



Rodney "Speedy" Stewart is sprinting into his final CU football season.
Photo Courtesy: CUBuffs.com



Brooks: Bieniemy's Backs Know Meaning Of Demanding

Release: 08/17/2011 Courtesy: B.G. Brooks, Contributing Editor

(Note: Fifth in a series previewing the Buffs position-by-position during training camp. Today: Tailbacks/fullbacks.)

BOULDER - He's grinning broadly when he says it, but Eric Bieniemy might be only half-kidding (maybe less) when he refers to last winter's coaching transition as a "hostile takeover."

If they believed they fully understood the meaning of "demanding," returning football players at the University of Colorado - particularly those at Bieniemy's position (running back) - quickly discovered they were badly misinformed.

"Yeah, they're pretty demanding," senior tailback Rodney "Speedy" Stewart understated a week into preseason camp. "But they're demanding for the right reasons. They want you to do the right thing. They want everybody doing their job."

And in Bieniemy's world, which revolves around football done right, not carrying out an assignment to the letter brings a quick trip to the sidelines. Stewart and CU's entire stable of tailbacks/fullbacks have heard, "Get out of

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this drill" countless times since camp opened on Aug. 4 - most of the time with ah, a colorful adjective preceding drill.

But there's a method behind the "EB" mayhem. Bieniemy, maybe new Buffs Coach Jon Embree's closest friend in coaching, is trying to groom his backs into steely, steady, utterly efficient and complete players.

Of the nine tailbacks/fullbacks on CU's roster, Bieniemy inherited six. Whether any of that half dozen would make Bieniemy's 2012 prospect list is of no concern now.

"Here's what you've got to understand: Whether I recruited them or not, my job is to make sure that they learn how to have the same attitude and mindset as their position coach," he said. "These are some competitive kids, so from that standpoint, yes they are (his kind of player).

"Now, understand this, too: These guys are Colorado Buffaloes. So they're family. When we took over as a staff, we understood that these guys were going to take on the personality of the people who are leading them. So we came in and it was a 'hostile takeover,' you know what I mean? But the bottom line is, these kids have been great. I can't stress it enough. They've been great."

It didn't take long for Bieniemy's players to understand where he was coming from or what was expected from them.

"I think I'm living up to this camp's expectations," senior tailback Brian Lockridge said. "The coaches demand a lot; you either do it or don't do it. They want the guys who do it - no excuses, just get it done. And that's good, having that behind you and that sense of drive to be perfect is a great thing to have.

"They demand a lot and it's one thing to have 'EB' yelling at you, but you yourself also wants to do it right. If not, they'll get another guy, guaranteed. It's great; everyone's competing and I'm loving it.

"I've always been a guy who's highly motivated, but you have something extra (in that regard) with 'EB.' He's a real fiery coach; you want to do things right, everything perfect. Not to say I didn't want that before, but there's more than me (motivating him) now."

Bieniemy's first tailback will be Stewart, who last season surpassed 1,000 yards for the first time in his CU career. After "Speedy," well, Bieniemy wants to develop a stable of backs, each capable of being plugged in and competing at a high level with the offense not downshifting. Nothing less, he contends, will get the Buffs through a demanding 13-game schedule that offers no breaks.

"I'm coaching all of them to be the starter," Bieniemy said. "When you're called on to play, we're not going to change the game plan. We're going to do what we do. When 'B-Lock' gets in there, I expect him to run the ball efficiently, to average 41/2 yards a carry. I expect him to pick up a blitz when he has to. And when he's called upon to make a play in the open field, that's going to be his job - and regardless of whether it's 'B-Lock,' Tony Jones, D.D. Goodson, Malcolm Creer, Josh Ford . . . or the fullbacks.

"All the guys are going to be coached to be the starter. I want these kids to understand that in any given situation, you never know what might happen. I want them to gain confidence . . . we're not going to change what we do. You never know when your time might come. You've got to step up. The team is counting on you to play at a high level."

Although Stewart is expecting as much from himself as Bieniemy is, he always has refrained from setting personal goals. "I really don't do that," Stewart said. "I'm learning to go hard on every play, that's the biggest thing I want to do this season - coming out every day, going hard and understanding the offense. I don't want to aim too high and come in lower than what I wanted. I just want to have a great year - the whole team, winning and getting this experience from the coaches."

But there is a yardage total that has Stewart's attention: If "Speedy" rushes for 1,197 yards this season - he ran for 1,318 last season - he can overtake his position coach as CU's career rushing leader.

Stewart might remind Bieniemy of himself - at least in size. Bieniemy played at CU as a 5-7, 195-pound tailback for the Buffs' 1990 national championship team and setting the school's still-standing career rushing record (3,940 yards). Stewart is 5-6, 180, and Bieniemy sees the makings of "a complete football player.

"That's the thing I love about him. When the ball's not in his hands I want him to accept the challenge of being a better pass protector. I want him to realize his ability of getting out of the backfield and having the ball thrown to him. I want him to realize that he cannot take this moment in his life for granted. Each and every day he's in practice, that particular play becomes the most important play. Don't take this time for granted; have a sense of urgency."

After about three months of training last spring with CU's sprinters on the track team, Stewart says he picked up "a lot of little details and techniques" that have made him faster. "They work their small muscles, their hips. I'm definitely faster now than when I started working with them."

"The little details" Stewart referred to, said CU sprint coach Drew Morano, specifically are "things like lifting his knees, working his arms and staying relaxed . . . those will be big for him."

Stewart's quickness is obvious, said Morano, "but his speed was an issue, and that's something we took upon ourselves to help him with. He had to work on getting his knees up and getting that lift to pull away from people - and not decelerate once he gets past 20 meters. We worked a little bit on his explosion, getting out of the blocks, but the main thing was working on his top-end speed. That's where he needs the most work. Obviously he can get through the hole, but getting away from the cornerbacks trying to run him down was kind of our main goal."

Morano said Stewart went beyond willing to learn: "He was a sponge. He would absolutely do anything; he would look me right in the eye as I talked to him and try and take in everything I said. And if he thought he was deficient in anything, he said, 'What can I do to fix it?' He was great; I really enjoyed having him around. He's very humble, a very good young man."

Almost everything Stewart absorbed under Morano should be beneficial this season. Straight-line sprinting is what Bieniemy wants from Stewart. In the past, he sometimes has been a "dancer," moving too much laterally when straight ahead is the best route.

"That's my goal . . . I want him to see he's a much better runner when he's going north and south," Bieniemy said. "I will say this: My job isn't to take away 'Speedy's' creativity. My job is to give him a starting point and from there, execute the scheme. In open field, be 'Speedy.' But there's certain footwork we want; we want him to get north and south. He's so good when he puts his foot down and accelerates to that hole. That's what I want him to understand; yards are hard to come by.

"When I'm out there with him, I quote my old running backs coach (at CU). Oliver Lucas used to say, 'I don't want you out there stomping snakes and killing all that good grass; put your foot down and get up the field.' That's what I want from 'Speedy.'"

Bieniemy, who also is Embree's offensive coordinator, has installed a hard-nosed running game that will feature Stewart usually lined up behind a fullback and a mammoth offensive line. The pro-style attack, said Stewart, has been welcomed by players, but he adds: "It doesn't really make a difference whether we're in a spread or pro offense. It's us coming out and doing our jobs every single day, drilling it in our heads that if you come to practice you can't take time off. You've got to do everything right all the time. Once you do that, it comes easier."

One of the fullbacks in front of Stewart and Lockridge will be senior Evan Harrington, who like senior Tyler Ahles is a converted linebacker. Bieniemy says he "couldn't be any more proud" of the pair - even though he wasn't sure how either would take to the transition. "We joke about this in the running back room," Bieniemy

said. "The first day I said, 'Oh Lord, I don't know about this.' But I'll tell you, those are two prideful kids. The only thing they want is a chance to get on the field and show what they can do. Improvement and strides has been light years. They're getting better. I wish they weren't graduating . . . they're just great kids."

Harrington, a 2010 transfer from the College of The Canyons, left spring drills with a decree from Bieniemy to gain weight. At the time, the 5-11 Harrington weighed 212. He reported to camp weighing 230 - the product of strength and conditioning director Malcolm Blacken's off-season program, continued weight work back at his junior college in Santa Clarita, Calif., and Harrington simply become more diet conscious.

Harrington played fullback in high school, so the position switch didn't thrust him into a completely foreign role. He's been pleasantly surprised, though, by how much Bieniemy's offense appears to utilize his position.

"It's been pretty surprising; we've been getting a lot of check down routes and seeing the ball a lot," Harrington said. "It's been an adjustment for me, but it's been fun. I'm just trying to do everything I can to get better each day, and more importantly to help the team out.

"My blocking is up to speed, but there's always room to get better. 'EB' says every day to work on something to get better - whether it's blocking, catching the ball or just your assignments. I'm not where I need to be, but I come out every day and try to get better."

Bieniemy expects that from all of his players, and he's seen a night-day difference from his introduction to them last winter and this summer. "The first few days this spring, we came into it as a staff and said, 'Oh my goodness, we've got a long ways to go,'" he recalled. "But those guys bought in and worked their tails off each and every day and progressively made improvement and strides.

"After going through that spring process and getting to where we are right now, we are a lot better than what we were. But understand this, I want to be cautious when I say this, we're a lot better because we know what to do. Are we there yet? No. There's still a long ways to go. But I do believe this: if they continue to work as hard as they are and put the time and effort into the books, the sky can be the limit for this group of guys."

The offense he and Embree introduced in January is heavily influenced by what each learned as NFL assistants - Embree with Kansas City and Washington, Bieniemy with Minnesota. CU's players, said Bieniemy, identify with what they're being taught because they see it on Sundays.

"The beauty of it is, with the pro style we're running, coming out and showing guys what the Minnesota Vikings and the Washington Redskins did, it gives the guys an added sense of motivation and enjoyment in what they're doing," he said. "Watching a Bret Favre or Donovan McNabb or Adrian Peterson or Percy Harvin . . . they're running the same exact scheme as we do.

"These kids are all in; they're working their tails off. I've been in this profession now for 11 years and that's all you can ask - work hard and focus on improving one aspect of your game each and every day. We've seen that."

CU's offense, said Lockridge, is a fine fit for his and his teammates' skill sets: "It's a good match . . . it's hard-nosed football, running downhill. But most of all it's physical. Football is a physical game and coaches want you to play that way. That's football."

Bieniemy remaining tailbacks include returnees Tony Jones and Josh Ford, and incoming freshmen D.D. Goodson and Malcolm Creer. All, insists Bieniemy, will play: "We've got 13 games. I've got to have six starting running backs. Bottom line is, my job is to teach, then motivating them in the proper way. At times I know my methods can be, ah, misconstrued. But the bottom line is, I'm going to love 'em up and make them understand, hey, the reason why I'm hard on you is because I need you to make this play. I'm going to be their harshest critic, but also their biggest fan."

BUFF BITS: Various punting situations were emphasized Tuesday morning, and Embree said incumbent sophomore Zach Grossnickle had taken a slight lead over walk-on freshman Darragh O'Neill. Grossnickle's punts

appeared to have better hang time - a huge factor for Embree, who will allow the competition to continue for a couple more days at least . . . Along with the usual nicks and bruises of a preseason camp, the flu bug continues to run its course through the Buffs. Embree said 15 to 20 players have been hit, with many requiring two, three and four IV bags for re-hydration. Still, very few have missed practice. "That's the mindset of these guys," he said, lauding them for their determination. In his post-practice huddle, he asked for a show of hands of how many of them were "nicked." About three-quarters of the team's hands went up. Because of their efforts, he told them, "We beat somebody today . . . we're working hard and it will pay off." . . . Held out of practice Tuesday were Stewart (tight hamstring), receiver Paul Richardson (sore groin) and tight end Kyle Slavin and safety Will Harlos, both with flu symptoms. Embree said it was his decision to hold out Stewart and Richardson because he knew the abilities of each and wanted to evaluate other players at their positions . . . Back-up quarterback Nick Hirschman (foot sprain) expects to return to practice on Monday . . . Former Buffs tailback Chris Brown has attended the last two days of practice. He said his NFL career is behind him and he's in the process of determining where he wants to settle, with Houston (his current home), Chicago (his hometown) or Boulder being his three options . . . The starting time for Wednesday morning's practice is now 10 a.m., with about 90 minutes of work scheduled.

THE INSIDE LOOK AT . . .

Running backs/fullbacks

Coach: Eric Bieniemy, first season at CU under Jon Embree; second stint on CU staff.

Returning starters: TB Rodney Stewart, Sr.

Returnees: TB Brian Lockridge, Sr.; TB Tony Jones, Fr-RS; TB Josh Ford, Soph.; FB Evan Harrington, Sr.; FB Tyler Ahles, Sr. (both Harrington and Ahles are former linebackers).

Newcomers: TB D.D. Goodson, Fr.; TB Malcolm Creer, Fr.; FB Nick Plimpton, Fr. (walk-on).

Key losses: TB Corey Nabors, TB Cordary Allen (moved to tight end).

Stat line: The Buffs ran for 137.0 yards a game last season, with Stewart averaging 109.8 and scoring 10 touchdowns. He topped 1,000 yards (1,318) for the first time in his career. When Stewart hits the 256-yard mark this season, he'll become the fourth Buffs player to hit 3,000.

Bottom line: Bieniemy demands much of his backfield and believes the Buffs' 13-game schedule will demand that his entire stable of backs be ready to play. Stewart should be in for a banner season in a running game that has been prioritized, and once Lockridge hits 100 percent physically his productivity should increase. The fullbacks will be key in CU's offense; Harrington appears a good fit at the position. If the Buffs running game isn't productive, it won't because it hasn't been emphasized. Newcomer to watch: Goodson.

Next: Wide receivers

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SHOW MENU



CU Buffs gear up for flyin' Hawaiians

Colorado's untested secondary first faces pass-happy Hawaii

By **Ryan Thorburn** Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 08/16/2011 04:21:51 PM MDT

Jon Embree Post Practice Aug. 16



The majority of Colorado game plans from the past five seasons likely ended up in the Dal Ward Center shredder over the winter.

But there was at least one game -- check that, one half -- of useful strategy executed by the Buffs that should be included by the new staff in the 2011 blue prints.

After trailing 10-0 at halftime in the Folsom Field opener last season, CU ran the ball, dominated the line of scrimmage, and beat a good Hawaii team 31-13.

"We wanted to really come out and run the ball and show we could run the ball. That's what we did; we came out and we ran the ball," right guard Ryan Miller said after the Sept. 18, 2010 victory over the Warriors. "So next weekend, I think we should come out and run the ball."

Unfortunately, the Buffs had a bye the next weekend. Although Rodney Stewart ran wild during a victory over Georgia, CU eventually reverted back to a spread passing attack and a 3-1 start quickly turned into 3-6 and resulted in a coaching change.

Jon Embree has made no secret of his desire for the Buffs to be a run-first team entering the Pac-12. That's how the program's only Big 12 championship was won in 2001 when he was a Gary Barnett assistant.

The first-year CU head coach knows the best way to start the season 1-0 is to keep Hawaii quarterback m on the sideline.

The perceived mismatch between the Warriors' passing attack, which led the nation with 5,520 yards and 42 touchdowns in 2010, and CU's inexperienced cornerbacks is the foremost reason why the wise guys have the Buffs as 11-point underdogs.

"It's hard to practice against because nobody runs that style of offense. Our offense certainly doesn't do anything remotely close to that," CU defensive coordinator Greg Brown said of Hawaii's five-receiver attack. "You need extra defensive backs to get into the game, and we're very thin as it is with people. The clock is ticking. It's a deal where we need to come up with some people and put them out there in our schemes where we can give ourselves a chance."

The Buffs, of course, lost starting cornerbacks Jimmy Smith and Jalil Brown to the NFL. An army of defensive backs have been auditioning to replace the diligent duo since the first spring football practice.

Parker Orms, Travis Sandersfeld, Greg Henderson, Paul Vigo and Ayodeji Olatoye are emerging as the cornerbacks likely to be included on the flight to Honolulu.

"Anytime you lose guys like Jimmy and Jalil, they're going to leave a big hole no matter who is behind them," senior safety Anthony Perkins said. "But there are a lot of young corners who are eager to get in there. They're not shying away from anything, and that's great to see."

Moniz completed 65 percent of his passes last season for 5,040 yards (387.7 per game) with 39 touchdowns and 15 interceptions. The Buffs, who would have been down 24-0 if not for a pair of goal-line stands by the defense, limited Hawaii's best player to 330 yards passing with one touchdown and one interception.

Stewart finished the Hawaii game with 107 yards rushing and two touchdowns. Brian Lockridge added 111 yards rushing. CU, despite falling behind by double digits, rushed the ball 52 times and passed 26 times (Tyler Hansen completed 19 of the attempts for 200 yards and two touchdowns) en route to the victory.

"They definitely throw a lot, so we'll get our chances," safety Ray Polk said of the Warriors. "We want a good, consistent corner that knows his stuff. That's what we're starting to get, and it's exciting because we're starting to see that in these young corners."

Locally, much of the focus during fall camp has been on CU's unknown acumen at cornerback, but Moniz lost his top three weapons -- receivers Greg Salas and Kealoha Pilaes, and 1,000-yard running back Alex Green -- to the NFL. The Warriors also return just one starting offensive lineman, left tackle Austin Hansen, for the rematch at Aloha Stadium.

Based on practice performance, it appears CU's defensive line will be a team strength this season. If the Buffs have an advantage up front it would certainly help the unseasoned members of the secondary.

"We've all got to make each other better because I don't really feel like we're going to have a set corner," said Orms, who returned to practice on Monday after missing most of camp with a sore leg. "I think we're going to have guys rotating in that want to play, and we've all got to learn how to work hard."

The Buffs open the season at Hawaii on Sept. 3. The game plan? Embree had it constructed in April.

"If you are going to be a physical team, you need to run the ball and implement your will on the other team," Embree said at football media day. "The other thing is that it helps our defense.

"I laugh sometimes when people throw out these defensive statistics. Well, if you are on the field all the time, you are not going to be a good defense. When you're on defense and you want every guy running to the ball every play, then you have to limit their plays."



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CU Buffs linemen pull double duty

By **Joshua Linden**stein Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:08/16/2011 07:19:51 PM MDT

Being a jack of all trades is just part of the gig for offensive linemen in Colorado preseason football camp.

Buffaloes head coach Jon Embree said Tuesday that if there are any growing pains along the line so far many of them stem from coaches moving guys around to get them proficient at various positions.

"... Every once in awhile a guy thinks he's at tackle and he's at guard," Embree said.

Without naming them, Embree said the coaches have a good idea who the top five linemen are.

"But we're working guys in other positions so that if we have an injury they can move in and it's not their first time doing it," the coach said. "It may cost us some reps in practice, but it's what we need to do because we don't have any true depth as far as saying, 'We've got these 10 guys.' So we've got to use eight guys to fill the 10 spots."

Offensive line coach Steve Marshall said as many as 12 guys are still vying to be in the rotation once games start.

So far, David Bahktiari (left tackle), Ethan Adkins (left guard), Ryan Miller (right guard) and Jack Harris (right tackle) have gotten the most reps at their respective positions. Sophomore Gus Handler and redshirt freshman Daniel Munyer continue to battle at center, and Embree said both have done well.

Harris, a 6-foot-5, 295-pound sophomore out of Chaparral High School looking for his first game action as a Buff, said everyone is expected to know at least two positions, no matter where they stand on the depth chart.

"It's the calls, the techniques, the sets, basically everything," Harris said of playing one position versus another. "Everyone has their own calls and everyone has their own techniques."

Marshall said a lot of the concepts from one position to another mesh.

"We're concept teachers, so if you know one position, you should know the other," Marshall said. "But that's easier said than done because of the volume of offense we run. The guys have done a heck of a job at this point."

Speedy, Richardson hobbled

Starting tailback Rodney Stewart has seen limited action the past two days due to a tight hamstring, Embree said.

Others such as Tony Jones, Josh Ford and D.D. Goodson have gotten extra carries as a result, while Brian Lockridge also has been limited in his ongoing return from an ankle injury.

"(Stewart's) hamstring was a little tight and it gives us a chance to work other guys," Embree said. "That's what we need to do. Same with (receiver Paul Richardson). His groin was a little sore. We know what he can do. We've got to evaluate other guys. So I just made the decision we're not going to let certain guys practice."

Notable

Today's lone practice, originally scheduled from 8:30-11 a.m., has been moved to a 10-11:30 a.m. time slot. ... The Buffs bid farewell to their final two-a-day practice early Tuesday afternoon thanks to lightning in the area that caused the team to leave the field about an hour into the workout. ... Embree said sophomore Zach Grossnickle might be a little ahead of freshman Darragh O'Neill for the top punting spot, but that neither has distinguished himself yet.

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THE DENVER POST

cu football

CU's untested centers Daniel Munyer, Gus Handler coming up big

By John Henderson
The Denver Post

Posted: 08/17/2011 01:00:00 AM MDT

Updated: 08/17/2011 07:12:03 AM MDT

BOULDER — The cornerback situation is a mess. The punters are inconsistent. Backup quarterback is frightening. But of all of Colorado's position battles, the center position is one that makes first-year coach Jon Embree smile.

He knows something. Neither redshirt freshman Daniel Munyer nor sophomore Gus Handler has played a college game. Both are former high school guards. Yet Embree doesn't seem worried.

"They're doing well," Embree said.

For Embree, who's as brutally honest as Judge Judy, that qualifies as high praise. The other four line positions appear set with sophomore left tackle David Bakhtiari, senior left guard Ethan Adkins, senior right guard Ryan Miller and sophomore right tackle Jack Harris.

Whoever wins the center job must help keep senior quarterback Tyler Hansen upright. Redshirt freshman Kaiwi Crabb is on the fringe and missed Tuesday afternoon's practice with a

foot injury, and senior Shawn Daniels is hurt. The starter Sept. 3 at Hawaii will surely be Munyer or Handler.

"You've got two young puppy dogs who are battling it out," offensive line coach Steve Marshall said. "Every day we have to put a lot on them, and they're rotating with the ones, twos and threes. They're getting a ton of reps. They're making progress."

Munyer was a good enough guard at Notre Dame High in Sherman Oaks, Calif., to earn scholarship offers from UCLA and Washington, and he even played guard in his redshirt year.

Handler, who except for the 6-foot-3, 290-pound frame looks like a Greenwich Village artist with his long hair and beard, played guard at Barrington (Ill.) High.

The biggest adjustment is the center must know the offense as well as the quarterback, but it's not the only one.

"There's no room in front of me," Mun-yer said. "When you're at guard, you're off about a half yard. When you're center, the D-tackle is right in front of you. You've got to have a quick first step."

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THE DENVER POST

Knowing two positions is de rigueur for the line. It's as deep as Beetle Bailey, and Embree is not taking any chances.

@johnhendersonDP

"We've got to use eight guys to fill the 10 spots, so to speak," Embree said. "We're moving guys around all over the place. That's why you sometimes see a guy come in scot-free on passes. There's a lot that has to go through their minds. But when they're in there in their right positions, they do a good job."

This is all going very fast for Munyer and Handler. Handler dressed for eight games as a redshirt freshman last year and didn't play a snap. Now he might start the opener.

"He's very intelligent, plays the game well," Marshall said. "I'd like him to be more powerful, but Gus has been consistent and has to continue to work on technique and run the offense."

As an all-state prep star, Munyer was a little more highly touted and last spring won the Dan Stavelly Award for the top redshirt freshman to be.

"He's a good, young athlete," Marshall said. "Gus started a little slower, but Gus has gained ground on him."

So 17 days before the opener, who's No. 1?

Said Marshall, "Flip a coin."

Footnotes.

Embree said 15 to 20 players have the flu. . . . Incumbent Zach Grossnickle has moved slightly ahead of freshman Darragh O'Neill at punter. "He's been a little more consistent," Embree said. "But that's not saying much." . . . Tailback Rodney Stewart (hamstring) and receiver Paul Richardson (groin) are nursing injuries.

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AUGUST 16, 2011, 11:46 AM

Flu bug hitting CU football team; plus an update on position battles

By JOHN HENDERSON |  1 Comment



Karl Gehring, The Denver Post

CU coach Jon Embree addresses his team after practice,

BOULDER — Random notes from Colorado's last two-a-days Tuesday:

- The flu bug has hit the team. Coach Jon Embree said 15-20 players have the bug but only tight end Kyle Slavin and defensive back Will Harlos didn't practice.

"We're getting killed by the flu," Embree said. "We have guys taking four bags of IV."

- Incumbent Zach Grossnickle has moved slightly ahead of freshman Darragh O'Neill in the punting race. Rice-transfer Mark Brundage seems like the odd man out.

"Grossnickle is just a little bit ahead just because he's been a little more consistent," Embree said. "But that's not saying much. We have to be way better."

- The last offensive line position, center, is still up for grabs. Competing are redshirt freshman Daniel Munyer and sophomore Gus Handler. Neither has played in a game and are both converted guards.

"We have a good idea who are five are but we're working guys in different positions so if we have an injury

they can move in,” Embree said. “So it’s not their first time doing it. It may cost us some reps in practice but it’s what we need to do, because we don’t have any true depth in saying, we’ve got these 10 guys.”

- Starting tailback Rodney Stewart is nursing a sore hamstring and starting receiver Paul Richardson has a sore groin. They were limited in practice Tuesday.

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<http://blogs.denverpost.com/colleges/2011/08/16/flu-bug-hitting-colorado/19710/>

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**ESPN.com:** Pac-12[\[Print without images\]](#)

Wednesday, August 17, 2011

Best case-worst case: Colorado

By Ted Miller
ESPN.com

Second in a series looking at potential dream and nightmare scenarios for all Pac-12 teams.

Understand: These are not predictions. They are extreme scenarios and pieces of fiction. You can read [last year's versions here](#).

We're going in reverse order of my [post-spring power rankings](#) (which might not be identical to my preseason power rankings).

Up next: Colorado



Best case

Hawaii quarterback [Bryant Moniz](#) shook his head.

"If Colorado is the worst team in the Pac-12 South, I'd hate to play in the Pac-12 South," said the touted Warriors QB after the Buffaloes sacked him five times and intercepted him twice in a 42-20 victory that ended a 17-game road losing streak.

Says new Buffs coach Jon Embree, "We don't have too much time to feel good about this. We have to go back home and watch film of last year's game with California. That should make us sick."

That 52-7 defeat to the Bears is a major reason many old school Pac-10 fans don't think too much of the Buffs. But after Colorado prevails 24-21 in a highly physical contest, it becomes clear the Buffs have been underestimated.

"Colorado has been underestimated," the Pac-12 Blog insightfully observes.

After whipping Colorado State, the 3-0 Buffs head to Ohio State brimming with confidence, though pundits believe the Buckeyes -- even down a few players -- have too much talent to lose, particularly inside the Horseshoe.

Down 21-17, with two minutes left, QB [Tyler Hansen](#) drives the Buffs to the Buckeyes 17-yard line. On third-and-10, he connects in the corner of the endzone with [Paul Richardson](#).

But the officials rule Richardson didn't have possession when his landed. The play is reviewed but not overturned. Ohio State survives.

"What did I think of that call?" Embree asks. The term "pregnant pause" is used in 17 of 23 game stories the following day.

After whipping Washington State to improve to 4-1, the schedule gets tougher. [Andrew Luck](#) picks apart the Buffs secondary in a 41-20 loss at Stanford. An overtime win at Washington is followed by consecutive defeats to Oregon and Arizona State.

The Buffs could use a bye, but the schedule says 13 consecutive weeks, none off. Most of the whining, nonetheless, comes from the beat writers, who start to wish hotel room keys still had numbers on them.

The Buffs bounce back and upset USC, which guarantees them bowl eligibility, but lose to Arizona when QB [Nick Foles](#) lines up with five receivers and throws for 425 yards and four TDs against a game but overmatched secondary.

Colorado outlasts UCLA in the Rose Bowl when linebacker Jon Major blows up Bruins receiver [Taylor Embree](#), who for a moment appeared to catch a game-winning TD pass.

"He's my son and I love him and I wish that it wasn't him on that play," Embree says, "But I really wanted to win this football game."

The 7-5 Buffaloes head to Utah, which is 7-4, with the apparent stakes being a berth in the Sun Bowl. The game is billed as a rivalry game between the Pac-12's two new members.

"Do you guys see this!" an enraged Embree says to his team during a meeting Monday before the game. He holds a bike above his head that it appears someone has vandalized with cheap, red spray paint.

"This is my 15-year-old daughter's bike. Look what they did to it! It used to be black and gold, our beloved colors. And now it is Utah red! Those, those, Utes... they made her cry!"

The meeting room erupts. "They made coach's daughter cry!" rages 6-foot-8 guard Ryan Miller. "We must crush them, see them driven before us, and hear the lamentation of their women!"

It will become known as the "Red Bike Incident." Utes fans will alternately revel in it or deny involvement. Years hence, college football historians will lean back and sagely say, "Yep, that was when those Buffs and Utes really started to hate each other. Might be the most vicious rivalry in all of college football."

Colorado prevails 28-27 in a game that features 195 yards in penalties. The Buffs then stomp Clemson in the Sun Bowl and finish 9-5.

Embree's recruiting class ranks 15th in the nation. The Big 12 falls apart. Nebraska finishes last in the Legends Division of the Big Ten.

The snow comes early and often and is most righteous.

Worst case

A team that can't win on the road and has a highly dubious secondary is not a good thing when you're facing a QB like Hawaii's prolific Bryant Moniz, who throws for four TDs against the Buffaloes.

And so Jon Embree's debut as Colorado's coach becomes an 18th consecutive road defeat, 44-35. Embree isn't happy.

"I'm not happy," Embree says.

The Buffaloes try to rally around the embarrassment of their 52-7 defeat at California last year, but they don't have anyone in the secondary who can cover receiver [Keenan Allen](#), who catches three TD passes in a 38-20 Bears victory.

The Buffs beat state rival Colorado State, but the schedule becomes unforgiving thereafter. It doesn't help that injuries start to pile up.

They get rolled at Ohio State, picked apart by Washington State QB [Jeff Tuel](#) and blistered by Stanford QB Andrew Luck. An upset win at Washington ends the road losing streak -- the Huskies are struggling to throw the ball with new QB [Keith Price](#) -- and briefly stops the bleeding. At least until Oregon hangs 55 on the Buffs in a game that foregrounds Colorado's lack of team speed.

That becomes the first of four consecutive defeats. Though they win a sloppy game at UCLA, they go down hard at Utah, which captures the South Division crown.

A 3-10 finish is blamed on former coach Dan Hawkins, as are poor early snow accumulation and flu symptoms lots of fans seem to be having. Further, fans no longer burst into song each time Jon Embree's name is mentioned.

"I'm not happy," Embree says. "We need to get faster. We need to get tougher."

Nebraska loses the national championship game to Oklahoma, one of two BCS bowl teams from the nation's best football conference, the Big 12.

"Well, at least we signed the top five prospects from the state of Colorado," Cornhuskers coach Bo Pelini says after the game.