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colorado buffaloes practice begins

## Colorado Buffaloes' Embree making it physical

By Tom Kensler  
*The Denver Post*

Posted: 07/31/2011 01:00:00 AM MDT

Colorado football players call it "Mac's drill" when the whistle blows during practice and first-year Buffaloes coach Jon Embree orders the dreaded 9-on-7 drill. It was a favorite of legendary Buffs coach Bill McCartney.

"Max" drill would be equally appropriate.

"It's the toughest drill out there," CU senior quarterback Tyler Hansen said. "It's about beating guys into the ground."

After reviewing game tapes from Colorado's 2010 season, Embree decided the entire team needed to get more physical — much more physical. A Colorado tight end under McCartney in the 1980s, Embree brought back the 9-on-7 drill for spring drills and has already informed Hansen and other team leaders to expect more of the same during

August drills, which begin in earnest Thursday.

In the 9-on-7, nine defensive players line up against seven offensive players. There's nothing fancy. It's classic smashmouth football — with both sides bringing it.

"You know we're running the ball, they know we're running the ball," Hansen said. "You've got two safeties in the box, and they're coming to fill those holes. And it's full go, full speed, full

contact.

"So what are you going to do when you're in there? Are you going to let him overpower you? You have to man up and get after him."

Former Buffs coach Dan Hawkins, 19-39 in five seasons, was concerned about the potential of injuries in practice and didn't use the 9-on-7. Under Embree, it was employed during spring ball for at least a 15-minute period every day the team was in pads.

No coach wants to see a player get hurt. But the 9-on-7, Embree believes, is a way to toughen up the team and see who he has that can withstand a pounding.

"You have to make them hit in practice," Embree said. "Being physical — it's how you train. It's a mind-set, how you see yourself. If you have a strong enough belief in yourself, then that's what you will be. That's what I have to get this team to believe. Do you believe you're tough? Do you believe you're a guy that's physical?"

Peer pressure comes into play. The 9-on-7, Embree said, "exposes" players. Nobody can slack off or pretend to be tough.

"You have to practice in such a manner that you

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can't hide," Embree said. "Players have to let their teammates see if they're doing what they're supposed to be doing. That will either make you tough or get you out of there. You'll see who really wants to hit, who really wants to play. If you don't hit and tackle every day, guys can hide."

Embree said he chose to watch film of only four 2010 Buffs games: Hawaii, California, Kansas and Nebraska. All but the 31-13 victory over Hawaii was a horror show. The Buffs weren't competitive against Cal (52-7) or Nebraska (45-17) and blew a 28-point, fourth-quarter lead at Kansas (52-45). Hawkins was fired two days later.

Embree wanted to see which players "quit" against California and who got "tight" when things went south against the Jayhawks. Nebraska, he said, was the rivalry game by which CU players were judged. Hawaii is the 2011 opener.

"We're not going to have guys quit in games this year," Hansen said, "because coach Embo is going to be in your ear about it."

Physical drills such as the 9-on-7 will always be a litmus test for what a player is made of, Embree said.

"The 9-on-7 was pretty bad the first day," the coach recalled of the spring practice. "I told the assistants, 'The players don't know yet (what we expect), so let's not overreact.'"

"At the beginning, it was disappointing. There wasn't a lot of intensity and get-after-it. But the last four or five days, it felt like football. So I'm anxious to get going again and see if we can pick up where we left off."

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## Three things to watch

### 1. Starting cornerbacks, anyone?

Jimmy Smith and Jalil Brown have taken their talents to the NFL. Nobody behind them stepped up during spring drills to be penciled in as an heir apparent. There are plenty of candidates, but is anybody good enough to hold up against the pass-happy Pac-12?

### 2. Will senior wideout Toney Clemons approach his potential?

Based on all the hoopla surrounding his transfer from Michigan, Clemons had to be considered a disappointment in his Buffs' debut season with just three TDs and 11.2 yards per catch on 43 receptions last fall.

### 3. Can sophomore David Bakhtiari fill the shoes of All-American left tackle Nate Solder?

A 6-foot-4, 295-pounder, Bakhtiari showed great promise last year as the starter at right tackle. Now he's sliding to the other side of the line and must protect Tyler Hansen's blind side.

Five who could make a move

### 1. CB Greg Henderson

The two freshman corners will get a look, and

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word this spring is Henderson was ahead of Kyle Washington.

## 2. PK Will Oliver

Colorado hasn't had a dependable field-goal kicker since 2007 when Kevin Eberhart ably succeeded All-American Mason Crosby. They are hoping the freshman Oliver is that kicker.

## 3. Redshirt-freshman C Daniel Munyer and senior C Shawn Daniels

On the pre-camp depth chart, the center position is listed as a toss-up for the starting job.

## 4. DE Juda Parker

Defensive end is one of the thinnest areas on the depth chart. Parker, a freshman from Hawaii, showed well against blue-chip blockers in the prestigious Army All-American game.

## 5. WR Nelson Spruce

CU needs a fearless slot receiver to replace Scotty McKnight. A 6-2, 200-pounder, the freshman comes from an outstanding high school program in Westlake, Calif.

*Tom Kensler, The Denver Post*

## Colorado State

### Three things to watch

#### 1. Can Pete Thomas take control?

The quarterback had an up-and-down freshman season but gained valuable experience. Look for Thomas to be a more confident, comfortable leader as a sophomore.

#### 2. Will a total makeover work?

Whether it's scheme changes or just players

stepping up and playing better, CSU has myriad issues to fix. The Rams ranked 102nd or lower in the NCAA in rushing offense, scoring offense, rushing defense, pass efficiency defense, scoring defense, turnover margin and sacks allowed. Whew.

### 3. Time to think positive.

Losing wears on a team and its coaching staff and eventually takes a toll on the psyche of the team. This year, the Rams need to get positive energy back into the program after a disastrous season a year ago. By all accounts, the attitude was much improved during spring ball.

### Five who could make a move

#### 1. Wide receiver Lou Greenwood

Last year was a transition season for the running back-turned- wide receiver. This fall, he should be ready to take the next step.

#### 2. Linebacker Mike Orakpo

Nearly a third of his tackles last season came in the final two games (11 of 37 total). He will be counted on as a team leader on defense.

#### 3. Defensive tackle Nuku Latu

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As a junior, he backed up both interior defensive line positions. He's looking for a productive final season.

## 4. RB Raymond Carter

As a junior, Carter battled injuries and was held to 235 yards (a 3.6 average per carry) in eight games. Now healthy and atop the depth chart, the former UCLA transfer could give a much-needed lift in the run game.

## 5. Cornerback Momo Thomas

Was off to a good start when shoulder surgery ended his 2010 season. Awarded a medical redshirt, Thomas is back to give the secondary and punt return game a needed boost.

*Chris Dempsey, The Denver Post*

## KEY DATES

Tuesday — Freshmen report to campus.

Wednesday — Veterans report to workouts.

Thursday — Rams hold their first practice.

Aug. 8 — CSU has first practice in full pads.

Aug. 9 — First two-a-day practice sessions.

Aug. 13 — First formal scrimmage.

Sept. 3 — First game, at New Mexico.

## Northern Colorado

### Three things to watch

#### 1. Who is the starting QB?

Although fifth-year senior Dylan Orms is a returning starter and passed for 2,055 yards last season, new coach Earnest Collins said the position is wide open. Colorado transfer Seth

Lobato and veteran backup Matt Baca are in the mix. Collins won't discount Mullen walk-on Tim Tancik.

#### 2. How will the Bears adapt to a new offensive scheme?

Collins describes the new offense as a spread, but he is determined to have a power running game too. There might be some two-back experimentation.

#### 3. How fast can the linebacker corps rebuild?

All three starting linebackers graduated, including the team's two leading tacklers, John Eddy and Matt King.

### Five who could make a move

#### 1. Wide receiver Patrick Walker

Senior moves to the go-to spot among the wideouts.

#### 2. Wide receiver Chris Morris Jr.

Collins making Morris a top priority to help his new attack.

#### 3. Tight end Doug Steele

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The junior was the team's fourth-leading receiver last year, and in the spread will be a key safety valve for whomever starts at QB.

#### 4. Cornerback Korey Askew

Top returning tackler from a year ago will be asked to take on a leadership role in the secondary.

#### 5. Running back John Burnley

The junior was the team's leading kick returner two years ago and is back after missing all of last season. *Natalie Meisler*

#### KEY DATES

Wednesday — Players report to workouts

Thursday — First practice of the fall

Aug. 13 — First major scrimmage

Aug. 22 — First day of classes

Sept. 3 — Opener vs. NAIA Lindenwood University



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