance to play in the Big 12 Conference with CU moving to the Pac-12 next season.

"I know that has been the question out there," he said. "I'm excited because we get to play Texas Tech, Oklahoma, Nebraska. I mean this half of the schedule is really what football is all about. I want to be a part of that and be a part of the Big 12 and be a part of Big 12 games since we're leaving next year. I feel like I want to get a taste of that and a taste of the experience before next year."

Colorado coaches are getting to the point where they don't have many options other than using young players in the secondary. Five defensive backs have suffered season-ending injuries or injuries that are keeping them off the field for multiple weeks. Another defensive back was indefinitely suspended from the team and senior cornerback Jimmy Smith is recovering from a concussion and might not be available this week.

Colorado used true freshman Jered Bell and redshirt freshman Deji Olatoye in the secondary last week against Baylor. Bell led the team in tackles and moved back to cornerback this week in anticipation of the Red Raiders' high-powered passing attack.

This isn't the same Texas Tech program that routinely led the Big 12 in passing statistics over the past decade under former coach Mike Leach. It is running more often under coach Tommy Tuberville, but it still throws a majority of the time and has a bevy of playmakers in the passing game.

It might not be the ideal time to break in a true freshman like Smith, but secondary coach Ashley Ambrose has faith in his 5-foot-9, 185-pound safety.

"I expect him to do like he do out here in practice," Ambrose said. "He runs hard to the ball. He's a physical guy. You look at him and think he's a small guy but he packs a punch. I look for him just to go out there and even if he makes mistakes,

go all out and make plays."

Smith hasn't played a down of college football. Yet, head coach Dan Hawkins already has compared him with Indianapolis Colts All-Pro safety Bob Sanders because he is undersized and a big hitter.

Coaches expected to see Smith put some licks on opponents on game days and teammates during practices, but they were mildly surprised at how quickly Smith adjusted to the college game. He led the Buffs in tackles during the first scrimmage of fall camp and provided the hit of the day that afternoon when he smashed wide receiver Jason Espinoza who leaped into the air for a high ball going toward the sideline. Smith put him on his back.

"Yeah, ever since I was a little kid I've been known as a big hitter," Smith said. "I'm glad that I'm known to be a big hitter. I've just got to prove it out on the field against Texas Tech and hit some people this Saturday."

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Longmont, Colorado
Friday, October 22, 2010

Publish Date: 10/21/2010

Buffs still have plenty to play for

By Brian Howell
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There aren't many college football fans around the country jealous of the University of Minnesota right now.

Several Colorado fans, however, wish they had what the Gophers have. No, not the 1-6 record. A new coach.

With every CU loss — and even after wins — fans call for head coach Dan Hawkins to join Minnesota's Tim Brewster on the unemployed list.

The complaints are not without merit.

Hawkins has a 19-36 record in 55 games at CU. He hasn't had a winning season, he's been to just one bowl game, has a 2-22 record outside of the state and a 10-24 mark in Big 12 play.

Ironically, the man some CU fans want to replace Hawkins — former Buffs coach Bill McCartney — was 19-35-1 through 55 games in Boulder, and he turned out to be just fine.

Maybe Hawkins could turn it around like Mac did. Maybe not. What we do know is that he has not produced the results he was hired to produce.

Believe it or not, that irritates Hawkins and the players much more than it irritates the fans.

"You know what, I honestly think wins and losses are the most important thing, so I totally understand," CU senior receiver Scotty McKnight said. "As a fan, what it boils down to, you root for your team to win, so I understand that. I understand why they'd be upset."

Still, this is no time to follow the Minnesota model.

Firing a coach during the season is to give up on that season. After six straight defeats, Minnesota's season is a lost cause anyway.

The 3-3 Buffs, on the other hand, have too much to play for this season.

"We can maybe go win three or four (more) games and make a pretty good bowl game and have a great year and send these seniors out on a good note," junior quarterback Tyler Hansen said.

Finishing 7-5 and qualifying for a bowl game would be a big step for this program. And, it's not an unrealistic goal. They've got three winnable home games and a road game at dreadful Kansas.

"We realize we have a lot of season left," cornerback Jalil Brown said. "We have a lot of games on our schedule where we know we definitely can go in there and get a win in. We've proved at times this year we can be a good team."

On-the-field goals aren't the only reason for keeping Hawkins on board the rest of the season.

Most of the seniors were brought to Boulder by the current coaching staff, and Hawkins is the only head coach they've known. McKnight gave a reminder that wins — while important — can't be the only consideration in this type of situation.

"Most of these guys (on the coaching staff), they're the ones that came into our families' houses and recruited us and told our parents they were here and they were going to take care of us and all of that stuff," he said. "There's a sense of being comfortable, not only from our aspect, but from our families as well.

"I have yet to deal with it, but talking to guys, it's always tough to go through a coaching change. But to do it in the middle of the season, that would really shake things up."

A shake up is just what some CU fans want. But, this is not the time to do it.

Should CU finish 6-6 or worse and miss out on another bowl game, fine. Start the search.

But, let's wait. This is Hawkins' most talented team, and he and the players deserve a chance to finish what they've started.

"Our day is going to come soon," Hansen said. "If we keep fighting, it's going to happen soon."

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