

Ex-CU Buff Rodney Stewart tears ACL in Bengals' camp

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Rodney Stewart realized his dream of playing football for an NFL franchise for all of 15 minutes earlier this month before his nightmare began to unfold.

Fifteen minutes into his first practice of rookie mini camp with the Cincinnati Bengals, Stewart fell to the ground during a non-contact blocking drill. He felt his knee buckle in an all too familiar way and it wasn't long before team trainers told him what he already knew. He suffered a torn anterior cruciate ligament in the same knee where he had previously endured the injury in high school.

"It's just another obstacle I've got to get through," Stewart said Tuesday in a phone interview from his home in Columbus, Ohio.

The Bengals signed Stewart as an undrafted free agent shortly after the NFL draft last month and were excited that he might be able to fill the role of third-down back and special teams return man for them in 2012.

Stewart will undergo surgery on June 6 and will be on injured reserve with the Bengals through the season.

He will do all his rehabilitation in Cincinnati at the team training complex.

Ohio State team physician Chris Kaeding will perform the surgery. He also repaired Stewart's knee in high school.

Stewart said he trusts Kaeding, whose work the last time around endured four years at Colorado where Stewart was a workhorse in the CU offense, becoming the program's second leading rusher in career yardage.

"A lot of people see me and wonder why I'm always smiling," Stewart said. "I'll tell you why. I'm always smiling because I've done dealt with tougher situations. I'm very fearless.

"I don't let things get me down. I can turn from being in a sad situation to being very happy very quickly. I don't hold grudges or nothing."

Former CU quarterback Tyler Hansen, who was also signed as a free agent by the Bengals following the draft, was on a different part of the field at the time and didn't see Stewart go down. He saw him later that day in the locker room with a big knee brace and crutches.

"I felt horrible," Hansen said. "I know how hard he worked and for that to happen in his first practice was just the worst thing that could happen. But he came back from it in high school. So he's going to try again."

Colorado middle linebacker Doug Rippy is nearly fully recovered from his torn ACL suffered in October. Rippy said he has talked with Stewart, his cousin, and offered advice and encouragement about the surgery and rehabilitation.

"He's not even worried about it to be honest because he knows he's going to bounce back from it," Rippy said. "He's going to be able to produce for Cincinnati. I'm just happy that he's in good spirits."

Stewart said he plans to pass the time in the coming months by working hard to recover from the injury, focusing on learning the Bengals offensive system and also by writing a book about his life. He hopes to publish his book by the end of the year. Stewart said he believes he was too quiet during his time in Boulder and didn't open himself up to people as much as he should have.

"I'm going to come back and be the same person I was in the past," Stewart said. "I've got a lot of obstacles that I've got through."

"I've faced a lot of adversity in my career and I've also seen a lot in my career, coming from an environment where it's mostly black people to an environment where it's mostly white people. So there is more than just football barriers that I had to break during my career as a college athlete and a college student."

Stewart said the injury will give him an opportunity to focus on improving himself in other ways and maturing as a person.

"I think God sat me down to think," he said.