

Move to 3-4 defense will benefit CU Buffs linebackers

Juniors Major, Rippy should excel in new scheme

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

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Colorado's move to a 3-4 base defense doesn't mean the Butkus Award is headed back to Boulder.

At least not yet.

Although the coaching staff has inherited some potentially great linebackers -- juniors Jon Major and Doug Rippy fit Brian Cabral's mold -- the depth in the program isn't anywhere near where Jon Embree wants it.

The Buffs are several recruiting classes away from creating the type of competition witnessed at CU practices back in the glory days.

"We're not where I'd like to be from that standpoint. When I'm comfortable with our depth is when we have great scout teams," CU's first-year head coach said when asked about the 2011 linebackers as a whole. "When you have a Chad Brown, who you know is going to be a great player, or a Greg Jones on

your scout team ... that allows you to have better quality practices, it allows you to do more things from a physical standpoint. I'm not knocking the guys now, I just feel when we get to that point, that's part of the deal of building a program."

If the Buffs stay healthy, defensive coordinator Greg Brown is confident the scheme will work well in the Pac-12 this season.

Josh Hartigan, coming off a seven-sack season at defensive end, will move to "Jack" linebacker. Senior David Goldberg and freshman Juda Parker should see plenty of action rotating in at the new position.

"(Hartigan) has such speed and quickness, he can really get that pressure on the quarterback, which is really what we need," Major said. "It's going to help our pass defense and help us in third-down situations and in turnovers."

Rippy appears to be poised for a breakout season. The 6-3, 230-pound junior is the starting "Mike" linebacker.

"We're looking for great things out of Doug Rippy," Brown said. "He's everything that you want -- he's big, he can run, he's tough, he's smart, and he's a leader."

Derrick Webb will start next to Rippy inside at the "Will" linebacker. The sophomore beat out senior Patrick Mahnke during fall camp.

Major plays the "Sam" position, which is the other outside linebacker spot opposite Hartigan. Embree said the junior, who was having an All-Big 12 2010 season until suffering an injury, has improved his pass coverage skills during the offseason.

The players in the front seven really seem to have responded to new defensive line coaches Mike Tuiaosopo and Kanavis McGhee.

"Tui and Kanavis are getting those guys off the ball and converting from run to pass rush moves and all that," Embree said. "I expect those guys to do a good job getting after the quarterback."

Tuiasosopo was on the Arizona staff last season with Brown. The Wildcats were third in the Pac-10 in total defense behind Cal and Stanford.

McGhee and Alfred Williams dominated the line of scrimmage together to lead CU to the 1990 national championship.

"(Brown) is awesome. He's such a mastermind and such a hard-working coach. (The 3-4) is really going to allow us to be successful and make some plays," Major said. "(McGhee) comes from the greatest team in CU history. Trying to bring back that team's atmosphere and attitude and translate it to the future era is definitely huge."

CU also has one of the best assistant coaches in the country, Cabral, focusing on the inside linebackers.

The only concern is how young reserves like Parker, Brady Daigh, Liloa Nobriga K.T. Tu'umalo and Lowell Williams will respond on Saturdays this fall. You get the feeling Embree would rather see them giving Tyler Hansen a good look in practice than having to experience a baptism by fire.

But with a difficult 13-game schedule and no byes, it could be all linebackers on deck in the 3-4.

"Anytime we talk about CU defense, it's a staff decision. That obviously includes the head coach. Jon has had a great deal of success as a defensive coach, too," Brown said. "As a staff we're excited that the 3-4 offered some versatility for us. We've got some guys that are smart, tough and bring different things to the table."

"One of the things we like about them is we have a group of guys that can think of on their feet. They can blitz and they can cover. That's just hugely important for us."

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CU Buffs not taking it easy in practice

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

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The Buffs will not play the Buffs on Saturday.

"Then that will mean we'll play 14 straight weeks," Colorado head coach Jon Embree said after Wednesday's practice. "Thirteen is enough."

CU, which closed fall camp with a scrimmage last Friday at Folsom Field, will go through a "scout scrimmage" one week before opening the season on Sept. 3 at Hawaii.

"It's really a mock game. We go through the substitutions, special teams situations, where we go for pregame warm-up," Embree said. "We'll just be in helmets."

The Buffs have not been tapering down the physicality of practices this week. Embree was pleased with the defense's tackling on Tuesday and said the offense played well for about 90 percent of Wednesday's session.

"Offense had a heck of a practice (Wednesday), then the last period we didn't finish like we should," Embree said. "But we'll get it. They don't have a choice, so we'll get it."

Different road map?

The Buffs have lost 17 consecutive road games dating back to a 31-26 victory over Texas Tech on Oct. 27, 2007, in Lubbock. Tyler Hansen was still a senior in high school that fall.

"This will be my first away game with them," Embree said when asked about the dubious streak. "So we'll just keep preparing. We're going to keep talking about it and making sure they understand what they have to do to go in there and win."

This is the first time since 1995 that CU will open a season with a true road game. The Buffs beat Wisconsin 43-7 in Madison to kick off the Rick Neuheisel era.

Notable

The Buffs have been practicing from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. this week. Next week the practices will be from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. The game at Hawaii will kick off at 8:15 Mountain time. ... A Kansas City Chiefs scout attended Wednesday's practice. Embree coached the tight ends in Kansas City from 2006-08 under Herm Edwards.

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colorado football

CU's running backs line up behind Rodney Stewart

By Natalie Meisler
The Denver Post

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BOULDER — One backup Colorado running back played for the mythical high school national champion in 2009. Another starred for the team that annually strikes fear in the Colorado Class 5A prep ranks.

"I don't think he ever heard of Mullen before he came here," Mullen grad Josh Ford said of CU teammate Tony Jones. "But I know who Don Bosco (Prep) High School was."

OK, Jones said he might have heard of Mullen once before he came to CU as New Jersey's Gatorade player of the year in 2009.

Bosco was picked by Sports Illustrated and USA Today as this season's preseason top high school football team.

The CU coaching staff isn't looking at the pedigrees of the redshirt freshman Jones or the sophomore walk-on Ford. The staff is looking for someone to take over the rotation behind starter Rodney "Speedy" Stewart.

"It's separation time," offensive coordinator/running backs coach Eric Bieniemy said. "We can't have flashes here and there. It's all about consistent behavior."

At 5-foot-9, 195 pounds, Ford is the giant among the Buffs' minibacks.

"Well, kind of," he said.

With five backs listed between 5-6, 175 pounds and Ford's size, how much diversity can there be in their styles?

They are very different, said Ford who played for the 2008 state champions.

"Tony is fast," Ford said of Jones. "If he gets outside, he's gone. He's very instinctive. He'll surprise you a lot. You'll see everything will be clogged and Tony's bursting out."

As for himself, "I like to get to it. I like to hit the hole and just go."

Of the running back corps ringleader, Ford said: "Speedy is quick. He makes people miss. He is fast, electric-like."

CU's running game became more physical the day Jon Embree and Bieniemy walked through the doors. No one can take every carry, and certainly not the 5-6, 175 Stewart.

"We all know people look at us as little, but we have big hearts," Ford



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Colorado running back Josh Ford, left, who played at perennial big-school power Mullen High School, pulls away during a scrimmage. (Cliff Grassmick, Daily Camera)

execution. The bottom line is you have to show up every day and give us a reason why you should play."

Natalie Meisler: 303-954-1295 or nmeisler@denverpost.com

said. "Speedy will prove a lot of people wrong this year. . . . Look at our running backs coach — he was a little guy (Bieniemy was listed at 5-8) but he made a big impact. It's about the heart and the fight in the dog."

There really isn't any battle for high school bragging rights. Ford concedes the New Jersey school, drawing students from three states, is bigger.

"We are both just humble and appreciative coming out of those schools," Ford said. "There are always great guys come out of those schools."

If Bieniemy had a rotation figured after Wednesday's practice, he knew it probably would change often before the Buffs' season kicks off in Hawaii on Sept. 3.

"As Coach Mac (Bill McCartney) used to say, talent will only give you a chance," Bieniemy said. "It's all about being consistent with your

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The Field House — Blogs — The Denver Post

AUGUST 24, 2011, 12:07 PM

CU's McCulloch shows recruiting is inexact science, Embree says

By TOM KENSLEK |  No Comments

Karl Gehring, The Denver Post

CU receiver Tyler McCulloch.

BOULDER — Colorado coach Jon Embree [had some interesting things to say about recruiting ratings](#) ^[1] when I asked him how a player like Buffs freshman wide receiver Tyler McCulloch could be virtually overlooked by major-college recruiters.

McCulloch, 6-feet-5 and 205 pounds, made a fast impression with Colorado coaches during August camp. He is listed as a co-starter with senior Toney Clemons at one of the wide receiver spots for CU's Sept. 3 opener at Hawaii.

And yet, Colorado was the only major-college program to offer a scholarship to McCulloch, who had an injury-shortened senior season at Eldorado High in Albuquerque last fall. McCulloch was set to either walk on at hometown New Mexico or New Mexico State when he received a call from Colorado — more than a week after national signing day in February.

“Recruiting will never be an exact science,” Embree said. “You can make the numbers (recruiting rankings) say whatever you want. You can spin it however you want. At the end of the day, I hope we have great classes when they graduate. Then we’ll know who had what class.

“If you sign all 5-star guys, that doesn’t mean you’ll win. You can find a million ‘sleepers’ that become first-round draft picks. When you recruit, you have to find guys that fit your system and have the mentality you want.

“I look at a program like Iowa. I don’t know what their recruiting ratings are but I’m not sure they’re in the top 30 every year, let alone in the top 10. And yet, they find a way to be in a BCS Bowl every four years. (Iowa coach) Kirk (Ferentz) does a great job of finding linemen. He recruits guys for his system. Same with Wisconsin. I say those two because they’re similar to us in having (low numbers) in-state.

“This is a very good year in Colorado (for recruiting), but normally, what, three or four guys? We have to go out of state. Just like Iowa, they have to go out of state. Wisconsin, they have to go out of state. You have to do a good job of identifying (recruits). You have to do a good job of coaching them up when they get here.

“A lot of times you can get 5-stars or whatever, and they’ve peaked out. They’ve maxed out.”

You should follow me on [Twitter @TomKensler](#) ^[2] And read more at the [CU Buffs blog](#) ^[3]

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<http://blogs.denverpost.com/colleges/2011/08/24/cus-mcculloch-shows-recruiting-is-inexact-science-embree-says/19947/>

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[1] had some interesting things to say about recruiting ratings: http://www.denverpost.com/cu/ci_18744013

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Colorado Springs Independent

COLUMNS » END ZONE

August 25, 2011

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CU: Pac-12's worst, or not?

End Zone

by [Ralph Routon](#)

Look around at the various projections of what to expect in the Pacific 12 Conference this football season, and one point immediately comes clear.

Colorado gets no respect. Almost every source out there picks the Buffaloes to make their Pac-12 debut as the unquestioned worst team in the South Division. *Sports Illustrated* goes further, pegging the Buffs to go 0-9 in league play, including a home loss to Washington State, the assumed North Division cellar-dweller.

Yet there has been no bracing for the worst in Boulder. New head coach **Jon Embree** and his staff, including some of Colorado's most recognizable names from its 1990 national title team (All-American runner **Eric Blenlemy**, defensive end **Kanavis McChie** and quarterback **Darlan Hagan**), by all accounts have pushed the Buffs much harder than previous head coach **Dan Hawkins** and his assistants ever did.

Embree has made no outrageous predictions. He's actually been realistic, such as last month in Los Angeles at the league's media day.

"Obviously we haven't been a good team," Embree said stoically, "or I wouldn't be here."

Hard to argue, especially after the worst memories from last year — like blowing a 45-17 fourth-quarter lead at Kansas and losing 52-45, which caused Hawkins' dismissal with three games remaining. Home victories followed against Iowa State and Kansas State, pulling the Buffs within one win of bowl-eligible. They finished 5-7 after one last clunker, 45-17 at Nebraska.

Still, does that translate into the dregs of the Pac-12 in 2011? Not necessarily.

This isn't to say CU will reach a bowl, which would require seven wins in a 13-game season (because of the opening trip to Hawaii; teams going to Honolulu get an extra game to make up the cost).

But Hawkins didn't leave the cupboard entirely bare. Senior quarterback **Tyler Hansen**, now the unquestioned starter, is capable of making a decent offense better. Receivers like **Paul Richardson** and **Toney Clemons**, along with promising freshmen, are legitimate threats, and returning tailback **Rodney Stewart** has experience against top defenses. Factor in an acceptable line, and the offense should not be overmatched.

Defensively, the Buffs should be described as suspect. They lack experience, especially in the secondary, and that will spell trouble against Oregon, Stanford, Southern Cal and Washington. Those games (especially Oregon and USC at home) should tell CU what it needs to become a Pac-12 contender.

But the other league games don't look so ominous. UCLA has struggled lately, and head coach **Rick Neuheisel** (remember?) faces a make-or-break year. That one is winnable, even in California. Arizona and Washington State must visit Folsom Field. Arizona State and Utah might be tough road games, but they aren't impossible.

Embree's formula is simple: He immediately wants to be strong at home, and consistently competitive away from the Flatirons. That second part might take a little longer, but as Embree has said on several occasions, "Good teams win on the road."

We just don't know how fast the Buffs can come around. They'll probably win, and lose, some games they shouldn't. But the nonconference schedule won't help, starting with Hawaii (a tough place to play), a home game against California, the rivalry battle against improved Colorado State and a trip to Ohio State.

So, if Colorado could survive that first month at 2-2, if Hansen can lead the way and if the defense can grow up fast, this team could finish in the 5-8 or 6-7 range. If those "ifs" go the wrong way, it could be 3-10.

But something tells me the emphasis on discipline, a senior leader at quarterback and other talented playmakers might add up to some surprises. And a lot more respect for CU, come November.

Prologue postmortem: The competition was excellent and the TV coverage superb Monday for the start of the USA Pro Cycling Challenge, but the crowds were short of many expectations. Organizers talked about as many as 75,000 spectators for the prologue, and estimates afterward reached that vicinity. But in my view, the number from start to finish couldn't have totaled more than 10,000 to 15,000.

The weekend of buildup events proved highly successful, but having the prologue on Monday afternoon clearly didn't bring out the masses, especially around the finish line downtown. Perhaps a Sunday start next time?

— routon@csindy.com

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