

CU Buffs receivers trying to catch on

McCulloch, Canty among those looking to replace Clemons

By **Kyle Ringo** Buffzone.com
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 04/01/2012 09:06:18 PM MDT

When spring football practices began last month at Colorado, one of coach Jon Embree's priorities for the 15 sessions was finding out if any of the current wide receivers could fill the hole left by Toney Clemons or if coaches would have to rely on a true freshman this fall.

One wide receiver spot will obviously be manned by junior-to-be Paul Richardson, leaving a handful of players to make their case for the other side or niche roles in the offense.

Nothing is settled yet, but wide receivers coach Bobby Kennedy said before the team broke for spring break 10 days ago that he has liked what he has seen from his group. The Buffs return to practice today with seven practices remaining, including the April 14 spring game at Folsom Field.

"Like I always say, we're a work in progress," Kennedy said. "We've just got to maximize their ability and get the most out of them. You know, I see us as so far ahead of where we were last year at this time. What I keep telling Jon is we're better than at almost any time last year. We miss a big play-maker in Toney Clemons, but there are some other things that we're doing that we're way, far ahead on. It's an eclectic group but a group that can be good if they keep working."

Kennedy is working with a cast of characters that includes the dynamic ability of Richardson along with two big targets in DaVaughn Thornton and Jarrod Darden, who are most likely role players because they lack the speed to stretch defenses on the outside. He also has speedy sophomore Keenan Canty, who is undersized and best suited to the slot.

Canty and fellow sophomore Tyler McCulloch are the most experienced in the group. Both earned occasional playing time last season. McCulloch actually started ahead of Clemons early last season.

"He's improved. He still has some technique things to work out, but the great thing about Tyler is he's a guy who wants to do it and he's a guy who is going to do it the way you want him to do it," Kennedy said. "Once again, I don't think his mind is locking him up, so he's playing a little faster. He knows the offense. He's more comfortable in the offense. He's a guy who we definitely need to step up. We've got to continue to bring him along and really push him."

Coaches have told players at all positions that this spring is their chance to prove themselves and the early part of fall camp in August will be devoted to giving the 28 members of the freshmen class the same opportunity. In the second and third week of fall camp, coaches will whittle out the players they don't believe are ready from those that are and move forward.

Kennedy said all of his players have responded well to that message knowing the program is adding three freshman wide receivers -- all from Texas high schools -- in the fall. Kennedy said redshirt freshman Nelson Spruce and senior-to-be Dustin Ebner have done as well as anyone in the first eight practices this spring, including two scrimmages.

Kennedy said both Spruce and Ebner are in the mix for playing time at this point along with McCulloch and Canty. He said the other players also could get on the field at times but their roles will be more situational.

"Knowing that it's kind of a wide-open thing has really stepped up the competition," Spruce said. "Everyone is really working hard."

Kennedy said the area where he has seen across-the-board improvement from his receivers is in run blocking. It's a part of the game coaches often say is a "want-to" skill. Kennedy said Richardson has led the way in overall improvement in running blocking among the entire receiving corps.

"We are light years ahead of where we were last year in terms of blocking," Kennedy said. "So if we continue to make that progress, we can be a good blocking team. Paul Richardson has bought into it. Those are the things I'm excited about."

The importance of the second half of spring practice for the wide receivers currently on the roster can't be overstated because Embree, Kennedy and offensive coordinator Eric Bieniemy believe incoming recruits Gerald Thomas, Jeffrey Thomas and Peyton Williams all have the ability to play right away if they can pick up the offense quickly.

"I'm going to do what I can to get those young guys ready," Kennedy said. "Now it's up to these guys to hold them off."

[Close Window](#)[Send To Printer](#)