



Tony Jones (26) expects to be No. 1 in CU's tailback rotation this season.
Photo Courtesy: Joel Broida



Brooks: Jones' Return, Powell's Arrival Boost 'EB'

Release: 08/17/2012 Courtesy: B.G. Brooks, Contributing Editor

(Note: Sixth in a series previewing the Buffs position-by-position during training camp. Today: Tailbacks/fullbacks.)

BOULDER - Within the first 24 to 48 hours of training camp - that's by his count - Eric Bieniemy's voice was reduced to something between a rasp, a croak and a wheeze. If camp went any longer, "EB" might require a bullhorn - an unsettling thought for his Colorado tailbacks and fullbacks as well as residents near the practice fields.

Whether April or August, the Buffs' fiery offensive coordinator/running backs coach can find plenty to shout about - good and bad. The bad: Bieniemy's top rusher from 2011 (Rodney "Speedy" Stewart) has graduated and CU's offense still is mastering Ground Game 101. The good: Bieniemy promises that's about to change - and he isn't one to make idle promises.

Said Bieniemy: "We've gotten better, we've studied it more,

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we've detailed it. It's going to be a lot better; we're much improved."

One reason for his optimism is CU's offensive staff being on the job together for a full season. "We're a lot further along . . . obviously we're one year into it," he said. "We're better as a coaching staff because we're all speaking the same language now that our players have heard us speak for a full year."

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Just as vital to Bieniemy's optimism, though, are the return Tony Jones, Josh Ford and D.D. Goodson, the recovery of Malcolm Creer and the arrival of three freshmen tailbacks and two fullbacks that Bieniemy says will "make people remember what fullbacks are supposed to look like."

After Stewart's 854 rushing and 571 receiving yards last season came Jones with 297 rushing and 168 receiving. Stewart's productivity in the offense, said Bieniemy, will be difficult for a single player to duplicate: "Rodney did so much for us. Like I've said, Rodney was a hell of a football player who just happened to play tailback. Tony is growing into his own type of player. He's doing a tremendous job of running the football and doing some great things in protection. To ask if Tony can come out and duplicate what Rodney did, right now that's asking a lot. We'll see."

Jones' off-season was focused on studying tape with Bieniemy and his teammates and reviewing his protection schemes and pass routes. He believes he's already a more complete back than he was in spring drills.

The 5-7 Jones, who has bulked up to 192 pounds, comes into his second season with the rushing bar raised pretty high. Behind the Buffs' team of reaching a bowl game, Jones' personal goal is 1,200 yards on the ground.

If he reaches that, he would become only CU's second 1,000-yard rusher in eight seasons. Stewart ran for 1,318 yards in 2010. Preceding that was Bobby Purify, who had 1,017 in 2004.

Bieniemy believes 1,200 is "very, very realistic" for Jones, but adds with a grin: "You know what? I'm surprised he said 1,200. I'm surprised he didn't say 1,600. He was being very modest. The thing I love about him is that he's a humble kid. He appreciates having the opportunity that he's worked himself into. He's making the most of it."

Jones, of Paterson, N.J., called his first season under Bieniemy a time of unparalleled growth. "He's definitely wanted me to be the best I can be," Jones said. "He's treated me like he treated his guys when he was in the NFL. He wants the best out of me. Since I have a year under him, he holds me to a higher standard. That higher level is something I want to reach; I'll continue to strive for that."

Along with his rushing goal, Jones wants to improve his pass protection. On a 1-10 scale last season, he said he probably was "maybe a seven . . . there's never a time when you might think you're the best at it. When you think like that, you're gonna get blown out by a linebacker or a 'D' end. I just try and get better in technique every day, try to fit up on a linebacker as best I can."

Three other players - sophomores D.D. Goodson and Malcolm Creer and junior Josh Ford - were on Bieniemy's 2011 tailback roster. That season offers each an edge on newcomers Donta Abbron, Terrence Crowder and Davien Payne. But any edge is slight because each of the freshman trio showed well in camp's first week.

Said Jones: "They're good; coach Bieniemy wouldn't bring anybody in here who wasn't good. Right now they're trying to learn the system. When they do that, they'll be topnotch."

Bieniemy is waiting until after Saturday's first full scrimmage of camp to determine his depth chart. "Every day it's tossing and turning," he said. "I will say this: we've got some great competition out here. There are some guys who are stepping up and doing some very good things. Some days they get more reps than other days; we try to equally balance it and distribute it so we can get a fair assessment."

"You always want to give guys a chance to go play. Let's see how they can handle it (Saturday) when nobody knows what's going on. I will say this: collectively, these kids work and compete and it's important to them."

At fullback, the lone upperclassman is junior Alex Wood, who is inexperienced but has impressed Bieniemy with his camp work and has the size (6-2, 245) needed at the position. Wood is joined by two new scholarship fullbacks and walk-on Jesse Hiss (6-1, 225).

One of the scholarship fullbacks - Clay Norgard (6-1, 240) - was a January enrollee and had the benefit of participating in spring drills and competing with Wood. So the real August camp newbie is Christian Powell (6-0, 235), and he arrived ready to work. Make that continue to work.

From his recruiting visit until he reported in June, he shed nearly 25 pounds. He said he played at Upland (Calif.) High School at 250, but weighed nearly 260 when he visited Boulder.

Malcolm Blacken, CU's director of speed, strength and conditioning, told Powell, "I need you in shape when you get here . . . I'll get you strong."



Christian Powell

Powell complied, shedding nearly 15 pounds - and he got stronger. Upon arriving in Boulder, he was power cleaning 220 pounds. Before camp opened, he was up to 308 pounds in that lift "just because he listened to us and wanted to get better," said Steve Englehart, Blacken's assistant director of speed, strength and conditioning.

Bieniemy was impressed by Powell's weight loss, his strength gain and his first week and a half of camp. Noted Bieniemy: "(Powell) has stood out. He's young, but the thing I like about him is that he's coachable, he listens and you only have to tell him once how to do it."

Powell admitted he had "a lot to learn, but I feel like I'm taking it in pretty good." He also was a defensive end at Upland, where he played with two of his current CU freshmen teammates - Abron and safety Marques Mosley. But Powell was mostly recruited as a fullback and the similarities in Upland's offense and what he's found at CU have helped in his transition.

"I felt like I was a pretty good blocker (in high school)," he said. "There's always room for improvement, but I've felt like I've done pretty well . . . but it's definitely tougher. It's something I've never dealt with before, but I can make it."

Powell said his weight loss resulted from a realization that he "just needed to get shape. And I knew coming up to altitude, it would have been harder for me carrying all that weight. I felt like it was something I had to do."

Powell believes he can do whatever is asked of him. And in Bieniemy's day as a CU tailback (1988-90), the Buffs asked a lot of their fullbacks. Of his current group, Bieniemy said, "I think people are going to remember what fullbacks are supposed to look like. Alex Woods has done a great job. Christian Powell has come into his own. Clay Norgard is doing a hell of a job. I like the competition there."

THE INSIDE LOOK AT . . .

Running backs/fullbacks

Coach: Eric Bieniemy, second season at CU under Jon Embree; second stint on CU staff.

Returning starters: None.

Returnees: TB Tony Jones, Soph.; TB Josh Ford, Jr.; TB D.D. Goodson, Soph.; TB Justin Gorman, Soph.; TB Malcolm Creer, Soph.; FB Alex Wood, Jr.

Newcomers: TB Davien Payne, Fr.; TB Donta Abram, Fr.; TB Terrence Crowder, Fr.; FB Clay Norgard, Fr.; FB Christian Powell, Fr.

Key losses: TB Rodney Stewart; FB Tyler Ahles; FB Evan Harrington; TB Brian Lockridge; FB Nick Plimpton (left program).

Stat line: "Speedy" Stewart accounted for 854 rushing yards last season, but the Buffs averaged just 3.5 yards per rush (No. 9 Pac-12) and 108.7 ground yards a game (No. 9 Pac-12).

Bottom line: Jones (297 yards, two TDs) gained experience last season filling in for Stewart and should come out of camp as the top tailback. But he's getting competition from the incoming freshmen as well as from Ford and Creer. The Buffs desperately need a punishing runner and more proficient running game. For the first time in a while, CU has three true fullbacks - not hybrids pulled from other positions. That, and an attitude of being more physical, will help in regenerating the run game.

Next: Defensive backs

BUFF BITS: Coach Jon Embree has been telling his players throughout camp that if they work hard in every practice he will "take care" of them at the appropriate time. Thursday afternoon was the appropriate time for care and maintenance. After their meetings, the afternoon walk-through was canceled and a night at the movies was scheduled. Also, Friday morning's practice was moved back 45 minutes, allowing a little extra time to sleep in . . . Saturday's scrimmage at Folsom Field (closed to media and public) won't differ greatly from some of the Buffs' daily situational work. However, one difference, noted Embree, would be some live special teams scrimmage snaps . . . By his admission, Embree isn't a "big depth chart guy." He and his staff already have good ideas of their two-deep roster, but Saturday's work should help fill in any blanks. But filling out a depth chart won't head Embree's to-do list afterwards. It might be Sunday or Monday before a depth chart is complete . . . Among the things Embree is anxious to see on Saturday is improved communication among his offensive linemen. "They're coming together as a unit, but in the offensive line everyone has to be on the same page," he said . . . Quarterback Jordan Webb played in a mostly spread offense at Kansas, taking mostly shotgun snaps. Embree said his starting QB has handled the move under center very well, with very few fumbled snaps: "If you can't do that you can't play. That's not been an issue for us." . . . Nick Kasa is a senior but a neophyte at tight end. But with his size - 6-6, 260 - he can be a better than average blocker. Embree said Kasa was improving in that area as well as his receiving: "His run game has really come along, so that's been a positive . . . and he's worked hard catching the football; he's worked hard to make himself a complete player."

Contact: BG.Brooks@Colorado.EDU

SHOW MENU



Football: CU Buffs' Jordan Webb stands tall in practice

By Ryan Thorburn Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

Colorado has played small ball before.

Some of the notable diminutive quarterbacks to take snaps for the Buffs over the years include Koy Detmer (6-1), Mike Moschetti (6-0), Cody Hawkins (5-11) and Tyler Hansen (6-1).

The tradition continues with Jordan Webb.

The 6-foot-1 junior was named CU's starter this week by head coach Jon Embree. No word if the Kansas transfer was standing on a phone book for that roster measurement.

According to CU coaches and teammates, Webb stood tall throughout training camp and clearly earned the job.

"In my eyes, he made plays. He's out there just slinging it," starting left tackle David Bakhtiari said. "You've got No. 4 (Webb's number) and it looks like Brett Favre out there. He's about like 5-6. No, he's pretty short, but he's making plays."

Quarterbacks coach Rip Scherer calls his new signal caller "The Smurf." Webb, who has traded in KU blue for CU black and gold, would probably like to earn a different nickname as soon as possible.

All that really matters is Webb has been head and shoulders above Connor Wood (6-3) and Nick Hirschman (6-4) when it comes to making plays consistently in practice and leading the offense.

"He's strong, he's tough," Embree said when asked about Webb's size. "He's played in 19 games and been beat up pretty good and seemed to survive that all right. I'm not real overly concerned about that."

Scherer said Webb is adept at seeing the field and throwing accurately through tight windows.

That's easier said than done with hulking offensive linemen like Bakhtiari (6-4, 295), Alexander Lewis (6-6, 285), Gus Handler (6-2, 295), Ryan Dannewitz (6-6, 300) and Jack Harris (6-5, 305) creating the pocket in front of him.

"I don't now how he does it, to be honest," Bakhtiari said. "I'm not going to question it. The fact that he does do it is enough for me."

Webb has also earned the respect of his new peers by mastering the offense so quickly. That includes taking snaps under center after two years in the shotgun for the Jayhawks.

"I don't really think he had a learning curve," said Handler, CU's starting center. "I think he just picked it up and ran with it. ...

"I think practice kind of slows down once you've had that game experience. He just learned the offense well and played well."

Added Bakhtiari: "I feel it was a fair competition and he outright beat Connor and Nick."

Next generation LBs

Brian Cabral is excited to have Jon Major, Doug Rippy and Derrick Webb all healthy and determined to lead the defense.

"The thing I like about my group is I have my starters back," Cabral said.

The longtime CU assistant coach is in the process of converting two hard-hitting defensive backs, sophomore Kyle Washington and junior Paul Vigo, into linebackers.

"I like how both of those guys are progressing," Cabral said. "They're a part of that next generation."

Scrimmage time

The Buffs will conduct their first official scrimmage of fall camp Saturday at Folsom Field. Embree will be evaluating Wood and Hirschman for the No. 2 quarterback spot and taking a look at how the CU special teams perform in "live" drills.

The scrimmage, which is scheduled to go from noon until 2:30 p.m., is closed to the public and the media.

CU day on Pac-12 Network

Colorado will take center stage on the Pac-12 Network today.

At 4 p.m. MDT the 2011 CU-Cal game will be part of the network's Encore Series which highlights the top 10 games from 2011.

At 6 p.m., the 1991 Orange Bowl between CU and Notre Dame will air as part the Classic Game series. Beyond the game footage, the show feature interviews with former CU coach Bill McCartney and former Buffs Darian Hagan, Charles Johnson and Eric Bieniemy among a few others.

The CU 2012 Football Preview show will air at 8 p.m.

The Pac-12 Network is currently only available locally on Comcast channels 430 and 840 (high definition).

Quotable

"I've never been a big depth chart guy ... usually it's Dave Plati (CU's sports information director) calling me saying, 'Hey, I need a depth chart to put in the program,'" Embree said when asked about possibly updating the depth chart after Saturday's scrimmage. "Dave will be on me about that. I'm sure after his third phone call for me to set the depth chart we'll go ahead and do that."

Follow Ryan on Twitter: @RyanThorburn

Football: CU Buffs' Uzo-Diribe striving to reach full potential

By Kyle Ringo Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

Malcolm Blacken's eyes open wide and a hint of excitement is detected in his voice when he answers a question about defensive lineman Chidera Uzo-Diribe.

Blacken, in his second year as Colorado's strength and conditioning coach, has seen Uzo-Diribe's freakish blend of size and speed before, but that was the NFL where he trained some of the best athletes in the world. He has been working with Uzo-Diribe and the rest of the Buffs for 20 months now and this offseason he was impressed by watching Uzo-Diribe begin to appreciate the dedication he needs to reach his full potential.

"We did a lot of speed work with him, working a lot on his fast-twitch muscle groups," Blacken said. "He is a guy that can really get off the ball. What we're trying to do now is have him play the fourth quarter like he plays the first and not lose any speed coming off the edge and stay healthy."

At 6-foot-3, 254 pounds, Uzo-Diribe finished second among all Buffs in the 5-10-5 drill and the 20-yard get-off drill conducted by Blacken earlier this year. The 5-10-5 drill requires players to sprint five yards in either direction, then reverse direction and sprint 10 yards and then reverse direction again for another five yards. The 20-yard get-off tests a player's ability to get up to full-speed from a dead start.

The only player to produced a better time in the 5-10-5 drill than Uzo-Diribe's 4.1 seconds was wide receiver Keenan Canty (5-9, 160), who beat him by one-tenth of a second.

"I would just say good genetics," Uzo-Diribe said explaining his talent. "I feel like I'm a pretty fast guy for my size."

Cornerback Greg Henderson (5-11, 185) was the only player with a faster 20-yard get-off. He did the drill in 2.57 seconds. Uzo-Diribe finished in 2.59.

"He's unbelievable," Blacken said. "He had the second fastest 5-10-5 on the team. For a 254-pound guy competing with all the little guys and the skill players, that's pretty good. I'm looking forward to him having a great season because if it mirrors what he did this summer, it should be a pretty good one."

Uzo-Diribe wasn't disappointed with his 2011 season immediately after it ended, but during the winter while watching film, he began to recognize he was capable of much more. He finished his sophomore season with 18 solo tackles and no assists, a statistical oddity that sports information guru Dave Plati determined to be a record for most solo tackles without an assist in a season at CU. He led the team with three forced fumbles, the most by any Buff in one season since 2003, and he was second in sacks with 5 1/2.

Uzo-Diribe played both defensive end spots in 13 games in 2011, starting three games on both sides. He is expected to be the starter at the "jack" outside-linebacker/defensive end hybrid position this season.

While Uzo-Diribe recognized on his own during film study that he had room for improvement, assistant coach Kanavis McGhee reinforced the idea when he told Uzo-Diribe, "You're a lot better than what you've shown on film."

Uzo-Diribe focused his efforts over the past nine months on improving against the run. How does a defensive lineman improve against the run when he doesn't have any running plays coming his way in the majority of that nine months?

He said he spent hours working on his technique and improving his strength and endurance. Uzo-Diribe also acknowledged he needed to play with more determination and a greater sense of urgency on a fulltime basis.

Uzo-Diribe said he noticed teammates such as Will Pericak and former Buff Curtis Cunningham consistently getting to the ball when he was not last season. He said he's faster than both of those players and he had no excuse for not playing harder and more consistent in 2011. He said he is determined to change that this season and beyond.

"It was just something that I knew and they knew that I wasn't very effective against the run," Uzo-Diribe said.
"Seems like I always came to play when it came time for third-down situations. Coach McGhee always says if you want to be a complete player, you've got to play on first, second and third down. That's something I worked on this offseason."

Follow Kyle on Twitter: @KyleRingo

AUGUST 17, 2012, 12:34 PM

Colorado coach Jon Embree: jobs up for grabs in Saturday scrimmage

By **TOM KENSLER** |  No Comments

BOULDER — Although Colorado coaches settled on junior Jordan Webb as the starting quarterback on Wednesday, that doesn't mean the team will just go through the motions in Saturday's closed scrimmage, Buffs coach Jon Embree said.

"There are a lot of jobs up for grabs," Embree said.

For example?

"(On defense) we're going to see what happens up front, and we're going to see what happens on the back end," Embree said.

"The offensive line is pretty much set," he added. "But receivers, we're going to take a look at what that rotation looks like. There's guys playing for some stuff."

Defensive starters on offense and defense will go against each other in the scrimmage, Embree said.

"Whenever we do scrimmage situations and team situations, we always go ones and against ones," Embree said, "because that's how you play. We'll continue that. We'll do twos against twos. We'll do a couple of rotations."

The scrimmage also will include special teams and "situational" work, he said.

"Stuff like punting after a safety, we'll work that in, in this scrimmage," Embree said.

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<http://blogs.denverpost.com/colleges/2012/08/17/colorado-coach-jon-embree-jobs-grabs-saturday-scrimmage/24280/>

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