



Starting QB Jordan Webb says his timing with the No. 1 offense is improving.

Photo Courtesy: CUBuffs.com



Brooks: Embree Likes First Scrimmage, Team's Passion

Release: 08/18/2012 Courtesy: B.G. Brooks, Contributing Editor

BOULDER - At the end of Saturday's 96-play scrimmage at Folsom Field - the first major scrimmage of training camp - Colorado coach [Jon Embree](#) huddled his players around him and invited them to peer two weekends into the future.

"Right about now in two weeks," he said, "we're going to be warming up . . . right about now."

Those warm-ups will be in Denver's Sports Authority Field at Mile High in preparation for CU's 2012 season-opener against Colorado State.

The meter already is running on the fastest four months of the calendar year. Game week is closing in. Are the Buffs ready to greet it? Not quite, but by all accounts they're getting there.

In Embree's estimation, his second CU team is "about halfway there . . . the way they came out (Saturday) and got after it, it

BUFFALO EXTRAS



Watch:

Tony Jones
08/18/2012



Watch:

Jordan Webb
08/18/2012



Watch:

Will Pericak
08/18/2012



Watch:

Brady Daigh
08/18/2012



Watch:

Keenan Canty
08/18/2012






Watch:

Jon Embree

was good."

Much, much better, he said, than what occurred in last season's first scrimmage: "I remember after last year's scrimmage . . . it wasn't acceptable and we came out and played that way (in the opener at Hawai'i). Truth be told, it carried over. The guys knew how to practice (in this camp) and they came out and did it. So I'm pleased with that."

08/18/2012

-  [Photo Gallery](#)
-  [Buy Tickets](#)
-  [Fall Camp](#)

With two weeks of training camp in the books, Embree's key observation of the Buffs is this: "They want it . . . they don't say it, but their actions - how they come out and work - it got better every practice. They want it. They really do want to win. That's refreshing to be around . . . they really care and respect each other. There's a lot of camaraderie there. It's been a good camp . . .

"I feel good about what this team has done and how hard they've worked. It goes back to the Utah game (a 17-14 CU win). That momentum has given them a little taste of winning big games and what it means. We'll see how that translates pretty soon."

Embree said he used the "halfway there" description for Saturday's work because several key defensive players - linebackers [Jon Major](#) and [Doug Rippy](#), safety [Ray Polk](#) - didn't participate. All are expected to be ready for CSU.

"We've got to get work in with all our guys, so we can get a good feel for that," Embree said. "There were some mistakes on one side of the ball or the other, and generally it was a guy playing who maybe wouldn't be in that situation."

The absences of Major, Rippy and Polk created opportunities for younger players such as [Brady Daigh](#) and [Kyle Washington](#) at linebacker and Marques Mosley at safety, and each made big plays that Embree recognized. He also singled out corner [Greg Henderson](#), ends [Chidera Uzo-Diribe](#) and [Juda Parker](#) and freshmen defensive linemen Tyler Hennington, Justin Solis and Josh Tupou.

Mosley also was a standout on special teams, returning a kickoff 100 yards for a touchdown. "He's a smart player; he's got good football instincts and can run and likes to hit," Embree said. "I'm excited with his progress."

On Mosley's long kickoff return, Embree said he was "holding my breath because of (Mosley's) tweaked hammy . . . but he didn't have to hit fourth gear - he was able to score in third. I'm really pleased for him."

WEBB WATCH, QB BACKUP STATUS: New starting quarterback [Jordan Webb](#) worked exclusively with the No. 1 offense and said those reps were beneficial for his timing with some of the veteran offensive players. "We're going to keep getting better," Webb said, adding, "If we had to step on the field next weekend, I think we'd be ready. We have leadership. The offensive line is working hard, they really set the tempo (Saturday). If they're playing good it's going to bode well for us."

Webb said he felt "definitely more comfortable" directing the offense since he was named the starter last Wednesday. "But I'm working even harder now. Being named the guy is a big responsibility. It's time to take leadership of this offense and make it my own. I'm really trying to do that. I think the guys are rallying around me well. I think we're really excited for a couple of weeks from now."

Embree said all three QBs - Webb, [Connor Wood](#), [Nick Hirschman](#) - "played well" and no separation occurred between Wood and Hirschman in their duel to be Webb's backup. "Both threw a couple of TD passes . . . both have kind of gotten over the fact that they're not the guy and they're competing again," Embree said. "I expected it to be like that."

One of the afternoon's two interceptions resulted from a route error by a freshman receiver. "Other than that,"

Embree said, "I thought our ball placement and decisions were pretty dang good at the quarterback position and allowed us to have some good plays."

No official scrimmage statistics were released.

GROUND GAME ID DEVELOPING: The Buffs weren't the hard-running, hardnosed ground team last season that Embree and offensive coordinator/running backs coach [Eric Bieniemy](#) wanted.

That seems to be changing. Embree cited sophomore tailback [Tony Jones](#) and the O-line for their work Saturday, noting that a physical identity in that phase of the offense seems to be developing.

"We're really close to having an identity in the running game," Embree said. "We really are. I feel it's so much better, it's night-and-day from where we were last year to now. But we've got to continue to get better.

"We're still in a 'camp' mode. We have to continue to grind a little bit. I know they're tired, I know we've got a little bit of legs. But we'll continue to keep working and we'll get freshened up when we need to."

Jones said the Buffs "got better . . . we got after each other" on Saturday. "I had a couple of small runs . . . I was just looking to get 41/2 (yards) like coach Bieniemy always talks to us about. He says to not expect a big run on every play; I always want to be patient."

Asked if he saw a personality developing on the offense, Jones answered, "I think we always had a personality, but I guess a lot of people didn't think it was a strong personality . . . it's definitely toughness."

He said he believed from a toughness standpoint, the Buffs are game-ready "right now, but we still have a lot of things to clean up. We have to get back to the drawing board, see what we're going to do come our first game. We're ready; coach Black ([Malcolm Blacken](#)) got us conditioned and coach Embree has definitely been hard on us."

TAKING IT UP A NOTCH: Embree applauded his assistant coaches for their development of older players on the roster, citing defensive line coach [Mike Tuiasosopo](#) and senior tackle [Will Pericak](#) as his Exhibit A.

"The first day I saw (Pericak), I said, 'You gotta be kidding me,'" Embree recalled. "He didn't know how to use hands right, his footwork was awful . . . now when I watch him I say here's a guy who has a chance to be an all-conference player.

"He was willing to work and Tuiasosopo has done a great job of grinding him and staying on him and holding him to that standard . . . making him do things the right way every time."

Pericak was a playmaker Saturday, batting a pass that was intercepted by Daigh. Pericak cited the influx of newcomers to the D-line and said that group was "executing well, but everybody has room to improve . . . we've got to get a little better in our pass rush and get our game mentality down - running on and off the field, speaking up and seeing the pre-snap reads."

CAN CANTY BE 'SPECIAL K'? Receiver [Keenan Canty](#), a sophomore from New Orleans, had several nice catches Saturday and could be working his way toward more playing time. In 12 games last season, he made 14 receptions for 161 yards.

Canty's take on the offense Saturday: "We came out pretty good, came out pretty fast. We had a few mental errors, but overall it was pretty good."

Canty's take on his performance: "I just came out trying to be assignment sound in my play and keep going as fast as I can for as long as I can."

He said he has benefitted from the competition provided by freshmen receivers Jeffery Thomas and Gerald Thomas, as well as that from returnees [Tyler McCulloch](#), [Nelson Spruce](#), [Jarrod Darden](#) and [Dustin Ebner](#).

"Coach (Bobby) Kennedy says he's bringing in guys who can compete with us and take our spots," Canty said. "There's always competition going on."

BUFF BITS: Embree reported no new injuries in Saturday's work Attending the scrimmage were a pair of McCartneys - grayshirt candidate Derek, a freshman defensive end who will enroll in January, and former coach Bill, who watched from the press box and took notes for an upcoming weekly radio gig. Derek McCartney is up 20 pounds (to 235) from his signing day weight The final week of camp brings the final pair of two-a-days. The first is Monday, the last is Wednesday The beginning of fall semester classes is just over a week away (Monday, Aug. 27).

Contact: BG.Brooks@Colorado.EDU

SHOW MENU



Football: CU Buffs finding their identity

By Brian Howell Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

Saturday was the mid-point of preseason camp for the Colorado football team.

Fans and media really don't know how the Buffs are looking, because practices have been closed to the outside world. Those inside the gates, however, insist the Buffs are coming together and making rapid progress toward the Sept. 1 opener at Sports Authority Field against Colorado State.

"I think if we had to step on a field next weekend, I think we can be ready," new starting quarterback Jordan Webb said after Saturday's scrimmage at Folsom Field.

The scrimmage, the first formal one of the preseason, was closed, but head coach Jon Embree was pleased, once again, with the progress the Buffs continue to make.

Throughout camp, Embree has stated he has seen his team start to take shape and he likes the attitude they have established.

"They want it," he said. "They don't say it, but their actions how they come out and work, and we've gotten better every practice -- they really do want to be good; they really do want to win.

"It's refreshing to be around a group like that, that really feels that way. They really care and respect each other a lot. There's a lot of camaraderie there, so it's been a good camp."

It's been a productive camp, too.

A year ago, the Buffs were new to Embree and the rest of the coaches. A 3-10 season followed a preseason camp that had a much more instructional feel than this one.

"We always joke about it that he doesn't have to teach us what to wear, how to look and where to line up," senior linebacker Jon Major said. "Now it's more football and position specific. It's been a lot smoother in that sense."

With so much instruction taking place a year ago, the Buffs perhaps didn't have as much of a chance to establish an identity and take shape as a group. That appears to be happening during this camp.

"I feel like it's a really motivated bunch, but even more, we're really resilient," Webb said. "There are times where we'll have second-and-20 and miss the first two balls, but I'll go right back to the same guy and I think they really like that. We're going to make mistakes. It's going to happen and I think with that resilient attitude, it's going to pay off."

From the time he took over as head coach in December 2010, Embree has talked about establishing a powerful run game. That never really materialized last year, but he said this camp has allowed the Buffs to make great strides in that area, too.

"We're really close to having an identity in the run game," he said. "We really are. It's night and day from where we were last year to where we are now. But, we've got to continue to improve and get better."

Quarterback play has improved throughout camp, and Webb talked about gaining comfort in the offense and finding playmakers on offense.

Embree has repeatedly praised the defense, and Major said players on that defense are doing "the things you need to win."

Two weeks into camp and two weeks before the season opener, it sounds as if the Buffs couldn't be happier with

their progress.

"I think it's been one of those camps where you can really see improvement every day," Major said.

Follow Brian on Twitter: @BrianHowell33.

Football: CU Buffs' Marques Mosley makes big play

By Brian Howell and Ryan Thorburn Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

True freshmen Kenneth Crawley and Yuri Wright have been receiving a lot of praise from teammates and coaches. Both are expected to help Colorado at cornerback this season.

Head coach Jon Embree noted that it was Marques Mosley, another physically blessed defensive back in the 2012 class, who turned in the special teams play of camp on Saturday.

Mosley, who has been working primarily at free safety and also some at strong safety, returned a kickoff 100 yards for a touchdown during the Buffs' closed scrimmage.

"He's a smart player, he has real good football instincts, he can run and he likes to hit, he really does," Embree said. "He tweaked his hammy a little bit (earlier in camp), and I was holding my breath when he took that kickoff return not just to blow the whistle.

"But he didn't have to get to fourth gear, which is good news. He was able to run and score staying in third. So I'm really pleased for him."

CU's freshmen are not allowed to talk to the media until after the opener against Colorado State.

Not-so secret identity

The Buffs want to be known as a team that can run the ball down a defense's throat, even when the defense knows what is coming.

That identity which Embree and offensive coordinator Eric Bieniemy are looking for remained a secret last season as CU was routinely down big early and forced to abandon the run.

Starting running back Tony Jones leads what should be a more balanced attack in 2012.

"I think we always had a personality, but I guess a lot of people didn't think it was a strong personality," Jones said after Saturday's scrimmage. "It's toughness. A lot of people are bruised up, but we still put our shoulder pads on and come out here to work."

The offensive and defensive lines both held up well in the "physical" 96-play scrimmage, according to Embree.

That doesn't mean fall camp is over. CU has two-a-days scheduled on Monday and Wednesday.

"We're still in camp mode. So we've got to continue to grind a little bit," Embree said. "I know they're tired, I know they've got a little bit of legs, but we'll keep working and we'll get freshened up when we need to."

The Canty man can

Paul Richardson probably has at least another month of rehab before attempting to play.

Starting quarterback Jordan Webb says he's confident in veteran receivers Tyler McCulloch and Nelson Spruce.

The coaches have been bragging about the potential impact of freshmen Gerald Thomas and Jeff Thomas.

But Keenan Canty believes he made a statement with a solid scrimmage on Saturday. The sophomore wide receiver said the Buffs are ready to open some eyes on Sept. 1.

"Since spring was over, it was like we were way better than last year," said Canty, who had 14 catches for 161 yards

as a freshman. "We had a good grasp on what we were doing offensively and defensively, knowing the plays and stuff. The coaches have high expectations for us, so we have to come out fast."

Backup plan

Embree said he is not ready to name a No. 2 quarterback just yet. Connor Wood and Nick Hirschman continue to battle to be the top backup to Webb.

"Nope. Unless (former Denver Bronco Gary) Kubiak wants to come out, the best No. 2 out there, right?" Embree joked. "Both guys played really good in the scrimmage. I think both of them threw a couple of touchdown passes. Nick would have thrown two, one got called back but it was a beautiful pass, nice deep ball.

"They're both over the fact that they're not the guy and competing again. They're getting back to their normal selves and I expected it to be like that. When you want something and you're competing for it and you don't get that position right away it's natural to be upset and disappointed, but they've bounced back and both had good scrimmages."

Notable

Embree mentioned sophomore linebacker Brady Daigh as one of the standouts from Saturday. With starters Jon Major and Douglas Rippey sitting out, Daigh was able to shine. ... Embree also mentioned that cornerback Greg Henderson and linebacker Kyle Washington played well. ... Starting safety Ray Polk was held out of the scrimmage as he nurses an injury. ... Embree said Darragh O'Neill and Zach Grossnickle had good hang time on their punts. On field goals, he said, "We were good, except for one, and good snap get-offs and good lift on the ball."

Thorburn: Jon Embree excited about CU Buffs' possibilities

By Ryan Thorburn Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

Outside the locked gates at Folsom Field, expectations for the 2012 Buffs remain low.

About as low as a program from a major conference can go.

Colorado received the fewest votes in the Pac-12 preseason poll in July. The conference does appear to be even stronger at the top and deeper near the bottom.

Projected South Division champion USC and North Division favorite Oregon are ranked No. 1 and 5, respectively, in the Associated Press preseason poll. Stanford is No. 21 with Washington and Utah receiving votes.

Arizona (Rich Rodriguez), Arizona State (Todd Graham), UCLA (Jim Mora Jr.) and Washington State (Mike Leach) have all made splashy hires.

And the Buffs -- who play the Ducks in Eugene right after a trip to USC and just before a home game with Washington -- don't draw the beatable Beavers of Oregon State again this year.

USA Today odds maker Danny Sheridan has done his preseason math and recently ranked CU No. 1 on his "10 Worst BCS Teams in College Football" list.

"(Embree) may need to check Craigslist to find some skill players as his team lost every starter at an offensive skill position from last year," Sheridan wrote in a recent piece for Cigar Aficionado. "If the American Indians were to give Colorado's opponents an Indian name, it would be 'Dances in End Zone.'"

So why has Embree been smiling after practices like a guy planning to light a celebratory stogie?

Perhaps after two full weeks of fall camp, the second-year head coach is optimistic about his team's bowl chances in the short term.

Or maybe the sophomores and freshmen Embree has recruited have what it takes to return CU to prominence down the road.

"Both," Embree said. "I'm excited."

Embree is excited about Jordan Webb seizing the opportunity and emerging as the starting quarterback.

Embree is excited about the way his first-string offensive line is coming together, which makes the Buffs "really close to having an identity in the run game."

Embree is excited about Will Pericak's development from a player with "awful" footwork last summer to a possible All-Pac-12 defensive tackle this fall.

Embree is excited about defensive end Chidera Uzo-Diribe preparing to terrorize quarterbacks this season, and Josh Tupou's potential to dominate on the defensive line for years to come.

Embree is excited about the impact his freshmen wide receivers (Gerald Thomas, Jeff Thomas) and defensive backs (Yuri Wright, Kenneth Crawley, Marques Mosley) are going to have this fall on offense, defense and special teams.

Embree is excited about the improved depth, work ethic and chemistry the Buffs have when the rest of us aren't allowed to watch.

Practices may be closed, but it sounds like fans should keep an open mind about these Buffs.

"I feel good about what this team has done and how hard they've worked. I think it goes back to the Utah game," Embree said, referring to the season-ending upset over the Utes last November in Salt Lake City. "The momentum has kind of given them a little taste of winning big games and what it means. We'll see how that translates here soon."

For the most part, Embree was satisfied with Saturday's first official scrimmage of camp, a 96-play dress rehearsal at Folsom Field.

The head coach's mood was much different at the same point in his first camp a year ago when the Buffs' offense looked very shaky against the Buffs defense, which proved to be a sieve.

"There are guys who continually show they can't do it or they won't do it," Embree said after that ominous scrimmage in August 2011, which everyone who attended probably wished had been closed. "We're going to have to stay healthy and we're going to have to get creative. If we get some injuries at some positions ... I'm not going to just put somebody in because they're next on the depth chart."

The Buffs had more than their share of injuries and plenty of other problems during a 3-10 campaign.

That record and the loss of familiar faces like Tyler Hansen, Rodney Stewart, Ryan Miller and Paul Richardson (recovering from injury) makes CU an easy target for us outsiders.

"You guys remember last year's press conference after the scrimmage," Embree said during Saturday's interview session with the media. "It was not acceptable and we came out and played that way. Truth be told, it carried over.

"The guys knew how to practice (in this camp) and they came out and did it. So I'm pleased with that."

Only 13 days until everyone gets to see what all the excitement is about when CU opens the season against Colorado State at Sports Authority Field in Denver.

Follow Ryan on Twitter: @RyanThorburn

Coach Embree: Buffs have "want" factor

Posted:

DenverPost.com

BOULDER — Colorado coach Jon Embree smiled while discussing the first full scrimmage of August camp Saturday. He thought about last year at this same time, how this felt like almost a 180-degree improvement.

"You (reporters) remember the press conference after last year's first scrimmage," Embree said. "It was not acceptable, and then we came out (in games) and played that way, truth be told.

"These guys want it; they really want to be good. That's refreshing to be around. ... I feel good about things."

Observers said newly named starting quarterback Jordan Webb threw a nice touchdown pass in the corner to Keenan Canty.

"It went well," Webb said of the scrimmage, which was closed to media. "We moved the ball well. ... If we had to step on the field next week, we'd be ready."

The scrimmage went more than 100 plays, including special-teams work. Embree said backup quarterbacks Nick Hirschman and Connor Wood also played well, and there is no clear-cut No. 2 yet.

Mosley impresses. Freshman safety Marques Mosley (6-foot-1, 175 pounds) is making an impact. He returned a kickoff 100 yards Saturday and played well in the secondary.

"Marques is a smart player; he has real good football instincts, and he can run," Embree said. "And he likes to hit; he really does."

Footnotes. No injuries were reported. ... Several veterans were held out for precautionary reasons. ... Freshman defensive linemen Josh Tupou, Tyler Henington and Justin Solis continue to stand out, Embree said.

Tom Kensler, The Denver Post

Bufs, Pac-12 defenses must adapt to "basketball on grass" spread formations

By Tom Kensler *The Denver Post* *The Denver Post*

Posted:

DenverPost.com

BOULDER — The challenges of facing all those spread offenses in college football — multiplied by tricky variations and multiple options available for each play — is enough to keep a defensive coach awake at night.

The season opener is still a few weeks away, and Colorado defensive coordinator Greg Brown could already use a nap.

"Yeah, I don't get much sleep," Brown said.

When Brown shuts his eyes, he probably visualizes a chalkboard, with an opposing coach dressed like a mad scientist devising wild and crazy formations.

These days, you never know what offensive minds will plan. The cat-and-mouse game between offense and defense seems to get exponentially more complicated.

Spread offenses may split out four, even five receivers. Consequently, a base defense these days may include five or six defensive backs in a "nickel" or "dime" package.

"It's so innovative with the twists that offensive coordinators put on these schemes; it seems like we're facing a different tact each week," Brown said. "That's tough to handle. You spend a lot of time preparing, covering all the bases about what they might do pass-wise, what they might do with the run."

The demands placed upon defensive coaches in the pass-happy Pac-12 Conference are about to get even more ridiculous.

Four teams have new coaches, and each favors the spread offense. That leaves Colorado, Southern California and Stanford as perhaps the only Pac-12 offenses that won't primarily set up in some fashion of the spread.

"It's become 'basketball on grass,' " CU quarterbacks coach Rip Scherer said.

Also, offensive coaches seem to be calling plays by a stop watch. Huddle? What huddle?

Oregon's "blur" spread offense hardly gives the opposing defense time to catch its breath, nonetheless make substitutions.

"It's now, 'How fast can we go?' " Brown said. "They're all trying to get defenses to become predictable and sit back on their heels in their calls. So as a defense, you have to counteract that by having a lot of up-tempo practices yourself."

Defenses have been forced to adapt and adjust. The evolution of the nickel back is a case in point.

A decade or more ago, the nickel back, or fifth defensive back, was usually a cornerback or safety that wasn't quite good or athletic enough to be a starter. The nickel was called an "extra" defensive back, which in itself connotes a position of lesser importance. But now, a team's nickel back may possess the best coverage skills on the defense.

"I see that all the time — teams bring in an extra cornerback and move their good corner to nickel," said Colorado junior quarterback Jordan Webb, the new Bufs starter who played two years at Kansas.

"That's the way it's going these days," Webb added. "We have to be aware of the nickel because he's usually very fast. He's usually a good tackler as well. We have to account for him on every play."

Nickel backs often are assigned the slot (inside) receiver. But that can change at the snap.

"Defenses seem to be doing a lot of disguising," Webb said.

Colorado's starting nickel back junior Parker Orms was a two-way standout on a Wheat Ridge High School team that claimed a state championship. Orms excelled in both running back and free safety, but he didn't play nickel back until arriving at CU.

"When I got here (to Colorado), and somebody said 'nickel back,' I didn't even know what that was," Orms recalled of playing on the CU scout-team defense while redshirting in 2009.

The nickel back is more involved in run support than regular cornerbacks and must be adept at open-field tackling.

Defenses and individual defenders had better be versatile.

"The game is now all about speed," longtime CU linebackers coach Brian Cabral said. "There's no question speed is more important to a defense than size."

Safeties are often converted to linebackers. Linebackers are turned into defensive ends. Safeties run like cornerbacks.

And it is not just at the college level.

"Instead of concepts trickling down from the NFL to college, it's going the other way," said Brown, who coached 15 years in the pros. "And there's stuff in the major conferences that guys picked up from the smaller ones.

"It's like, 'Hey, let's give this a shot. Let's mix this with this and see what happens.' "

Tom Kensler: 303-954-1280, tkensler@denverpost.com or twitter.com/tomkensler

Spike in yards

Number of major-college teams averaging more than 475 yards in total offense per game:

2011: 12

2010: 13

2009: 3

2008: 9

2007: 8

2006: 3

2005: 11

2004: 6

2003: 8

2002: 4

2001: 5

2000: 3

NCAAsports.com