



**Linebacker Doug Rippey (3)** says knee surgery won't hold him back in his final season.  
Photo Courtesy: CUBuffs.com



## Brooks: Defense Looks To LBs For Overall Experience

Release: 08/09/2012 Courtesy: B.G. Brooks, Contributing Editor

*(Note: Second in a series previewing the Buffs position-by-position during training camp. Today: Linebackers.)*

**BOULDER** - On a Colorado defense that figures to be a lush green at several spots, Brian Cabral's position appears as an oasis of experience. And the way CU's veteran linebackers coach sees it, the Buffs need every ounce of that commodity that his group can provide.

If good fortune holds through August camp (and in football that's always sketchy), Cabral will open the season with two seniors - Doug Rippey and Jon Major - and one junior - Derrick Webb - as his starters. Contrast that with the secondary and defensive line, which likely will feature only one senior starter each (safety Ray Polk, tackle Will Pericak), and linebacker shapes up as the Buffs' reservoir of experience.

Cabral likes it that way.

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"It has to be that way," he said. "Because one, just the nature of the position, you expect your linebackers to be the leaders. But two, we're going to be very green in front of us and behind us. My guys need to know how to lead on the field. That's probably our challenge for this season - to be the kind of leaders that this defense needs."

From what Rippy observed during summer conditioning work, these incoming freshmen are a different cut of Buff. He agrees that several of the players lined up in front and behind him and his LB mates might be first-year players, but he notes, "That really doesn't matter now. The attitudes and demeanor of some of these freshmen is different. These guys came from winning high schools and they know what it takes; they have the attitude that shows it. But it's still up to the veteran linebackers to show them how it's done."

Rippy (middle), Major (strong side) and Webb (weak side) have combined for 35 starts, with Major's 20 tops among the trio. He battled injuries for the first two years of his CU career, but started all 13 games in 2011. Still, Cabral says by late November Major wasn't as whole as he appeared: "He kind of limped through at the end. I'd like to see him have a full, fresh season. We need him to have a healthy year."

Ditto for the other two, especially Rippy, who missed nearly half (six games) of his junior season with a knee injury that required surgery and kept him out of spring drills. Rippy says he's considered "full go" for camp, but Cabral counters, "I'm not going to throw him 'full go.' I have to be smart in how I bring him back. I just want to bring him along and see what he can handle and how well he handles it. Everything (with his knee) is fine, solid . . . it's just a matter of bringing him back the right way."

Adds Rippy: "My knee feels good and my mind is clear; I'm ready to turn it on. I'm going to do everything the trainers and coaching staff asks me to do."

Webb can be a devastating tackler (he averaged 4.2 a game last season) and is a bona fide special teams standout. He was CU's special teams points runner-up (27) in 2010 and the leader (33) in 2011. Cabral is expecting "a bigger role" for Webb at his position as well as "greater consistency. He has a knack for making big plays, but at the same time we need for him to be a consistent performer."

The last recruiting cycle was one of those rare occasions when CU didn't sign a linebacker. It wasn't an oversight. Four linebackers were signed in the previous two classes, including three in 2011 and one (Lowell Williams) in 2010. The trio of 2011 signees - Brady Daigh, Woodson Greer III and K.T. Tu'umalo - all played last season, which Cabral termed "good news . . . the learning curve is a lot better with them having played and experienced the season as opposed to redshirting.

"That's really the group that I need to see the most progress from; I've got to keep my first group fresh. I do want to bring them along. I need them to be better at the end of the season from the beginning of the season. And that's true for us as a group, too."

Cabral was impressed with his underclassmen's spring work and their carryover desire to improve through the summer. "If they continue to grow and improve then I'm going to have a real solid group, a real solid corps of linebackers," he said.

Plus, he has received reinforcements in the form of a pair of former safeties - sophomore Kyle Washington, junior Paul Vigo - who have moved to the weak side position. One walk-on - Clay Jones (inside) - and a UC-Davis transfer - Scotty Jarvis (middle) - fill out Cabral's roster.

Washington, who averaged 2.5 tackles in eight games last season at safety, was a pre-spring addition to the linebacker corps, while Vigo moved after spring drills. So August camp offers Cabral his first look at Vigo in his new spot.

Nonetheless, Cabral says he's "seen enough of him to think that's a positive move for both of us - him and my position. I need some depth there. He's not lined up as linebacker for me yet, but I have every reason to believe that he can do the things we need him to do at that position. Just like Kyle Washington . . . I felt strongly about his ability to step into that position."

As for improvement from his group in general, Cabral wants to see "continued progress in understanding what we're asking them to do and then executing it well. We went through a lot of learning processes last year; now I just want to be able to see them execute it."

While he acknowledges there is no substitute for experience, Cabral believes the defense's expected youth will be off-set by ability. "Yeah, they're going to be young," he said, "but they're also going to be talented. There's a difference. We feel very strongly about the talent in this class. We expect them to grow game by game . . . stay healthy and grow fast."

"I'm real excited about the defense, but real excited about the whole team, too," Rippy added. "The leadership over the summer was great, just a great attitude all the way around. But it's practice time now; it's time to let your actions speak. There's been enough talking. We just want to get out there and play. Right now that's what it comes down to."

## THE INSIDE LOOK AT . . .

### Linebacker

**Coach:** Brian Cabral, 24rd season at CU, 23rd as a full-time assistant.

**Returning starters:** OLB Jon Major, Sr.; MLB Doug Rippy, Sr.; WLB Derrick Webb, Jr.

**Returnees:** OLB Lowell Williams, Soph.; WLB Kyle Washington, Soph.; MLB Clay Jones, Fr.-RS.; MLB Brady Daigh, Soph.; OLB Woodson Greer III, Soph; WLB K.T. Tu'umalo, Soph.; WLB Paul Vigo, Jr.

**Newcomers:** MLB Scotty Jarvis, Soph. (transfer from UC-Davis).

**Key losses:** WLB Patrick Mahnke, OLB Liloa Nobriga (left program), ILB Jermane Clark (released during camp).

**Stat line:** Major was the Buffs' leader last season in total tackles (85) and ranked second in tackles for loss (seven, including three sacks). He also was tied for second on the team with six third-down stops.

**Bottom line:** The venerable Cabral has another good linebacker corps returning, but a possible question mark is how quickly Rippy returns to form after the knee injury that shortened his 2011 season. Major and Webb have loads of experience, and Daigh, Tu'umalo and Washington, who switched from safety, were among the defensive bright spots last season as freshmen. One of Cabral's camp priorities will be developing depth, but there appears to be enough players to help him out. Tu'umalo got six games worth of experience as a freshman DB last season and Greer, who at 6-3, 225 looks the part of a linebacker, played in three games. Staying healthy as a group is key.

*Next: Special teams.*

**BUFF BITS:** Score one for the defense. Actually, score six for the defense. That's how many turnovers the 'D' collected in Thursday afternoon's practice. Of course, it was a bittersweet occasion for coach Jon Embree, who said his offense "had its moments, but the defense is continuing to get a good job of getting turnovers." Along with sophomore corner Greg Henderson, freshmen corners Yuri Wright and Kenneth Crawley had an interception each - their first of camp. "I was beginning to wonder," Embree joked. He said the "D" is "beginning to get a little bit of swagger about them. (But) we've got to get going offensively consistently. We have our moments, we're making some big plays. But as a coach you don't want one side dominating. I'm not sure the defense dominated, but I want less turnovers." . . . Linebacker Kyle Washington missed Thursday's work with a concussion suffered the previous day. He will be held out a few days, Embree said . . . Visitors to Thursday's practice included former CU punter Andy Mitchell and former linebacker Marcus Burton. Former coach Gary Barnett dropped by on Wednesday afternoon . . . The Buffs are in full pads on Friday afternoon for the first time this camp. A morning walk-through is scheduled again, but it might be offense only. Embree said the defense's

performance on Thursday afternoon had earned a morning off - if that unit's coaches wanted it.

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## Football: CU Buffs could open with quarterback rotation

By Kyle Ringo Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

Colorado football coaches expect to trim their quarterback competition from three men to two some time in the next week, but they might not name a starter until after the first or second week of the season.

Someone has to start the season opener Sept. 1 against Colorado State and the following week at home against Sacramento State, but that person might not be officially recognized as having won the job.

Assistant head coach and quarterbacks coach Rip Scherer said it's not ideal, but he wouldn't be averse to playing two quarterbacks in the first two games if it's necessary to decide who the starter should be for the rest of the year. He would prefer one of the three players competing for the position steps up and claims the job in practices this month, but decades of experience in the game has taught him it doesn't always work out that way.

"We don't treat it like preseason, but to let it play itself out a week or so into the season, we may have to do that," Scherer said. "The one thing I think we don't want to do is say, 'We're going to have a starter by this date.' Because you may not make the right decision or the best decision."

Third-year sophomores Nick Hirschman and Connor Wood along with junior Jordan Webb are all taking equal reps with the first team during the first week of practice. All three have things working in their favor and working against them.

Hirschman knows the offense best having been in the program the longest, but he's coming off three foot surgeries in the past year and missed spring ball. Wood entered camp ahead of the other two because he had all the spring reps to himself with Hirschman injured and Webb not on the roster at that time. Webb, who transferred from Kansas this summer after earning his degree there, has 19 games of experience on his résumé. The other two have played sparingly or not at all. But Webb is well behind the others in knowing the offense.

However, Webb's experience has made a big impression on coaches early in camp.

"It's easier to make up 15 days of spring practice than it is 19 starts," Scherer said. "That's the conversation he and I had when we first started talking to him. So he brings a kind of experience, you can see it here on the practice field with the way he handles himself. When all hell breaks loose, he kind of steps up, adjusts in the pocket, stays real calm. Everything is going crazy around him and he's been there, done that."

Scherer said adding Webb and his experience has made it a little easier to sleep at night versus going into the season with virtually no game experience at the quarterback position. That doesn't mean Webb is the favorite to win the job. He has to earn it. Scherer noted that regardless of who the starter is, the man will have little to no experience in the CU offense in a game.

Hirschman is the only other quarterback on the roster who has played in a college game. He saw limited playing time last season as a backup, but that playing time told him how important experience is.

"I played a decent amount of snaps for being a backup, which was so beneficial for me," Hirschman said. "When you're out here at practice, things move a lot slower and you're able to find people a lot easier. You get out there against an Oregon or an Arizona State, the game moves a lot quicker and it's not as easy to see things. You've got to catch up."

So how will coaches ultimately choose a starter? Scherer said it's no different this year than it was a year ago when Tyler Hansen beat out Hirschman. Hansen moved the team more consistently, made solid decisions with the football and showed leadership on and off the field.

"No. 1, it's productivity," Scherer said. "Sometimes the ugliest guy can take the team down the field consistently and cross the end zone. As I tell them in evaluation, I have a list of things that I evaluate them on and the bottom line is,

who takes the offense and scores points? That's the bottom line. Now, who is the best decision-maker and once we get it down to a couple, who emerges as a leader? Who has that leadership component?"

## Football: CU Buffs' Jack Harris finally feeling healthy

By Brian Howell Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

Had everything gone to plan, Jack Harris would be entering his third year as a starter on the Colorado offensive line.

Instead, he's still looking for his first full season in the lineup.

A redshirt junior, Harris is healthy after two injury-plagued seasons and hoping to secure a spot as the Buffs' starting right tackle.

"I'm feeling great," the 6-foot-5, 305-pounder said. "I've got my legs back and I got a lot of upper body work in. It's been good and hopefully I can help out the right side."

Harris was slated to start as a redshirt freshman in 2010, but he blew out his shoulder and missed the entire season. Last year, he started the first two games at right tackle, but broke his tibia and missed the rest of the season.

"I've been out way too much," said Harris, who is from Chaparral High School in Parker. "It's been rough, but I'm just trying to stay with what I can do and what I'm doing. I've just got to get over it and move on and not look at the past and focus on what's ahead."

Sometimes injuries can't be prevented, but Harris said he's done a lot of work to get himself in peak physical condition. He credited strength and conditioning coaches Malcolm Blacken and Jake Cox for improving his flexibility and strength.

"I feel a lot better than where I had with stiffness," Harris said. "That's part of it, and then getting adequately strong for what I'm doing. I think I'm finally at that point."

If Harris can stay healthy, he could be a huge asset to the Buffs for the next two seasons.

"I think he has a chance to be a very good player in this conference, a Pac-12 type of player," head coach Jon Embree said. "I really think he has that kind of talent. We've got to keep him healthy so he can try to do that."

Wright putting past

behind him

True freshman cornerback Yuri Wright made national news for things he posted on Twitter last winter. His tweets caused some schools to discontinue recruiting him. CU supported Wright, however, and he's glad. He also said he doesn't think he'll make the same mistakes he made.

"Yeah, I trust myself," Wright told CU's official athletics website. "I learned my lesson ... remembering how I felt then, I know it's something I'll never do again."

Wright is now focused on earning a starting job.

"I think there's a chance that I could be playing really early," he told CU's website.

Because of a new media policy, CU freshmen are not allowed to talk with the media.

Freshmen juiced up

For some freshmen, learning to practice with the intensity of Division I college football can be difficult. Not so for this year's crop, Embree said.



"Ironically we've got to rein them in a little bit," he said. "They're full-speed players, which is good. Those guys go full speed. It didn't take much to show them or let them know how we practice or how we finish drills. That's allowed us to continue to move at the pace that we're moving at because we're going at a quick pace. They've done a good job of absorbing information and not a lot of mental errors out here, which is good."

Embree said that's been a bit of change from last year's group of freshmen.

Defense looking good

Wright and fellow freshman corner Kenneth Crawley picked off passes on Thursday, as did sophomore Greg Henderson. The defense also forced some fumbles, Embree said.

"That side is starting to get a little bit of an identity and a little bit of swagger about them," Embree said.

The turnovers are good to see from a defensive standpoint, but Embree doesn't want to see so many miscues out of his offense.

"We've got to get going offensively consistently," he said. "I want less turnovers."

With an on-going, three-man battle for the quarterback job between Nick Hirschman, Jordan Webb and Connor Wood, Embree was asked if the turnovers are equally spread out. He declined to name names, but said, "No they aren't all equal offenders."

Beefing up the backfield

Colorado has six fullbacks on the roster this year, including Jordan Murphy who has to sit out this season after transferring from Colorado State.

The group represents a change in direction for CU from the past regime. Embree's staff has implemented a pro-style offense, which calls for the use of the fullback. Last year, they used converted tight ends and linebackers, but this year the Buffs have actual fullbacks vying for playing time.

"It makes a world of difference," offensive coordinator Eric Bieniemy said of having true fullbacks. "Now when you talk to them, they've been there and done that."

Of the five who can play this year, four are freshmen and the other is junior Alex Wood, who has been converted from tight end.

"I'm a firm believer that competition breeds success," Bieniemy said. "I feel we've got a good group. Now, we're just getting our feet to the fire. We're going to see how our kids respond over the next couple of weeks, but I like the group of guys that we have."

Hairy situation

Senior linebacker Jon Major is sporting some lengthy locks this fall.

"I guess he's going to try to do the Head & Shoulders (commercials) with (Troy) Polamalu," Embree joked.

Embree then called Major over to the media and told them about an agreement to cut his hair if the Buffs make a bowl game -- an agreement Major wasn't quite ready to commit to.

"Put it like this, he couldn't play for John Wooden," Embree said.

Notable

Sophomore linebacker Kyle Washington missed Thursday's practice with a concussion and junior center Gus



Handler missed practice with an undisclosed illness. ... Today is CU's first schedule practice in pads.

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AUGUST 10, 2012, 8:55 AM

## Colorado tackle David Bakhtiari hopes QB battle settled sooner than later

By **TOM KENSLE** |  No Comments

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BOULDER — Colorado practices are closed to the public, including the media. And, apparently, players have been instructed to not give reporters any observations about how the candidates for the starting quarterback job are doing.

Colorado's top offensive lineman, junior left tackle David Bakhtiari, did say that the three candidates — sophomore returnee Nick Hirschman, sophomore Texas transfer Connor Wood and junior Kansas transfer Jordan Webb — continue to share repetitions with the first unit.

Bakhtiari told me after Thursday evening's practice that he hopes the competition is settled soon.

"Before, I didn't have a problem (with it)," Bakhtiari said. "But now, I guess I'm having a little 'camp fever,' so I guess I'm getting a little annoyed.

"I want to see consistency. I want somebody to emerge from the group. I just want to see one of them step up and take the whole role, basically take this offense."

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AUGUST 9, 2012, 2:48 PM

## Ex-Colorado coach Gary Barnett gives observations on the Buffaloes

By **TOM KENSLER** |  No Comments

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BOULDER — I caught up with former Colorado football coach Gary Barnett Wednesday evening after he watched the CU practice and asked him about his early observations.

“It’s obvious to see how young they are,” Barnett said. “They don’t know how to practice at this level yet. It was the third day out for those guys. Jon (head coach Jon Embree) just has to be patient, be positive and bring the kids along.

“For some reason, we as coaches feel like we have to put a whole lot of stuff in. So everybody’s heads are swimming. But they had good intensity. There are a bunch of young guys flying around. They make mistakes, but they all want to play and want to be a part of it.”

More athletic?

“Yeah, especially in the secondary, that’s where I saw it,” replied Barnett, who was able to get inside the fence as a former member of the program, while practices are closed to the public and the media.

As for the quarterback battle among sophomore returnee Nick Hirschman, Texas transfer Connor Wood and Kansas transfer Jordan Webb, Barnett said they all drew an equal number of repetitions, so it wasn’t apparent if there is a leader.

But, Barnett added, Webb has something the other two do not: experience. Webb started 19 games at Kansas.

“Experience counts,” Barnett said. “When you’ve been in the fray, in the huddle, you’ve seen all these coverages — you automatically have an advantage. And you should have an advantage.”

Barnett is an college football analyst for Sports USA radio. Barnett said he will do about 15 national games this season. None involve CU, he said.

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