



COLORADO BUFFALOES

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Receivers coach Troy Walters was aware of Jeffrey Thomas' ability before coming to CU.

Photo Courtesy: CUBuffs.com



Brooks: Jeffrey Thomas, Troy Walters Reunited At CU

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BOULDER – Troy Walters' recollections of Jeffrey Thomas were a couple of years old, but ever so slowly Thursday afternoon on the Colorado practice field the memories came trickling back. Walters remembered them, liked them. A lot.

In 2011 when he was an assistant coach on Mike Sherman's Texas A&M staff, Walters was dispatched to Duncanville, Texas to form an opinion on Thomas – a lanky, wiry receiver with a hard-to-ignore upside.

A consensus All-American and Biletnikoff Award winner at Stanford in 1999, Walters knows a little bit of what to look for in a wideout. And what he saw in Thomas impressed him: "I noticed he was fundamentally and technically sound in high school. He was well-coached . . . I knew wherever he went he would be ready to play immediately."

A&M had the 6-3, 180-pound Thomas on its ready list, that is, Walters was ready to offer him a scholarship if the recruitment of another pair of receiving prospects fizzled. But former CU receivers coach Bobby Kennedy had made the first move toward Thomas, and even if an A&M scholarship had become available it was doubtful that Thomas would have reached for it. But there was an unknown silver lining: Thomas formed a relationship with a guy – Walters – who would become his position coach.

After signing with CU two winters ago, Thomas last August appeared ready to make good on Walters' projection of being ready to play immediately anywhere he went. Only a couple of days into CU camp former defensive coordinator/secondary coach Greg Brown made this observation: "I don't have anybody who can cover him."

Told of Brown's comment about a month before spring drills opened, new CU coach Mike MacIntyre grinned and pondered it as good and bad news. The good was obvious: Thomas can make an impact. The bad became just as obvious as the 2012 season unfolded: The Buffs had problems covering anybody.

On a sunny, mild early April afternoon, MacIntyre was treated to several glimpses of what CU's defensive coaches saw last August. After being sidelined with a hamstring injury, Thomas made his first appearance of the spring on Thursday. It was difficult for MacIntyre, Walters and anyone else paying attention not to do a double take or two.

Said MacIntyre: "He made a lot of plays . . . he's tall and athletic. We'll look at the film, but I would have to say I was definitely pleased with what I saw."

For Thomas, the pleasure came in simply being on campus, in uniform, running routes and doing what he had hoped to do last season. But his freshman year never materialized. He returned home for personal reasons, vowed to enroll in January and kept his word – even after the postseason coaching change that brought MacIntyre to Boulder.

The 6-3 Thomas came back bigger (he's up to 197 pounds), more mature and more committed than he was last summer. His fall without football "helped me mature a lot," he said. "In a lot of ways it helped me to value being up here and not taking anything for granted. It just made me focus more on school, football – those are my two main priorities instead of all the extra stuff I was doing."

He admitted to being not up to speed in the offense or in running his routes on his first day back: "I wasn't normal, I wasn't on top of things. I was definitely rusty – not getting out of my breaks, my releases. I'm just getting my feel back under me and all that will come. But I didn't have a problem with my hamstring so that's a positive."

Walters saw more positives than Thomas' sound hamstring. "He's still learning the offense so he was a little slow in his routes," Walters said. "But once he learns the offense and gets comfortable he's going to be a guy we can definitely count on. He made some plays, and a lot of those were him just going off athletic ability. I had to kind of stand behind him and let him know what route to run . . . it was his first day and things were going fast."

Although an inch or so shorter and maybe 10 pounds lighter, Thomas bears a resemblance to former CU receiver Michael Westbrook. Even that comparison wouldn't have been possible when Thomas was at Duncanville High School, where he averaged 15.2 yards on 59 catches (12 touchdowns) as a senior.

Walters said one of A&M's concerns in offering a scholarship was that Thomas "was so wiry and thin . . . but now he's put on weight and filled out. He looks like a legitimate Pac-12 receiver."

Could the Buffs have used him last season in the Pac-12? Don't even ask. Thomas isn't going to stew over what never transpired, but he said, "I feel like I could (have helped) in ways doing whatever. Coaches told me I could have helped, but I guess it just wasn't meant for me to be there."

Now that Thomas is here, Walters wants him to relax, learn the offense and his assignments, and maybe ease up just a little in his self-critiquing. "He's almost too hard on himself," Walters said. "I noticed (Thursday) that he caught a difficult pass . . . I guess he wanted to catch it and continue to run with it. (But) he caught it and got tackled; it was a great catch, but he got up and was like, 'Man, I'm down.' I said, 'Why are you down?' and he said, 'I need to do more, I need to do more.'"

"He has a purpose, he's driven. He loves football. When you have those combinations, he's going to be easy to coach because he wants to be great."

Once again, a second opportunity is before him and he seems intent on seizing it. "This is the place I was meant to be," Thomas said. "After all I've been through and I'm still here, it has to be."

BUFF BITS: MacIntyre called Thursday afternoon “our best practice of the whole spring, as far as the flow. We finished it three minutes ahead of time, so that was good.” . . . The spring’s third scrimmage is scheduled for Friday afternoon at 4 p.m. in Folsom Field. MacIntyre said some individual drills and special teams work would precede the scrimmage. “We’ll put the ball down in different places and play,” he said, adding the afternoon will feature red zone, goal line, short yardage, third down and two-minute work . . . “Sudden change” situations also will be addressed, as will potential game-winning final plays “so there’s no panic in it,” MacIntyre said . . . For the spring game (Saturday, April 13, 10:30 a.m.), the Buffs seniors are scheduled to “choose sides and play a game,” MacIntyre said. But that plan might be disrupted by a low body count (10) on the offensive line. “If one gets hurt we might have to change that format,” MacIntyre said. “But that’s the best way to see competition and people playing hard. It’s a lot of fun for them to stay involved.”

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SHOW MENU



CU Buffs wide receiver Jeff Thomas closer to catching attention

By John Henderson *The Denver Post* *The Denver Post*

Posted:

DenverPost.com

BOULDER — The best Colorado wide receiver you've never seen could help be the difference between the sputtering Ford Pinto offense of 2012 and a souped-up 2013 model that will at least make people stop and look.

You've probably heard of Jeff Thomas. He was the 6-foot-3 freshman from Dallas set to replace injured star Paul Richardson as Colorado's big-time receiver last year. However, family problems made Thomas return home a week before the fall semester began — and the Buffaloes went on to produce the fifth-fewest yards in the country.

Thomas and Richardson are back. Unfortunately, Thomas isn't all the way back. A sore hamstring has limited him this spring, but Friday afternoon at Folsom Field he will make his scrimmage debut.

He remains Colorado's ghostly hope. He's a big name with a bright future and zip production. Coming off a 1-11 season, Colorado will take a ghost — if he's 6-3 with good hands.

"Once he gets healthy and back on the field with us," Richardson said, "he's definitely going to be a threat."

Richardson, who has averaged 33.7 yards on his 11 touchdown receptions, should know. They worked out together all winter after Richardson gave him grim texted updates of the Buffaloes' rough season last year. He's also one of the few Buffs — including the first-year coaching staff — who has seen Thomas healthy.

"For his size, he runs really good routes," Richardson said. "He's 6-3 and runs routes like a 5-9 receiver. He has really good speed. He listens. That's the big thing. Young guys don't like to listen. With me doing what I've done before, he respects me and listens to me."

Thomas didn't arrive with big stats. His Duncanville High team didn't pass much, and his 59 catches for 899 yards and 12 touchdowns attracted the likes of Iowa State, Memphis and North Texas. Texas A&M and Oklahoma State came in on him after he committed to Colorado.

He was known as an all-around, solid receiver with good hands who could be a deep threat. But with a 4.62 40, he was no burner. However, Thomas has an update.

"I'm becoming a burner," he said.

After clearing up his family problems, he worked with a local trainer the rest of the fall. He pulled sleds, ran down the field in weighted vests, ran cone drills and did more routes than Mayflower.

By New Year's Day, he had 4.49 speed in the 40.

"I felt like my release off the line is much quicker," he said. "My attention to getting in and out of breaks is better. I can be a real good, complete receiver with that added (speed) element."

Thomas won't go into any specifics about the family problems, other than they're over.

"It was pretty bad," he said. "For me to leave? It had to be pretty bad."

Friday's scrimmage begins at 4 p.m. and is open to the public.

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Football: CU Buffs' WR Thomas back on field for Buffs

By Kyle Ringo Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

The Colorado offense is going to be significantly more potent in the fall if freshman wide receiver Jeff Thomas continues to make plays like he did Thursday, D.D. Goodson continues to emerge at the position and Paul Richardson remains healthy.

Thomas is the eye-catching new guy in the rotation. He is 6-foot-3, 195 pounds with a different gear than most of the wide receivers who played last season when Richardson was hurt. Thomas pulled a hamstring just before spring ball began and it kept him out of action until this week, but he made a big impression in his return to the field.

"He made a lot of plays today," coach Mike MacIntyre said. "He's tall and athletic. We'll go in and look at the film but I would have to say I was definitely pleased with what I saw today."

Thomas was originally recruited to CU in 2012 by former coach Jon Embree and his staff. He turned heads during the first week of fall camp and had coaches and teammates excited about his potential.

But he was involved in several incidents off the field and was sent home to Texas for the fall semester to figure out if he was ready to take seriously the opportunity to be a Buff.

Thomas said when the school fired Embree last fall, he gave serious consideration to playing elsewhere but ultimately decided that he had unfinished business in Boulder.

"I learned that everything isn't guaranteed and don't take anything for granted," Thomas said. "Just come out here and give it your all in football and your all in school so nothing can hold you back. Being on that couch watching your team play without you is the worst feeling I have ever felt."

Visitor

Sefo Liufau, the Buffs' 2013 signee at quarterback, is spending his spring break with his father in Boulder getting to know his future teammates and coaches and seeing how practices and meetings are handled.

Liufau is also able to study the playbook and get a head start on learning much of what he will need to know when he arrives this summer and is able to practice in 7-on-7 sessions in which coaches can't be present.

"You get to see how practice tempo goes, what we're doing, how you've got to run, all the things you've got to do, all the checks, all the signals, how it works," MacIntyre said. "I think it's a big deal for him when he first gets here and has that in his mind. When he gets here this summer when the players do their player-led practices, he'll understand how it's going and get in that comfort zone."

Washington's status

uncertain

Linebacker Kyle Washington has been out of practices all spring because he continues to suffer some concussion symptoms from concussions suffered late last season. MacIntyre said he meets with Washington

weekly and nothing has been ruled out at this point, but the priority is simply getting the junior from Arizona healthy.

"Right now, Kyle, with his concussions, is still having a lot of symptoms with it," MacIntyre said. "So we're concentrating on just his academics. ... We're trying to make sure he's OK and then go from there. It's still really, really up in the air."

Spring game format

MacIntyre said seniors will choose teams for the annual spring game a week from Saturday and the game will be played like a regular game. It is scheduled to start at 10:30 a.m., and will be televised on the Pac-12 Network.

MacIntyre said there are only 10 healthy offensive lineman available currently and if he loses any more he might have to re-consider the format for the game.

Scrimmage format

The Buffs will conduct their third scrimmage of spring drills today at Folsom Field. MacIntyre said they will do some special teams work early. He said quarterbacks will lead drives and if he doesn't feel like the team is getting enough work in any specific areas, such as redzone, goal line or third downs, he will set up those situations later in the scrimmage. Quarterbacks will be off-limits for hitting.

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Football: Jeffcoat's unit has long way to go

By Kyle Ringo Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

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Colorado football coaches had to limit the amount of full-team work they did in spring practices a year ago because they didn't have enough defensive linemen on the roster.

This spring there is a different coaching staff in place with a new set of problems to address in the defensive front. While there are more healthy bodies available than a year ago, most of them are raw and inexperienced players who have a long way to go to meet the potential that earned them scholarships to CU.

Sure there are guys who have played plenty of football such as Chidera Uzo-Diribe, Nate Bonsu and even Josh Tupou and Sam Kafovalu who were freshman last season, but the experience level falls off a cliff from there.

New defensive line coach Jim Jeffcoat likes what he has seen to this point from the 11 players in his group. A 12th defensive lineman, junior Juda Parker, has been sidelined by a shoulder injury and a 13th member of the group, redshirt freshman De'Jon Wilson, has missed much of spring with personal issues.

"They're working hard," Jeffcoat said. "They're trying to get better and everything. We know we've got a long way to go.

"The biggest thing is we've got to get in better shape and they understand that. The style of defense we play, we can't have guys that are over 20 percent fat, a lot of them, because we won't be effective because we play at such a fast pace."

Jeffcoat said the only way to reach that level of fitness is to play fast in practice on top of what players are already doing in the weight room with strength coaches.

The Buffs were extremely young at times on the defensive line in 2012. Senior Will Pericak was the standout in the group all season and is now expected to have an opportunity to play in the NFL this summer. But that inexperience showed up often and played a part in the Buffs producing only 21 sacks and allowing 226 rushing yards per game.

CU was also the easiest team in the nation to score on last season, finishing 120th nationally in scoring defense. The Buffs gave up 46 points a game. Obviously there were numerous factors that led to those ugly numbers, but any defensive coach will say the key to stopping offenses is a strong and disruptive front.

CU coaches at every position are doing their best to maximize repetitions this spring. It's no different for Jeffcoat who is trying to give those younger players who haven't been on the field at all or as much on game days every opportunity to learn how to play fast with sound fundamentals.

"The thing you look at is you continue the repetitions," Jeffcoat said. "The more repetitions you get, the more experience you get. You don't worry about it because young guys grow up fast when they get the repetitions.

"That's what we're thinking is keep working them and keep putting them in situations. That's why we do a lot of that is to get them to improve at a faster pace."

Defensive tackle Nate Bonsu will be a fifth-year senior in the fall. He is playing for his third head coach and third position coach this spring. Bonsu said the defensive linemen love playing for Jeffcoat for multiple reasons.

They respect him because of his success on the field as a player in the NFL. Jeffcoat spent 22 years in the league as a player and coach and won two Super Bowls with the Dallas Cowboys. Jeffcoat has been in coaching since 1998 and last year he helped produce the Western Athletic Conference Player of the Year, San Jose State defensive lineman Travis Johnson, who had 13 sacks.

Bonsu grew up in Texas watching some of the Cowboys teams Jeffcoat played on. Bonsu actually played against Jeffcoat's second son, Jackson, in high school. He said the biggest difference between being coached by Jeffcoat and former defensive line coach Mike Tuiasosopo and Kanavis McGhee is 'the delivery.'

"They're all different," Bonsu said. "Tui had a lot of experience coaching, but Jeffcoat brings that experience of being a player in the NFL on the highest level and winning Super Bowls. ... Every time he says something, he's saying something with a purpose and he can bring you those stories about Reggie White and all those dudes he played with."

CU signed two defensive linemen in the 2013 recruiting class. Jimmie Gilbert, a 6-foot-5, 230-pound product of College Station, Texas, and Tim Coleman, a 6-3, 245-pound star at Mullen High School in Denver. Both have the talent to compete for immediate playing time when they arrive this summer.

Ideally, several of the players already on the roster will fill those roles avoiding another year of growing pains up front.

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