



Senior tackle Will Pericak (83) finally is fundamentally sound.

Photo Courtesy: CUBuffs.com



## Brooks: Buffs Beef Up Numbers, Sharpen Up In D-Line

Release: 08/26/2012 Courtesy: B.G. Brooks, Contributing Editor

*(Note: Last in a series previewing the Buffs position-by-position during training camp. Today: Defensive line.)*

**BOULDER** - Mike Tuiasosopo firmly believes that good defenses are constructed from the inside out, which explains why he was mystified a couple of springs ago when he first stepped onto the practice field to coach Colorado's defensive interior.

Tuiasosopo's top returning tackle - junior Will Pericak - desperately needed a supersized dose of fundamentals. And Tuiasosopo's position as a whole cried out for a major infusion of real life-sized D-linemen.

That last part of "Tui's" to-do list - replenishing his roster with size and strength - was accomplished in February when CU signed a school-record nine defensive linemen in its Class of 2012.

The first part - a major makeover for Pericak - might have been easier than winning all those recruiting battles. That's because Pericak simply wanted to become a better football player - and in Tuiasosopo's opinion Pericak has gone beyond that.

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"He's a solid starter," Tuiasosopo said. "I don't know what other teams have in this conference in terms of interior guys. I do know about the Star Lotulelei kid at Utah, but Will certainly in my eyes can be in that conversation about the best interior guys in this conference."

Strong words from his coach, but the 6-4, 285-pound Pericak feels strongly about backing them up. He called his two-year improvement "night and day . . . my play has definitely gotten better. But it's probably going to show up more this season than last season."

Pericak's progress literally came from the ground up - where to position his hand, what to do with his feet, how to use his leverage . . . you name it and Pericak needed to learn it, then sharpen it.

"When the new coaching staff came in I had the fundamentals of the last staff, which weren't really like . . . great," he recalled. "It was nothing like I've gotten from 'Tui' and Kanavis (McGhee, DE/OLB coach). With the new coaches coming in, there was a whole new 'how to play,' a whole new technique, really a whole new everything. It took me awhile to pick it up, but now that you have it you just keep building off it. I've gotten the fundamentals down and kept expanding my knowledge."

Choosing his words carefully, "Tui" remembered when he arrived, CU's returning D-linemen "didn't know our way of teaching defensive linemen, coaching them up. It was just a hard concept for (Pericak) to grasp - to the very root of everything, hand placement, understanding what one-gap defense was. It was like, to be honest, a foreign language to a lot of these guys - Will included."

Pericak described his first spring under the new coaching staff "definitely a rough one," and Tuiasosopo added, "People don't realize it, but he lost his job in my first spring here. If you'll remember, it was Conrad Obi and Curtis Cunningham . . . and part of it was because (Pericak) just couldn't figure it out.

"I've always said 'knowledge is power.' I have that (posted) in the back of my meeting room. To be a great defensive player you've got to be very, very knowledgeable. You know what? Will is a very smart player; he's figured it out. That's why he's playing better."

Another possible reason: The cast alongside Pericak greatly improved with the Buffs' 2012 signing class. Nate Bonsu is back for his junior year in the best shape of his career, and freshmen Josh Tupou, Justin Solis and Tyler Henington all figure in Tuiasosopo's interior designs.

Said Tuiasosopo: "I feel good about those five."

Pericak (tackle) and Bonsu (nosetackle) opened with the No. 1 defense in the first major scrimmage of camp. But Tuiasosopo said Tupou "is really, really pushing Nate. Right now I have a lot of confidence in those three rotating in there. Nate came back in as good a shape as Will. Part of that is in the challenge we put to him in the spring: 'get your shoulder, your weight and your mind right.'"

Bonsu (6-1, 280) apparently paid attention to all three challenges and submitted a strong camp. But Tupou (6-3, 325) and Solis (6-3, 305) cast large shadows that Bonsu can't ignore. Tuiasosopo termed Tupou "special" and said Solis is "real stout. He's already low by stature and is hard to move. And he's beginning to figure it all out."

Flanking Tuiasosopo's interior guys are defensive ends Chidera Uzo-Diribe, a junior, and true sophomore Juda Parker. McGhee believes both will be solid on the edges.

Uzo-Diribe and Parker have gained about 20 pounds apiece since last season, now weighing nearly 255 each. And both contend the mandated weight gains have made them better. McGhee agrees: "I see a big difference in them. I told those guys last spring they needed to put on weight, but they were both kind of concerned it would affect their speed. I said, 'Not if you put it on right.'"

"Malcolm (Blacken, director of speed, strength and conditioning) has done a great job of balancing their speed

and strength.' The most amazing thing for them for them is that when they put pads on and come out here, they see they have more strength and leverage and didn't lose any of their speed."

Uzo-Diribe called his weight gain and accompanying weight-room improvement "a concentrated effort on my part and their (strength coaches) part. I knew I had to get stronger. It was one of the reasons I wasn't very effective against the run; I just wasn't strong. So I had to definitely improve my strength in the weight room to be able to hold my own."

After a break-in freshman season (he appeared in nine games), Parker said he now understands "what's expected of me. It took time to get in shape physically and mentally. I've conditioned myself for this and the transition has been a lot smoother. I know what I'm supposed to be doing; I know the big picture for this defense."

Parker's personal goals center on being a consistent contributor: "When people look at me they can be secure knowing I'm going to have my side of the ball," he said. "I'm going to make my tackles; I'm going to give this defense a solid starting defensive end."

Backing up Uzo-Diribe and Parker will be sophomore Kirk Poston and true freshmen John Stuart and Samson Kafovalu. McGhee called Poston his most improved player in August camp, adding Poston was "a little lighter than we wanted him coming back (250 listed), but he's strong. He's been most impressive through camp."

Stuart and Kafovalu, said McGhee, picked things up quickly but still have some "bad high school habits we have to get them out of. But they are guys who have to play."

For CU's returning defensive players, it was sometimes difficult not to gawk at the overall size of the incoming freshmen on their side of the ball.

Parker was impressed: "We're getting the 'size guys,' guys who are ready to come in and play," he said. "I know the younger guys right now have to get over the hump in the mental aspect - the same thing I faced last year . . . Once we get them mentally right I think we'll be fast and have a solid defensive line."

## THE INSIDE LOOK AT . . .

### Defensive line

**Coach:** DT Mike Tuiasosopo, second season on CU staff; DE Kanavis McGhee, second season on CU staff.

**Returning starters:** DT Will Pericak, Sr.

**Returnees:** DE Chidera Uzo-Diribe, Jr.; NT Nate Bonsu, Jr.; DE Juda Parker, Soph.; DE Kirk Poston, Soph.; DE Andre Nichols, Soph.; John Tusso, Fr.-RS.

**Newcomers:** Tyler Henington, Fr.; Samson Kafovalu, Fr.; Kory Rasmussen, Fr.; Justin Solis, Fr.; Johnny Stuart, Fr.; Josh Tupou, Fr.; De'Jon Wilson, Fr.; Thor Eaton, Fr.; Kisima Jagne, Fr. (scheduled to enroll in January); Derek McCartney, Fr. (scheduled to enroll in January).

**Key losses:** DT Curtis Cunningham, DE Dave Goldberg, DE Josh Hartigan, DE Tony Poremba, NT Conrad Obi, DE Cordary Allen (left program), DT Kyle Koch (left program), DE Casey Walker (left program).

**Stat line:** CU has lacked a preeminent QB sacker of late, but Hartigan came close with eight in 2011. Uzo-Diribe recorded 51/2 sacks last season and is expected to increase that total this fall. No other returning defensive lineman recorded a sack in 2011.

**Bottom line:** This is another position where CU's overall youth likely will be on display - very quickly. Pericak is

a solid tackle and Uzo-Diribe and Parker can be forces at end, but they need help. Parker progressed nicely in his first season and must make more strides as a sophomore. The Buffs gave up 183.9 rushing yards a game last season (10th Pac-12, 89th NCAA) and need immediate help in stopping the run from those large D-line recruits like Tupou, Solis and Henington. A slimmed down, stronger Bonsu also should benefit the interior and Pericak is primed for a productive final season.

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SHOW MENU



## New Colorado starting QB Jordan Webb out to prove people wrong

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

Posted:

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BOULDER — For Colorado football fans still aghast that the Buffaloes' starting quarterback, Jordan Webb, is a transfer from a downtrodden Kansas program, Dave Beaty has a message.

"What happened to us at Kansas wasn't because of Jordan," said Beaty, now the receivers coach at Texas A&M. "If you give that guy protection, he'll pick you apart. If he has time, I'm telling you, he will hurt you."

Beaty coached the Jayhawks' wide receivers when Webb made 19 starts for KU in 2010 and 2011. Yes, Kansas went 4-15 with Webb at the controls, but no, that shouldn't be a concern, said Beaty.

Listed generously by CU as 6-foot-1, Webb lacks prototypical quarterback size. At Kansas he was listed at 6-foot. But the scope of his competitiveness has never been questioned and it didn't take him long to win the job in fall camp after transferring this summer. In two years at Kansas, he threw for 3,079 yards with 20 touchdowns and 20 interceptions. He also was sacked 52 times, and escaped mayhem on numerous other occasions, but did not complain about it.

Even now, Webb doesn't want to hear anybody suggest that a dearth of talent among his supporting cast was the problem.

"I would never throw those guys under the bus," Webb said. "I loved my teammates at Kansas. We worked our butts off. Unfortunately, it didn't work out. They've got a new regime there, so hopefully that will work out for them."

Not long after replacing fired Jayhawks coach Turner Gill, Charlie Weis called Webb into his office and told the two-year starter that there was no future for him in Lawrence. Weis was bringing in two transfer quarterbacks, senior Dayne Crist from Notre Dame for 2012 and Jake Heaps from BYU for the following two years.

"I respect his decision. He pretty much said I wasn't in their plans," Webb said. "I don't agree with it, so that's why I'm here."

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As with so many new relationships these days, it began with an e-mail. In this case, a flurry of e-mails. Webb fired off e-mails to Colorado's offensive coaches, saying he was looking for a new place to play. The e-mails included a link to his Kansas highlights. Colorado quarterbacks coach Rip Scherer hadn't paid much attention to the e-mail until offensive line coach Steve Marshall poked his head into Scherer's office.

"Steve said, 'Did you see the tape on the quarterback from Kansas? He's an interesting guy,' " Scherer recalled. "I looked at it and said, 'Wow.' "

Scherer and Marshall watched the highlights again, together. Scherer then called Webb. It was early in the day and Colorado head coach Jon Embree was out of town. But Scherer thought he'd better not wait.

"I told Jordan, 'Look, we just signed a high school quarterback (6-foot-6 Shane Dillon from San Diego) that we really like, and I'm not sure we have a scholarship available,' " Scherer recalled of their initial conversation. Scherer and Webb agreed to stay in touch. And, when attrition led to a scholarship being available, Embree signed off on bringing in Webb, though he already had four scholarship quarterbacks: Texas transfer Connor Wood, sophomore Nick Hirschman, redshirt freshman Stevie Joe Dorman and Dillon.

Taking Webb made sense, however. Dillon is coming off shoulder surgery and will redshirt this season. Hirschman sat out spring drills to heal from a third foot surgery. And Wood, though a third-year sophomore, has yet to throw a pass in a college game.

Embree named Webb his starter following the eighth day of August camp.

"What interested me about Jordan was that he had started 19 games," Scherer said. "A backup quarterback from somewhere wouldn't have interested me. We have guys who haven't played games who are good players. In watching Jordan's film at Kansas, I saw a guy that was really accurate. He made plays. He threw the ball downfield really well. He showed some mobility.

"And there's no doubt Jordan has toughness. He's played under adverse situations."

In an upset victory against Georgia Tech, Webb leveled a linebacker after pitching the ball to a Jayhawks running back. Beaty said Webb's spirit inspired the team. He would get crushed by a pass rush only to bounce back up as if nothing happened.

"I see that competitiveness in Jordan in practices all the time," CU sophomore wide receiver Keenan Canty said. "The defense might get us one time, and he'll be in the huddle saying, 'Let's go back out there and get it.' "

A winner in high school

Webb grew up in Union, Mo., 40 miles west of St. Louis. Union High School went 30-4 during Webb's three seasons as a starter and he accounted for 108 touchdowns. Although he was ranked as highly as the state's ninth-best prospect, Missouri never offered a scholarship. So what did Webb do? He signed with Mizzou's hated rival.

"He plays with a chip on his shoulder," Embree said. "He's always out to prove something."

Webb, sturdily built at 205 pounds, overcomes his lack of height by staying strong in the pocket. "Growing up, I was never afraid of contact," Webb said. "At Kansas, I got beat up a little bit. But I always tried to come back out and keep swinging."

To be an effective passer, Webb needs to improvise to find passing lanes between behemoth blockers. "When you're not 6-3, and you're trying to survive, you find windows (to throw)," Scherer said. "You find a way to cope in the pocket."

Until he takes a snap, Webb doesn't necessarily look like a quarterback. But CU believes it has found a winner, despite his record at Kansas.

"Jordan is kind of like a 'silent assassin.' He sneaks up on people," said Buffs junior left tackle David Bakhtiari. "He's kind of laid-back because he knows what he wants and how to get there."

CU receivers have remarked during camp about how "catchable" Webb's passes are. Scherer said many of Webb's 20 interceptions at Kansas were the result of forcing passes into heavy coverage after the Jayhawks fell behind. "That's a trap quarterbacks can fall into," Scherer said. "We're working to get that out of his repertoire."

Webb already has shown to be a quick learner. That should come as no surprise for someone who graduated a semester early from high school and earned a bachelor's degree at KU in three years, which, under NCAA rules, still allows him two years of eligibility at CU.

He smiled when it was suggested that CU might have a better 2012 than Kansas will with Crist.

"That's the plan," Webb said. "But I'm not one to seek out revenge. I'm just focusing on the guys here."

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Bufs coming out of camp

Biggest surprise: Quarterback Jordan Webb. The Kansas transfer didn't arrive until July but, after cramming through the playbook, beat out returnee Nick Hirschman and spring-game starter Connor Wood.



**Biggest concern:** Wide receiver depth. Until junior Paul Richardson is fully recovered from offseason knee surgery, the most experienced receivers are sophomores Keenan Canty (14 catches in 2011) and Tyler McCulloch (10). Redshirt freshman Nelson Spruce likely will start in Richardson's place.

**Key camp injury:** Safety Will Harlos. After the sophomore suffered an apparent concussion early in the second week of camp, CU coach Jon Embree suggested Harlos retire from the sport. Harlos missed most of the 2011 season with post-concussion symptoms.

**Impact freshmen:** It would not be surprising if CU opens against CSU with three true freshman starters: DT Josh Tupou (6-foot-3, 325 pounds), CB Kenneth Crawley (6-1, 170) and FB Christian Powell (6-0, 235). Embree said true freshmen will play at several positions.

**Swing game:** Nov. 10 at Arizona. For a rebuilding Colorado team shooting for a bowl bid, reaching six victories may not allow much room for error. It would help immensely if the Buffs could bag a Pac-12 road win. New Wildcats coach Rich Rodriguez struggled to get his version of the spread offense implemented at Michigan in his first year. Tom Kensler, The Denver Post