

Football: CU Buffs' Addison Gillam may follow in impressive footsteps

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Only one player in the history of the Colorado football program managed to earn a starting role at inside linebacker in the first game of his true freshman season. That player was an unheralded recruit who wore No. 44.

History could repeat itself in 2013 right down to the jersey number.

Addison Gillam looks nothing like Jordon Dizon on the football field, but the true freshman from Foothill High School in Palo Cedro, Calif., has surged to the top of the depth chart at middle linebacker with uncommon maturity and a nose for the ball just like Dizon in his true freshman year back in 2004.

Any comparison between Dizon and Gillam beyond those basic facts is wildly premature. Dizon became the first true freshman in CU history to be named Defensive Freshman of the Year at the conference level when he established a CU freshman record with 82 tackles that year.

Gillam is obviously more than four months from knowing if he will even be the starter when the season opens Sept. 1 in Denver against Colorado State, but he certainly will be in the mix when fall camp opens.

Gillam joined the program in January with some concern over how he might fit in and how his talent would stack up once he got on the field.

"I think it was definitely the speed aspect, just how fast things were and getting reads and everything cause I was never really good at that, but it's starting to come to me now so that's good," Gillam said when asked what his biggest concern was prior to spring ball.

Gillam said only three schools recruited him during his high school career in Northern California. He said there were 1,200 students at his high school, which is similar in size to other schools in the area, but not many players from the area end up being recruited by major colleges. Gillam said former Oregon wide receiver Jeff Maehl, who attended nearby Paradise High School, has been the standard bearer for the area in recent years.

UC Davis, Sacramento State and San Jose State were the three programs interested and Gillam developed a strong relationship with CU coach Mike MacIntyre and defensive coordinator Kent Baer while they were still coaching at San Jose State.

Gillam signed with San Jose State as part of the 2012 recruiting class but discovered he needed arthroscopic shoulder surgery a year ago. He underwent that procedure and decided to grayshirt last fall, delaying his enrollment at San Jose State until this semester.

When MacIntyre was hired at CU in December, he noticed the program was in need of linebackers and decided to offer Gillam the opportunity to play in the Pac-12.

"I think it happened for a reason and it worked out for the better," Gillam said. "I love it here. I love all the coaches."

Gillam, who is 6-foot-3, 220 pounds, said he will be focusing on gaining weight and strength in the weight room this summer before practices resume in the fall. He also wants to improve his speed. Baer raved last week about what Gillam has accomplished so far.

"Addison Gillam is just going to be a tremendous talent some day," Baer said. "I don't want to put any pressure on him."

Being forced to watch an entire football season from his couch was difficult for Gillam, but it fueled his desire to get back on the field and make an impression. He finished his senior season in 2011 with 139 total tackles and three interceptions. He also played tight end and returned punts and kickoffs during his career.

Gillam said junior Brady Daigh, one of the many he will be competing with for playing time in August, was instrumental in helping him learn the defense this spring and understand how to play at the college level. He said he was beginning to feel more and more comfortable with Baer's 4-3 defense when spring ball ended this week.

"At first it was pretty confusing," Gillam said. "It was all new stuff. So it was hard, but over spring ball I started to learn a lot more about it and it's coming down."

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