



*Sophomore QB Connor Wood warms up prior to the start of Friday's practice.
Photo Courtesy: CUBuffs.com*



Brooks: Young D-Linemen Offering Solid Competition

Release: 08/10/2012 Courtesy: B.G. Brooks, Contributing Editor

BOULDER - In most ways, the Colorado Buffaloes' first practice in full pads Friday afternoon looked strangely like their practice the previous afternoon in helmets and shoulder pads. Which is to say that a CU defense figuring to be liberally stocked with freshmen - particularly up front - appears to be growing up fast.

At day's end, coach Jon Embree reviewed the Buffs' work and said while the unsettled quarterback situation might be a factor in the offense's lack of cohesion, a bigger factor was the development of a handful of young D-linemen.

"I think we have some guys over there," Embree said, citing freshmen Josh Tupou, Tyler Hennington, Kory Rasmussen, Justin Solis as being "stout in there. They were physical, they were causing some havoc . . . they're big strong guys that play strong. And they're very quick. Good athleticism. Every day when Tupou does something different, I'm like, (rolls his eyes).

BUFFALO EXTRAS



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Every day he surprises me."

"Stout" might be too gentle a term for the young foursome, but for now it will do. That quartet helped the defense leave with an upper hand in the camp's first full-contact nine-on-seven drill, marking the second consecutive day that the defense has impressed with its physicality.

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These guys are wide loads, especially Tupou (6-3, 325) and Solis (6-3, 305). And Hennington (6-3, 285) and Rasmussen (6-4, 280) aren't fingerlings.

Senior tight end Nick Kasa called the D-line newcomers "very impressive . . . they're stepping it up a lot. We've just got to step right back as an offensive line and tight ends." Kasa said he and the offense "could have done a lot better in terms of being physical running the ball. It was still good . . . a good day for learning." He believes the physicality will come when the offense is playing instinctively and carrying out assignments without having to think too much about them.

"It's a mind game right now," he said. "I think we can be physical; it's just getting that and identifying defenses, too."

Embree was reluctant to say the 'D' dominated Friday, noting that the offense rallied in succeeding segments of practice. "From a head coaching standpoint," he said, "it was good because it wasn't just dominated by one side."

However, he termed the nine-on-seven work from the 10-yard line (the offense was trying to score) "nice and physical" and left little doubt as to which side controlled the drill. "It was nice to see our defense continuing to do some good things up front . . . they really are," he said. "I had a sense that we were developing a little bit of an identity on that side of the ball and you can see it's starting to come along. So that's encouraging."

Defensive tackle Will Pericak, the lone senior at his position, called the new linemen "definitely a good sight to see. We've been pretty thin depth-wise in the D-line. Getting these new faces . . . they're playing well in there, they're producing. And that's exactly what we need. They're increasing competition, which is always good.

"I saw them on their recruiting trips; I knew how big they were. Josh Tupou didn't look 325 when he was on his trip. But when I saw him on the scale, I was like, 'Dang, that's pretty big.' I knew these guys were big."

Pericak, no fingerling himself at 6-4, 285, contended Friday's nine-on-seven work was another step in building the defense's ID. "Oh, yeah," he said. "We did really well in the nine-on-seven drill. I think every year you kind of establish a new identity and this year we've made good progress toward (that) - hustling, running to the ball, finishing and getting turnovers."

Asked if the Buffs defense can be better than advertised, Pericak grinned and answered, "It's something we're going for. Advertised? I don't know what we're advertised and I don't give a rat's (butt) about it. We're going to go out there every week and compete. It doesn't really matter what people think as long as we're getting our jobs done."

WEBB SETTLING IN: Kansas transfer Jordan Webb admitted he was "swimming" for the first several days of camp, trying to learn a new system from the most difficult position - quarterback - and also familiarize himself with CU's personnel.

"Those first couple of days I was kind of swimming with all the information," he said. "But these last couple of days, I've been settling in and getting used to everything as far as the offense and also knowing my personnel a little better. Only having a month and not being in pads and not having any real team stuff, that was tough. There are some little subtle things you have to get used to."

Webb, who is competing with sophomores Connor Wood and Nick Hirschman for the starting job, said CU's camp wasn't vastly different from KU's: "As far as the schedule, yeah, that's kind of similar. But there are differences. The biggest for me is the offense. I'm getting used to it and getting my feet under me. I think most teams do (camp) pretty similar."

As for the full contact going on around them on Friday, the first day in full pads was pretty much business as usual for the QBs. Said Webb: "Everybody comes out fired up and ready to hit each other. Fortunately for us (QB's) we're in green jerseys (non-contact) so we didn't get to take any hits. But there were some good hits, some pops I could hear."

DILLON SEES SILVER LINING IN REDSHIRT: He was lukewarm to the idea initially, but freshman quarterback Shane Dillon now believes redshirting this season will be best for him over his college career.

"I came in wanting to play," Dillon said. "But the way this is going to work out will be good for me."

A 6-6, 190-pounder from El Cajon, Calif., Dillon underwent off-season surgery on his right (throwing) shoulder but believed he would be ready to compete by the time CU opened camp on Monday.

It quickly became apparent that wouldn't be the case, prompting Embree to verify that the 2012 QB competition would be a three-man battle involving sophomores Connor Wood and Nick Hirschman and junior transfer Jordan Webb.

After the Buffs' first practice, Embree announced that Dillon was a redshirt candidate, saying the player had been cleared to be on the field, "but being cleared and throwing bombs 30 times (a practice) is a little different."

Said Dillon, who completed 59.2 percent of his passes as a senior for 3,301 yards and 22 touchdowns: "I thought I could throw as much as I needed to, but it turns out I wasn't ready yet. I know it's going to be hard sitting out a season, but it'll be good for me . . . I can work on gaining weight, getting stronger and focus on school."

Dillon said conversations with CU QB coach Rip Scherer, who spent six seasons coaching in the NFL before joining Embree's staff, helped allay his fears about sitting out a season as well as coming back from the shoulder surgery.

"He told me about several guys who are now in the NFL who were in the same situation," Dillon noted. "I'll make the best of it and be better off."

ADJUSTING ON THE FLY: Defensive coordinator Greg Brown likes his guys to be prepared to make adjustments. He and his staff have had to do the same thing this week.

A broken pipe in the Dal Ward Athletic Center created an inconvenience - OK, a stinkin' mess - in portions of the building's lower floors. Apparently one of the worst spots was Brown's defensive meeting room; sewage spewed into that area, forcing his unit upstairs into the second-floor Varsity Room for its daily pre-practice meeting.

And when that meeting ended, Brown - also the Buffs' secondary coach - held his guys over in the same room for their position meeting. Brown shrugged off the abrupt change of venue with a grin and said, "You gotta go on . . . we've got a game to get ready for."

Brown wasn't sure when normalcy would be restored: "I'm up here until they tell me different."

HANDLING THE CHANGEUP: Saturday marks CU's annual Media Day as well as the first day of two-a-day drills. The Buffs have been on the field twice-a-day for the first five days of camp, but the morning session has been a brief walk-through.

Not so for Saturday, when a two-a-day practice schedule kicks in. Embree and his staff have randomly divided

the squad (three tailbacks in one group, three in another; four tight ends in one, three in another, etc.) into Black and Gold groups that will work at separate times (7:30-9:15 a.m.; 8:45-10:35 a.m.) Saturday morning. Special teams practice is set for 8:45-9:15 a.m.

Then, the entire squad is on the field at the same time for Saturday's afternoon practice (4:15-5:45 p.m.). The Buffs have five days of two-a-day drills planned and will observe Saturday's schedule for all five.

BUFF BITS: If there was an offensive highlight Friday, freshman receiver Gerald Thomas (5-11, 175) provided it with his speed and elusiveness after catching short passes. Embree said Thomas "had a really good day. He made some mistakes now, but . . . he gets that ball in his hands and he can do some things." . . . How's this for equal opportunity among newcomers in early camp: In his pre-practice secondary meeting, Brown set his No. 1 left corner for Friday afternoon's practice with a rock-paper-scissors exercise involving freshmen Kenneth Crawley and Yuri Wright. Crawley's rock smashed Wright's scissors, meaning he got the opening chance on Friday. So Wright's turn with the first unit will come Saturday . . . Sophomore linebacker Kyle Washington continues to sit out after suffering a concussion - the second of his career - earlier in camp. He will continue to be monitored, and Embree said if Washington suffered a third "then you start worrying about that . . . we'll keep an eye on that. I think everyone knows how I feel about that."

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SHOW MENU



Football: CU Buffs' Josh Ford hopes to build off solid spring

By Ryan Thorburn Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

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All eyes were on Connor Wood during April's spring game at Folsom Field.

Buffs fans, who are locked out of fall camp this year, wanted to get a good look at one of Colorado's leading candidates for the starting quarterback job. Nick Hirschman did not play due to injury, and Jordan Webb was still in the process of transferring to CU from Kansas.

It was running back Josh Ford who stole the show on offense, carrying the ball eight times for 141 yards and two touchdowns (43, 36 yards) to emerge as an intriguing option in the backfield in April.

Was Ford, a junior from Mullen High School, able to take the momentum from the spring into fall camp?

"I think it did carry over," Ford said after Friday's evening practice, the first in full pads for the Buffs. "It was a good spring game, but I'm still trying to get better at every little thing. Right now, I'm trying to get better at just the basic stuff."

The ability to turn the ball doesn't really impress offensive coordinator Eric Bieniemy. Most running backs at this level can run the ball well.

In order to gain "EB's" confidence, players oozing with potential like Ford must prove in practice that they've mastered the details -- selling play-action, blocking, reliable pass-catching skills, and so on.

"What EB wants us to be is complete players. That's the goal," Ford said. "Just having a better understanding of the position and being more valuable to the offense."

CU's offense will try to make running the ball its identity again this season. First the coaches must figure out which quarterback will be handing the ball off.

"Josh has done well. Because of what we're doing a little bit right now early, trying to figure things out, we've been throwing it a decent amount, just because we need to see," head coach Jon Embree said. "But when he's been in there, he's made some plays."

Tony Jones is the top returning rusher (297 yards, two touchdowns) and probable starter. Ford had 128 yards on 22 carries and a touchdown in 2011.

Must-see Pac-12 TV?

The Pac-12 Network will launch at 7 p.m. next Wednesday with a live show from its new studios in downtown San Francisco. The 2012 CU football preview will air for the first time at 8:30 p.m. on Aug. 18.

Buffs fans without a healthy cable bill probably won't be able to check out all of the content.

Both the Pac-12's national network and the regional network featuring CU and Utah will be available for Comcast customers with subscriptions to the sports tier package. But during a conference call with members of the media on Friday, Pac-12 Enterprises President Gary Stevenson said it's unlikely a distribution agreement with DirecTV, Dish Network, Verizon and AT&T will be in place before Wednesday.

"We've had very good conversations with the other distributors to find a business deal that works for them and us," Stevenson said. "We haven't heard one time that fans don't want this content. ... At the end of the day, consumers get what they want in television."

Last season, five Pac-12 football games and 90 basketball games were not televised. This year every game involving the revenue sports will be televised on either ESPN, Fox, the Pac-12 Network or one of the conference's six regional networks.

"There's nothing that I've heard that is discouraging from any of them," Stevenson said. "We only have 50 percent of the vote. I don't expect all of them will be on at launch. I do believe that as we talk about our content over time, our fans that are customers of those distributors will get what they want."

Also, the conference's current web site, Pac12.org, will be renamed Pac12.com and relaunched at noon next Wednesday.

Dominant D-line

Embree was pleased with the offense for fighting back during 9-on-7 drills, but he said the defensive line continues to shine.

"It was good to see the defense continuing to do some good things up front," Embree said. "They're developing an identity on that side of ball. ... They were stout in there, they were physical, they were causing some havoc."

It sounds like Parker Orms is emerging as the clear favorite to start at strong safety opposite senior free safety Ray Polk.

"He's a very good football player, he's real smart, very instinctive," Embree said. "So having someone like him back there would go a long ways."

Notable

The offensive star of Friday's practice was freshman wide receiver Gerald Thomas. "When he gets that ball in his hands, he can do some things," Embree said. ... Sophomore linebacker Kyle Washington has missed some practice time after suffering the second concussion of his career. Embree said a third brain injury might cause him to "go a different way from a football standpoint" with Washington. ... Embree will participate in CU's media day event today at the Dal Ward Center along with assistants and players requested by the media.

Quotable

"We've got a lot of fast guys. We could probably get lane nine in the Olympics 4X100 relay," Embree said when asked who the fastest player on the team is while Paul Richardson is healing up from a knee injury.

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Football: CU Buffs' Paul Richardson on fast track to recovery

By Ryan Thorburn *Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera*

Posted:

Buffzone.com

The sense of dread was the worst part.

Paul Richardson was pretty certain that he had sustained a cruel injury to his left knee during an elemental non-contact special teams drill on April 9.

After a long day, Colorado's dynamic wide receiver -- arguably the player on the roster Jon Embree could least afford to lose during spring football practices -- had to wait well into the night for the official MRI results.

Dr. Eric McCarty, CU's head team physician, called Richardson at 11 p.m. with the diagnosis and prognosis.

Torn left anterior cruciate ligament. Full recovery expected for the 2013 season.

The dread was quickly replaced with a drive to get well sooner.

"Dr. McCarty told me, 'Look, it's torn,'" Richardson said. "I was OK with it because I was kind of expecting it."

Four months later, the expectations have changed dramatically. Richardson believes there is a realistic chance he could return to the field and help the Buffs in 2012.

"It will be four months on Monday, and I'm almost to where I was," Richardson said after Thursday's practice. "All I can say is I'm blessed, man."

Embree remains cautiously optimistic. But the second-year head coach has limited No. 6 to innocent bystander during the first week training camp.

Make that a bystander with an impressive 40 time.

"I'm running, I'm cutting, I'm jumping. I couldn't even tell you what the next step is," said Richardson, who has not been participating in contact drills or team drills. "We basically have me run, have me cut, have me work on jumping, changing direction, and seeing like the next day how my knee recovers from it.

"I haven't had any swelling or anything with it. I'm doing really well. It's promising."

During the offseason, @PRichJr was very upbeat on Twitter about his recovery and chances of playing this season. The only thing Richardson, a junior with a redshirt available, is guaranteeing right now is that he will run out behind Ralphie again someday.

Greatest (comeback) of all time

When it comes to the position of wide receiver, Jerry Rice is known as the G.O.A.T.

Greatest of all time.

During his legendary Sundays with the San Francisco 49ers, Rice's Hall of Fame career was halted when he tore the ACL and MCL in his left knee during the Aug. 31, 1997, season opener.

The normal recovery time from a torn ACL is seven-to-nine months. With advancements in medicine, athletes

dedicated to their rehabilitation regiment have been able to cut the time frame down to about six months.

Rice returned to the NFL field on Dec. 15, 1997, just three and a half months after his reconstructive surgery.

"They tell me coming back this fast is unheard of," Rice told Sports Illustrated at the time. "This could change the entire philosophy about medicine and recovery from this type of injury, but I'm not looking at it like that. I just want to get back out on the field and make things happen."

Embree was in the stands at Candlestick Park to watch Rice's remarkable comeback as the 49ers take on the Super Bowl-bound Denver Broncos.

"The stadium was electric that night," Embree said.

And so was the G.O.A.T.

Rice -- who was 35 and had already caught 1,050 passes for 16,377 yards and 154 touchdowns (all NFL records) with three Super Bowl rings and 11 Pro Bowl appearances -- had three receptions for 40 yards and a touchdown early in the game.

The return to glory was short lived, however, as a hit by bruising Broncos safety Steve Atwater on the 14-yard touchdown reception sent Rice awkwardly to the ground where he suffered a broken kneecap.

Although the injury was considered a fluke and unrelated to the ACL, it's hard to say if Rice would have been able to sustain the accelerated comeback over the rigors of an entire football season.

"It's either good, bad or indifferent," Embree said on the subject of ACL recoveries. "Each person is just unique with how it works."

There are other stories Richardson can use as motivation.

John Elway played 16 NFL seasons without an ACL in his left knee.

Tom Brady and Wes Welker have both returned from serious knee injuries to continue making beautiful fantasy football music together.

Willis McGahee, the Broncos' current starting running back, recovered from a devastating knee injury in the 2002 Fiesta Bowl to have a productive NFL career.

Richardson has personally talked to Detroit Lions wide receiver Nate Burleson, who tore an ACL in his left knee in 2008 and came back to catch 63 passes for 812 yards and three touchdowns during the final year of his contract in 2009.

Since signing with the Lions, Burleson has quietly made 128 catches for 1,382 yards and nine touchdowns in Calvin Johnson's shadow.

Not that Richardson needed any pep talks. He arrived at CU ready to overcome adversity.

"I'm so mentally tough. My father told me my whole life that the game is 90 percent mental, 90 percent from the neck up," Richardson said. "He used to tell me all the time that my confidence is everything. I know I have all the confidence in the world. Everybody that I've spoken with, they always say the hardest battle is the mental aspect. I tackled that the day I got out of surgery.

"It's been all physical since then, and I'm working on that 10 percent."

Staying on his toes

So underneath the helmet, Richardson believes he's 90 percent right now. But the calendar says he's only four months removed from surgery.

That could be a complicated math problem for the Buffs, who kick the season off on Sept. 1 determined to finish the year at a bowl game.

"He's not doing anything with the team," Embree noted this week. "He's running on the side, catching passes and watching practice on the side taking mental reps. But he's not doing anything, not even routes on air."

The quarterback candidates admit that winning at least six games would be a much easier task with Richardson running routes through traffic or down the sideline for them.

"Huge difference," Connor Wood, who took all of the first-team reps in the spring, said of breaking the huddle with Richardson. "He's a great talent. He adds so much to this offense. He can bring so much value to what we already have."

There have been plenty of recent CU athletes who have been able to return successfully from similar setbacks.

Senior linebacker Doug Rippey and sophomore running back Malcolm Creer are among Richardson's teammates who are back out on the practice fields following knee injuries that ended their 2011 seasons.

Shane Harris-Tunks, a member of Tad Boyle's basketball team, finally discovered confidence and strength in his legs last spring after tearing an ACL in October of 2010.

"It really depends on the person. The recovery is different for everyone I think," Harris-Tunks said. "I could jump long before I could cut coming back from my ACL. Sometimes even when you are feeling healthy you still have to sit out and wait because it's not ready yet. ...

"It's all about discipline. It's the same thing day in, day out, really monotonous, boring exercises. So it's just about staying focused on what you're doing it for and being determined to getting back."

Richardson said one of the keys to his rapid recovery is his ballet-like style. He makes defensive backs look a step slow by literally staying on his toes.

"I'm really awkward. I walk, jog and run on my toes. I'm never flatfooted," Richardson explained. "I do everything on my toes and I feel nothing on my knees while I'm on my toes, that's why I'm healing so fast."

Seeing the light

Richardson gave Buffs fans a dazzling Pac-12 preview with 11 catches for 284 yards and two touchdowns during an overtime loss to Cal last season.

The 6-foot-1, 170-pound blur would be slowed considerably by an MCL sprain and finished his sophomore campaign with 39 catches for 555 yards and five touchdowns.

Coaches and players aren't sure exactly what to expect of Richardson this season. Or if they should expect anything from him.

Still, they can't help but feel optimistic about the situation when they see P-Rich's remarkable progress.

"I think just from genetics he might be a physical freak," Wood said. "The thing is he works so hard in the training room. I'm in there a bunch and I see him in there icing it up and keeping the swelling down, all the things he needs to do. He's healing quick, which is awesome.

"He's getting after it. He wants to get back on that field."

As camp wears on, Embree plans to ease Richardson back into the fray.

"With knees, all of a sudden it swells one day and you don't know why," Embree said. "So we'll have to see as he continues to progress and increases his workload if he keeps at this pace."

The Rocky Mountain Showdown against the Rams? The Pac-12 opener at Washington State? The 2013 opener?

Richardson only knows that he feels a sense of excitement about playing again.

"I look at it as there is light at the end of the tunnel," Richardson said. "Whether I can play this season or not, I know that I haven't played my last game at Folsom Field."

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