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cu football

CU's Ryan Deehan provides skill, experience at tight end

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

Posted: 08/27/2011 01:00:00 AM MDT

Updated: 08/27/2011 01:18:32 AM MDT

BOULDER — It can be argued that any listings of Colorado's most important or valuable players for this season absolutely must include senior tight end Ryan Deehan — and near the top.

Tight end lacks depth, and after Deehan there is an enormous gap in proven production. A 6-foot-5, 245-pound Californian, Deehan recorded 25 catches in 2010. Other returning tight ends combined for three.

"I know they're counting on me," Deehan said.

Regardless of past performance, tight end will always be a focus of the man in charge. Coach Jon Embree played that position for Bill McCartney at Colorado in the 1980s and was proficient enough to attain his dream of reaching the NFL.

This is Embree's first head coaching gig. Previously, he coached tight ends at CU and UCLA, and more recently at the next level with the Kansas City Chiefs and Washington Redskins. Talk about lofty expectations.

"When you've got a head coach that has played that position, has coached that position, it's

going to be carefully watched and hopefully utilized quite well," CU tight ends coach J.D. Brookhart said. "It's good that we have Ryan this year."

Even more important than Deehan's experience is his versatility. Coaches say that among the experienced tight ends, Deehan is the only one equally adept at receiving and blocking.

The second-team tight end, senior Matt Bahr, is a former 305-pound offensive lineman who said this week he has slimmed down to 250 pounds. Sophomore DaVaughn Thornton (6-4, 225) is a plus athlete from Denver East who specializes in yards after the catch.

Former Chatfield standout Kyle Slavin (6-4, 235) has shown promise during August drills, but he is an untested redshirt freshman.

"They all have their strengths, but Ryan is kind of the 'complete' guy," Brookhart said. "He can do both (catch and block). The other guys might be a little better at this or a little better at that. But Ryan is way more complete."

Colorado junior safety Ray Polk often goes head-to-head with Deehan in practice and said he looks for the senior to have a monster year.

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Deehan has 40 career receptions and, with a big season, could finish as one of the most productive tight ends in CU history. He needs 41 catches to pass Embree's career total of 80. The all-time CU receptions leader among tight ends is Daniel Graham (1998-2001) with 106.

"I'm not thinking about individual honors," Deehan said. "I just have the goal of helping us win. We haven't done enough as a team in my time here to worry about individual goals."

Footnotes.

Embree got an estimated 900 Colorado fans and boosters fired up Friday during the annual Boulder Chamber of Commerce kickoff luncheon at Balch Fieldhouse on campus. "These guys have done everything we've asked, and more; you're going to be proud of this team," Embree said. "We will fight you. We will compete. We will get after you." . . . Citing a litany of injuries on other Pac-12 teams, Embree said Thursday of this week was the final August practice in full pads.

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AUGUST 26, 2011, 2:23 PM

Embree fires up CU fans at annual kickoff luncheon

By **TOM KENSLE** |  1 Comment

BOULDER – First-year Colorado coach Jon Embree fired up those attending today’s annual Boulder Chamber of Commerce kickoff luncheon with such enthusiasm, it’s a wonder the estimated 900 fans and boosters didn’t grab a helmet and shoulder pads.

“These guys have done everything we’ve asked, and more; you’re going to be proud of this team,” Embree said. “We’re not going to be the most talented, and that’s OK. But we’ll be the best team.

“I told the guys that we have to do everything that doesn’t involve talent. That includes physical toughness and mental toughness. ... We will fight you. We will compete. We will get after you.”

Embree, a CU tight end in the 1980s, did not mention that Colorado went 19-39 in five years under Dan Hawkins, with no winning seasons. Embree didn’t have to.

“This is a team that’s embarrassed by what’s happened in the past,” Embree said. “You’ll never hear me talk about team goals in terms of numbers (of victories). I told the seniors, this is their last chance to secure a legacy. We have to get the bricks back.”

Under previous coaches Bill McCartney and Gary Barnett, CU added a commemorative brick to a wall display outside the team locker room for each victory considered especially significant.

The first “brick game,” Embree said, is the Sept. 3 season opener at Hawaii because the team has lost 18 straight games away from Folsom Field.

“Our No. 1 goal is to get the bricks back,” Embree said, drawing a round of cheers.

Embree also drew a loud applause in Balch Fieldhouse when he informed the crowd that 24 players had below a 2.0 grade average when he accepted the job in December but now only two players are below that mark.

CU players attended the luncheon, and some introduced their position coach. The funniest line came from redshirt-freshman quarterback Nick Hirschman, who said of QB coach Rip Scherer: “He was a grad assistant at Penn State in Joe Paterno’s fourth year!”

Other highlights included the CU band performing the school fight song and the showing of a video produced by the Pac-12 office that welcomes Colorado and Utah into the league.

“I’m fired up,” Embree said. “I wish we had practice right now!”

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The Field House — Blogs — The Denver Post

AUGUST 26, 2011, 11:33 AM

No diet book forthcoming, but CU's Matt Bahr has dropped 55 pounds

By **TOM KENSLE** |  No Comments

BOULDER — To some, Colorado senior tight end Matthew Bahr must be hardly recognizable.

Two seasons ago, the 6-foot-4 Bahr was a 305-pound offensive lineman. Now, as a tight end, he said he's down to 250 pounds.

"No, there will be no diet book," Bahr told me with a chuckle after a practice this week. "I just needed to drop the weight to play a new position.

"I got help from a nutritionist and the weight came off. It was just a matter of eating less. When you're an offensive lineman, you eat so much to get and stay big."

Bahr, from Southern California, started eight games at offensive right tackle as a redshirt freshman in 2008 and made three starts at right guard in 2009. One week into 2010 August drills he was asked by then-coach Dan Hawkins to convert to an H-Back/fullback/tight end role because the Buffs needed help in goal-line and short-yardage situations.

The blocking responsibilities obviously would be no problem for Bahr, "but I think I surprised the coaches last year by showing I could catch the ball," he recalled.

Bahr will be more of a conventional tight end in the pro-set offense under first-year coach Jon Embree.

Last year, Bahr caught two passes for a total of 7 yards. That included a 4-yard touchdown grab in the victory over Georgia.

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CU Buffs football prepping for business trip

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

Posted:08/26/2011 08:04:32 PM MDT



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If the Colorado Buffaloes want to see the sights in Hawaii, they'll have to honeymoon there someday.

Even though the Buffs are heading to Honolulu on Thursday to get acclimated after a long flight and four-hour time change, there's not much room on the agenda for Diamond Head or Waikiki Beach before CU plays its season opener against Hawaii.

"It's all business," Embree said after Friday evening's practice. "They can see it when they take off and land. They can see everything they need to see then. We're there for one reason."

While the Buffs will be moving practices to the evening next week to get players used to running around then, Embree said the time change actually isn't a major factor since the game starts at 8:15 p.m. Mountain Time. CU games have started that late before and likely will more frequently in the future as the Buffs head into the Pac-12 conference.

Embree said the team will be sleeping and eating on Hawaii time, though, meaning 8 a.m. wake-up calls on the islands -- or noon here.

"(The Buffs) are probably used to sleeping till noon, so we probably don't have to change much," Embree joked.

The Buffs have a game day dress rehearsal of sorts today when they scrimmage in helmets to get used to getting plays and substitutions run in on time. They're off Sunday and resume practice Monday before leaving for Denver International Airport at 6:30 a.m. Thursday.

Underexposed

When Jon Embree says Hawaii quarterbacks get a bad rap, he's not just trying to pump hot air into the head of Warriors' senior signal caller Bryant Moniz.

"He doesn't get the respect he's earned because of the TV times," Embree said. "Not enough people see him play."

Embree saw another Hawaii QB closely enough to know that the Playstation numbers they put up aren't just a product of the system and wide-open league they play in.

Colt Brennan, a former Buff who transferred and had a celebrated career at Hawaii, played with the Washington Redskins while Embree was an assistant there.

"He's unbelievably accurate," Embree said of Brennan. "Colt might not have had the quote, big NFL arm. But he was real accurate and he threw the ball on time."

Embree said the things he likes about Moniz are the same things he likes about CU quarterback Tyler Hansen, particularly in the leadership department.

"(Former CU coach Bill McCartney) always used to say, 'Be careful when you play a senior quarterback, no matter who it

is and where it is," Embree said.

Introducing ...

A few players took advantage of the chance to have fun at the expense of their coaches Friday at the Boulder Chamber's CU Kickoff Luncheon at Balch Fieldhouse.

After Embree said a few opening words, he brought up a player from each position group to introduce the respective assistant coaches.

Second string quarterback Nick Hirschman scored the biggest laughs as he brought QBs coach Rip Scherer on stage.

"He started his first grad assistant job at Penn State in Joe Paterno's fourth year," Hirschman quipped.

Linebacker Doug Rippy stirred the crowd in a different way. The junior got choked up trying to hold back tears as he introduced longtime LBs coach Brian Cabral. The crowd responded with a standing ovation for Cabral. ...

... Oh, and for the record, Scherer did begin his career at Penn State. But it was 1974, merely the legendary Paterno's ninth season.

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CU Buffs' Jon Embree fires up Buff fans

New CU coach speaks at Kickoff Luncheon

By Joshua Lindenstone Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:08/26/2011 03:34:44 PM MDT



Click on any photo to see full gallery

Colorado football coach Jon Embree lowered his voice and told fans in Balch Fieldhouse on Friday afternoon about a call he'd received the night before from a UCLA Bruin -- his son Taylor.

It was 11 p.m., and the senior wide receiver wanted to know if what he'd heard at a Bruins booster dinner earlier that night was true -- that CU was bringing live Buffalo mascot Ralphie to run at the Rose Bowl when the Buffs travel to play UCLA there this fall.

"He says, 'We're not going to let that happen,'" Jon Embree recounted. "And I could hear some of his friends in the background chirping. I told him, 'First off, Ralphie doesn't travel. But, if we want to run her in that stadium, we'll run her.'"

Nevermind whatever bulletin-board material the father-son razzing might or might not have created for Taylor Embree and his Bruins. The 900-plus in attendance at the 23rd annual Boulder Chamber CU Kickoff Luncheon hung on every word

and let out a combination of laughs and cheers at the punch line.

The moment was just one of several Friday that got the crowd fired up as Jon Embree and his players held court for nearly a half-hour. The lively atmosphere was one that many in the crowd whispered had been missing from such events in recent years as enthusiasm for the program waned under the former coaching staff.

Embree touched on everything from the academic progress the team has made to the players' physical toughness to his goals for the Buffs and their fans alike. He allowed players a light-hearted chance to introduce the assistant coaches. And captains Ryan Miller and Anthony Perkins got their chances to address the crowd as well.

Embree said the phone call with his son was one of multiple moments lately that has indicated to him that the Buffs have new league rivals' attention as they move into the Pac-12 Conference this season, even if prognosticators aren't giving CU much of a chance.

"People are talking about the Buffaloes, and we're excited about the opportunity in front of us," the coach said.

"I know we were picked 13th in this conference out of 12 teams by the media," he joked. "That's all right. So we're picked 13th. But here's the good thing. We get to go play."

After five straight losing seasons for CU, Embree -- a tight end for the Buffs in the 1980s who has coached in college and the pros -- said like he has all along that he doesn't have a number in mind in terms of wins and losses for this year's team.

His No. 1 goal for the group is to "get the bricks back."

He was referencing the wall in the Dal Ward Athletic Center where the scores of major program victories had been recorded in the past before being painted over in recent years.

Embree nearly rattled the old Balch windows as he talked about the Buffs' 18-game, out-of-state losing streak and the fact that no current players had played in a road win.

"That's where we are right now," Embree said. "Sept. 3 is the first opportunity. People talk about the schedule (being tough). You know what? I love the schedule. I love that we open up on the road so we get a chance to get that off the books and bring the bricks back."

Despite all of the new Pac-12 road destinations this season, Miller, a senior offensive lineman, echoed the coach's sentiments toward the non-league Hawaii game on Sept. 3, saying it was the road game he looked most forward to this season.

As for the biggest home game the team is excited for?

"As soon as we get done taking care of Hawaii, we're going to come back and finish some business with Cal," Perkins, a senior safety, said of the squad that beat the Buffs 52-7 last year in Berkeley.

Perkins told the crowd that the senior class wanted to change the culture in the once-proud program.

"We want to create a legacy that future teams coming in these next few years can build off of," Perkins said.

Embree didn't just have goals in mind for his players.

The coach also implored fans to support the squad in the stadium and around town all the same. Plenty familiar with CU's new conference from his days as a UCLA assistant, Embree said there is only "one stadium, maybe two" that has a home-field advantage.

"We need to be one of those schools," the coach said. "If you can't come and you've got tickets, get somebody else there in your seats and put them in the black and gold because we need you guys."

With all of his praise and optimism, Embree noted that there is still plenty of work to be done. And only time will tell if the Buffs can quiet naysayers.

Embree never once criticized former coach Dan Hawkins or his staff. But he did say the team was "embarrassed by what they've done in the past."

The coach said he questioned early in fall camp whether he and his staff were making things too hard on the players and putting the group at risk for the upcoming season. He said the players have reassured him with the way they've responded to the demand for toughness and physical play.

"That physical mentality, that mental toughness that I talked about in the first team meeting, it's here, we got it," Embree said. "These guys have done everything we've asked them to do and more."

"You're going to be proud of this Buffalo team."

[CU Buffs football prepping for business trip](#)

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Friday, August 26, 2011

Utes, Buffs prepare for on-field transition

By Ivan Maisel

The only place that life in the Pacific-12 Conference has not begun for Utah and Colorado is on the football field. Though the Utes and Buffs didn't formally join the league until last month, and they don't play their first conference opponents until Sept. 10, both programs are fully immersed in their new competition.

"I saw more of Utah and Colorado recruiting in California than I have since I've been at Oregon State," Beavers coach Mike Riley said.

Colorado, in particular, has a legacy of winning with recruits from California. Bill McCartney's 1990 national championship team included stars from Southern California such as the Buffs' current offensive coordinator, former All-America tailback Eric Bieniemy.

"Seven coaches on our staff have a piece of California," Colorado coach Jon Embree said. "We're treating it like it's in-state."

The recruiting competition may have begun but that game won't finish until February. The games on the field are looming. The Buffs and the Utes have all they can handle trying to get ready for all those new opponents.

"There's a lot of things on our plate right now," Utah coach Kyle Whittingham said. "Unknowns, lack of familiarity, not only with the teams we're going to play but the venues we're going to play in. If you've been playing in a conference for several years, by the time your players are juniors and seniors, they've been to places a couple of times. You know the hotel you're going to be staying at. Everything becomes semi-routine. It's not that big a deal. It's just a change, a departure from what we've been doing the last few years."

Coaches are nothing if not creatures of habit, which is why new venues can loom as an issue on the same checklists as new offenses to defend. Whittingham said, as all coaches who join new leagues say, that their new league brethren have to learn about Utah, too. They have one new opponent. The Utes have nine.

Embree, hired shortly after last season to replace Dan Hawkins, believes he isn't going into the league blindly. For one thing, Embree has seen his son Taylor, a UCLA senior flanker, play for three seasons.

"I've had an opportunity to watch some of the teams, not necessarily from a coaching standpoint but I do have a degree of familiarity," Embree said. "What I've done this year, I've tried to pick a few teams and really study them and get a feel for the league and the different styles. There's a lot of diversity on both sides of the football. So what I did this offseason is I went out and I watched a few of the teams and watched every game in sequence, to get a feel for how teams improved as the season went on, and other teams faded."

Not only do the Buffs play, yes, 13 straight -- they open at Hawaii -- but they will play 10 Pac-12 opponents. The Sept. 10 game against California, the back end of a home-and-home that began last season, will be a nonconference game as far as the league is concerned.

"Only if we win does it count in the league standings," Embree said, laughing.

Embree said that his lack of track record may blunt his team's disadvantage.



Kyle Whittingham said the "unknowns" and "lack of familiarity" with Pac-12 teams and facilities will be an obstacle for his team.

“It’s not like we’re coming with a certain style or brand that they already know about,” said Embree, who has been an NFL assistant for the last several years. “With our schedule, going 13 straight, we need all the advantages we can get. At least we don’t play the Packers.”

On the other hand, as a new coach, Embree believes he will learn more in Honolulu on Sept. 3 than he has since Colorado hired him.

“Until we get into a game situation,” Embree said. “I really won’t completely know everything about our team. I watched five games last year just to get a feel for what their personality was. I saw a team that was very emotional. We were like teenagers, all over the map. We blew a game, up by 35 (Kansas). Cal beat us a million to nothing (52-7). In that game, I saw a team that didn’t finish, didn’t compete.”

Utah landed in the sweet spot of South-North schedule rotation. The Utes play neither Oregon nor Stanford. Consider it a welcoming gift from the Pac-12 office.

“If you base it off last year it certainly was,” Whittingham said. “Every year is its own entity, a different set of circumstances. Players graduate. A lot of change takes place. You can’t base everything off last year. But if you’re looking just at what did transpire last year, that’s the way you’d want to structure your schedule.”

Utah should have an easier time of it. The Utes went 10-3 last year and return seven starters on offense, including junior quarterback [Jordan Wynn](#). The Buffs went 5-7, swapped out their coaches and may start as many as four true freshmen. Let the transitions begin.



Jon Embree has some familiarity with Pac-12 teams after watching his son play for UCLA the past three seasons.

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NCAA Football Preview - Colorado Buffaloes

Sports Network

10:33 AM PDT, August 26, 2011

Philadelphia, PA

2010 SEASON IN REVIEW: There has not been much winning in Boulder over the past few seasons. In fact, the last time Colorado finished a year over .500 was back in 2005 (7-6). The hope was that the Buffaloes would be able to break that string of losing in 2010, but that was simply not the case.

Colorado's year started off with an impressive 24-3 win over rival Colorado State. After an embarrassing 45-point loss to California, the Buffs returned home to face Hawaii and Georgia. Colorado had no trouble with the Warriors, but what was shocking was the team's thrilling victory over the Bulldogs.

At 3-1 the Buffaloes were riding high, but the ride ended abruptly as they hit a wall, beginning with a 26-0 loss at Missouri. That was followed by back-to-back setbacks to Baylor and Texas Tech. This was likely the turning point in the season for Colorado, as the squad lost both of those games by a combined nine points, and both came at Folsom Field.

Unfortunately for CU fans the losing did not stop there. The Buffs went on the road to play Oklahoma and Kansas, and while the team was clearly no match for the Sooners (43-10), the loss to the Jayhawks was an epic collapse. The Buffs lost by seven points to Kansas after allowing the second-most fourth-quarter points in NCAA history (35).

Surprisingly, the team was able to get over the horrific loss with back-to-back wins over Iowa State and Kansas State. The season ended however with a 45-17 setback to Nebraska.

2011 ANALYSIS:

OFFENSE: The Buffaloes were not overwhelming last season in terms of offense, but the team has a large number of starters back for another go, giving new head coach Jon Embree the perfect canvas to paint a beautiful offensive picture.

What has hurt the Buffaloes in the past has been inconsistency in run game, and even though the team averaged just 3.7 yards per carry in 2010, Rodney Stewart became the team's first 1,000-yard rusher since 2004.

Now Stewart is back for Embree's club, giving the Buffs a solid option out of the backfield, and with four starters also back on the offensive line, this could be a successful year for the rushing attack.

Coach Embree is a strong believer in pushing the ground attack, and in his mind to do so, you need to be a physical team.

"I don't think we've run the football like we've should," said coach Embree. "You know when Colorado has been successful in its past, we've been a good running team and that's what we need to do. But, i think to be an effective team running ball you have to have a physical mind set."

A consistent rushing attack will take pressure off Tyler Hansen, who should be the team's starter under center for his senior campaign.

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Hansen was nothing special last season, and now he will have to find another top target, because Colorado's leading receiver from last season, Scotty McKnight, is no longer around.

Even though Hansen was less-than-stellar in 2010, the new coach believes he is as good as any signal-caller in the Pac-12.

"I think Tyler fits and belongs with the groups of guys you have here and the quarterbacks you have in this conference," said Embree. "For Tyler to be effective, I look at touchdown-to-interception ratio."

Taking over as the go-to guy will likely be Paul Richardson. The sophomore averaged 15.1 yards per catch a year ago and also finished with six touchdowns, and definitely is in line for a better second season.

DEFENSE: Where Embree really needs to focus his energy is in the defensive backfield. The Buffs were torched for an average of 260.0 ypg through the air last year, and now they're going up against teams from the Pac-12 who are notorious for their outstanding aerial assaults.

Colorado returns both safeties, but will have inexperienced players at the cornerback positions. As of now, it appears that sophomores Jered Bell and Deji Olatoye will have first crack at the starting jobs.

If the defensive backfield is going to stand a chance, the front line is going to have to apply tremendous pressure on the quarterbacks. Unlike the secondary, the defensive line for Colorado does have some experience returning, beginning with defensive end Josh Hartigan (seven sacks).

Also needing to play a bigger role will be the linebackers, notably Jon Major and Liloa Nobriga. Those two players will also need to attack the quarterback, but just as important, they'll need to drop back in coverage to help the inexperienced players behind them.

SPECIAL TEAMS: Last year, Justin Castor played in three games as a true freshman and missed his only field goal attempt. Now a sophomore, Castor will have plenty of chances to drill field goals for the Buffs. Castor has a strong leg, nailing five field goals from beyond 40 yards in high school, but like most kickers with a big leg, he is a bit erratic.

Arthur Jaffee and Toney Clemons shared kick return duties last season and both excelled in that area.

OUTLOOK: Colorado hasn't had a winning season in five years, and that streak is likely to continue as it embarks on its inaugural trek through the new-look Pac-12. The season will likely hinge on the month of October, as after a home game against Washington State, the Buffaloes take on Stanford, Washington, Oregon and Arizona State, and the only home matchup during that span will come against the Ducks.

If the ground game can be successful it will make the offense better, but the defense will have trouble defending the pass, and that will likely be the downfall for the Buffs this season.

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