



Receiver Nelson Spruce is set to debut Saturday against CSU.

Photo Courtesy: CUBuffs.com



## Brooks: Spruce Ready To Catch On In College Debut

Release: 08/30/2012 Courtesy: B.G. Brooks, Contributing Editor

**BOULDER** - No way to support this, but the 2012 Colorado Buffaloes might not have enough seniors (eight) to qualify as having an "old guard." To the contrary, there might be enough sophomores, redshirt freshmen and true freshmen (47) on the depth chart to make Buffs coach Jon Embree feel at times like he's running a day-care center.

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Nelson Spruce falls into that latter category - he's a redshirt freshman - but it doesn't feel like it to him, his position coach or his teammates. Still, Spruce is set to make his college debut on Saturday when CU faces in-state rival Colorado State in Denver's Sports Authority Field at Mile High (2 p.m., FX).

"He's more like a veteran guy; nothing really fazes him," CU receivers coach Bobby Kennedy said. "He's a guy who's really confident in his ability. He's deceptive in the things he does. I'm really excited for him; I'm expecting a really good year."

Spruce has only spent a year in Boulder, but it's been a year well spent. He arrived last summer about 10 pounds heavier than he is now, believing he should be beefed up to cope with the college game. Not so fast, kid...and he wasn't.

"I think that's a little of what he didn't understand last year," Kennedy said. "More weight wasn't the answer for him...he realizes now he plays faster at a lighter weight."

Spruce's current weight is 195, but with 10 more pounds on his 6-2 frame, "I could tell and coach Kennedy could tell that I wasn't as quick as I needed to be, not as explosive as I could be," he recalled. "Shedding those 10 pounds really helped. I feel quicker in and out of my cuts, going downfield, everything feels better."

The weight loss wasn't Spruce's only gain entering this season. Over his high school career in Westlake Village, Calif., Spruce caught 149 passes for 2,795 yards and 37 touchdowns. But as he tried to decipher and digest CU's offense last summer, said Kennedy, "His mind kind of locked up his body a little bit - but that's like it is for most young players."

Come spring, though, Spruce had a handle on his playbook and was functioning more freely. "He had a grasp of the offense and could play faster," Kennedy recalled. "He was doing a really nice job with routes and was catching the ball."

As much as anything Spruce did to comprehend CU's offensive schemes, a camp adjustment by Embree and offensive coordinator Eric Bieniemy aided Spruce as well as the incoming freshmen. Last August, said Kennedy, there could be three offensive "installs" in three days of camp. This year, all "installs" were done over a longer period.

Said Kennedy: "It gave all the guys a chance to grasp one part of the offense before moving on to another. They knew it. It helped all our guys with the mindset that 'I've got this, whatever formation I'm in I know the concept.' That really helped (Spruce) and all the rest."

Plus, being in the playbook a second year, Spruce said the Buffs "can expect to be better (offensively). Last year everyone was new to everything; we're more comfortable this year. Even during the spring, the coaches said we were better at that point than the first year."

Spruce won't win many 40-yard dash competitions at his position - maybe not even with a rehabilitating Paul Richardson and certainly not with freshman speedster Gerald Thomas. But he's fast enough and deceptive with more than his speed. If defensive backs go to sleep on him, it's at their own risk.

"He's maybe not the lightning in a bottle, but that's only 20 percent of the time," senior linebacker Jon Major said. "It's better to have almost an 80 or 90 percent guy like that."

"He's one of those rare guys...he's developed really quickly. Even though it'll be his first year, you couldn't really tell by the way he plays."

Inevitably, Spruce has drawn comparisons with former CU receiver Scotty McKnight. Spruce is OK with that because, well, McKnight left Boulder holding school records in career receptions (215) and receiving touchdowns (22).

Here's Major on the Spruce-McKnight play-alike subject: "Yeah, (Spruce) reminds me of Scotty. He's a very clean route runner with really, really good hands. He's reliable; he'll probably be a go-to target because he's consistent. He's going to do everything right."

For the record, Spruce is bigger than McKnight and maybe a tick or two faster, but he's not going to get picky with details. "If I could have the type of career he had and help the offense like he did, that definitely would be good...I'd take it," Spruce said.

"I get that (comparison) pretty often. I think the type of players we are, working out of the slot, guys with kind of good hands, running good routes...there are a lot of similarities. But obviously, there's a lot for me to learn to reach his level."

Kennedy, who coached receivers at Texas before joining Embree's staff two winters ago, has shown his CU bunch one-on-one tapes of NFL receivers such as Larry Fitzgerald, former Bronco Ed McCaffrey, former Longhorn Jordan Shipley and others matched against NFL corners. The lesson, said Spruce, is to help the young Buffs work on their footwork at the line of scrimmage, battling press coverage, etc. Kennedy said the one-on-one tapes entertain his players as well as offer them styles and, more importantly, fundamentals to emulate.

"I've seen with all my guys, but particularly with Tyler (McCulloch), Nelson and Keenan (Canty)," he said. "They see those tapes and I tell them if you want to get there, here's what you've got to do. But if you're satisfied with where you are, no, you don't have to do those things."

Spruce isn't satisfied. "I think he's a guy that strives on competition," Kennedy said. "The neat thing about him is he comes from a really neat family; it's important to them and him that he does well. He's been very reliable; I'm excited to see him in live action."

Spruce is excited to offer Kennedy that chance. "It's slowly starting to hit me that I'm finally going to be on the field," he said. "But I'm ready. I'm comfortable out there."

**BUFF BITS:** Speaking at Thursday's Boulder Chamber of Commerce luncheon in Balch Fieldhouse, Embree called this summer of work "the best since I've been here" - and he included his time as an assistant coach. He said the Buffs "got better with every practice" with perhaps Wednesday being the exception. "We were a little ragged because we're so excited" for the opener, he said. "We understand what this game's about and what it means." He implored CU fans to be loud at Sports Authority Field on Saturday and at Folsom Field a week from Saturday when Sacramento State visits. "Give us home field (advantage)," he said. "We're going to do our part."...Senior defensive tackle Will Pericak introduced Embree Thursday, calling him "the best coach I ever had...he's a players' coach." Pericak also said he was jealous of freshman nosetackle Josh Tupou because he gets to play four years under Embree and his staff...As of noon Wednesday, CU had sold 33,794 for Saturday's Rocky Mountain Showdown. That figure included 7,250 student tickets.

**Contact:** [BG.Brooks@Colorado.EDU](mailto:BG.Brooks@Colorado.EDU)

SHOW MENU



## Brotherhood drives Colorado linebackers Doug Rippy and Jon Major

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

Posted:

DenverPost.com

BOULDER — Rippy and Major. Your neighbor's pets? A children's book? Comedy act? It's a set of twins on the Colorado football team. No, that's not right either. But senior linebackers Doug Rippy and Jon Major jokingly call themselves "twins."

They may not look alike, but Rippy and Major have become the heart and soul of the Buffaloes' defense. And that's double trouble for opponents, starting with Colorado State in Saturday's 2 p.m. season opener at Sports Authority Field at Mile High.

Pals since they arrived at CU in 2008, Rippy (6-foot-3 and 245 pounds) and Major (6-2, 235) room together and hang out together away from football, then complement each other on the playing field — when they're not watching game film together.

The "twins thing" seems to be a running joke among the Buffs. But linebackers coach Brian Cabral is all for it. Anything to build camaraderie and chemistry.

"I think it's great," Cabral said. "It's totally amazing that they're doing this. They come from two totally different backgrounds."

Major is a Caucasian from Parker, an upscale Denver suburb. Rippy, an African-American, is a city kid who was born in Philadelphia and moved with his family to Ohio, where he played high school football in Columbus and Dayton.

At Colorado, they have learned together and grown together, and now lead a linebacker unit, along with junior Derrick Webb, that should be the strength of CU's defense.

They have experienced so much together — including being there for moral support when each had seasons curtailed by knee injuries — Major in 2008 and 2010, Rippy in 2009 and 2011.

Last season, Rippy was leading the team in tackles with 62 when he tore knee ligaments in the seventh game, against Washington, and was done for the year. Despite playing for little more than half the season, Pac-12 coaches voted Rippy honorable mention all-conference. He is among 51 on the official "watch list" for the 2012 Butkus Award.

Major finished last season as the team's top tackler (85) and is ranked as a preseason second team all-Pac-12 linebacker by at least one preseason college football magazine.

It's too bad there isn't a category for "twins."

"We were just joking around and both of us just kind of came up with calling ourselves 'twins,' " Major said. "We just wanted to have fun with it. It's corny. But little things like that make life fun."

Although Rippy and Major are similar in size and both have excellent speed for a linebacker, their styles of play differ. "Jon thinks everything through, he processes and analyzes," Cabral said. "Whereas, Doug just goes. Both styles can be effective, very much so. And they're going to be good for each other on the field."

Rippy said they "can feed off" each other.

"As seniors, Jon and I know what it takes," Rippy said. "Jon has really helped me over the years. I can really say that this year, watching film with each other and with the younger players, it has really helped bring everybody along. It's helped with our chemistry and with chemistry with the other players."

There are no hard feelings in a true friendship. Criticism is taken constructively, not personally.

"If I can get on him about something, he can get on me about something," Major said. "That just makes each other better. That helps everybody because, being linebackers on the same page, it's the unit a lot."

In Colorado's system, Rippy begins his second year as the starter at "Mike" (inside) linebacker. Major is a three-year starter at "Sam" (outside) linebacker. Both have been around long enough to have worked at all linebacker spots.

In fact, Major said they sometimes switch places on the field before a snap. Do Cabral and defensive coordinator Greg Brown know about this?

"If we do it right, they don't care," Major said. "It's just a way to have fun — or cause chaos. It's nice to have that versatility and maybe confuse the other team."

Tom Kensler: 303-954-1280, [tkensler@denverpost.com](mailto:tkensler@denverpost.com) or [twitter.com/tomkensler](https://twitter.com/tomkensler)

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AUGUST 31, 2012, 7:00 AM

## Colorado's top 5: taking the next step

By **TOM KENSLER** |  No Comments

BOULDER — Here is part four in a series of Colorado's top five players in various categories, this time the top five unheralded players who were on the roster last year and now are ready to be contributors in 2012. The media was prohibited from watching practices, so these lists were developed from dozens of interviews with coaches and players during fall camp.

### Colorado's top 5: taking the next step

1. Wide receiver Nelson Spruce — The 6-foot-2, 195-pounder could go from 2011 redshirt to the Buffs' top receiver in 2012. Said to have developed great chemistry with new CU quarterback Jordan Webb.
2. Left offensive guard Alex Lewis — The 6-foot-6, 285-pound sophomore starter has quick enough feet to have played some last year as a reserve tight end. Coaches believe the Arizonan, who physically is still filling out, has almost unlimited potential.
3. Defensive end Juda Parker — The 6-3, 250-pounder from Hawaii showed some things in spot duty last year as a true freshman but now gets his chance as the starter. If he can join junior starter Chidera Uzo-Diribe as effective bookend pass rushers, that would take some pressure off the youngsters in the secondary.
4. Right offensive guard Daniel Munyer — The 6-2, 295-pound sophomore from Los Angeles made a seamless switch from center to guard last year and now has the starting job to himself.
5. Tailback D.D. Goodson — The quick, 5-7, 190-pound Texan, volunteered to help out in the depleted defensive secondary last year and did an admirable job. The sophomore has returned to offense and is listed as the top back-up to Tony Jones.

Honorable mention: Linebacker Brady Daigh, tight end Kyle Slavin, offensive tackle Stephane Nembot.

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**The Field House — Blogs — The Denver Post**

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AUGUST 30, 2012, 4:31 PM

## Colorado's top 5: keying the defense

By **TOM KENSLE** |  No Comments

**BOULDER** — Third in a series of Colorado's top 5 players in different categories, this time the top 5 as keys to the defense. Reporters were prohibited from watching practices, so these lists were developed after interviewing dozens of players and coaches during fall camp.

Colorado's Top 5 as keys to the defense:

1. Free safety Ray Polk — The senior must direct traffic in a secondary that has four true freshmen in its two-deep, including starting left cornerback Kenneth Crawley. A three-year starter, Polk (6-1, 205) eagerly took on that task and spent additional time in the film room during the offseason so he could learn the responsibilities of every position in the secondary, including the nickel-back and dime-back.
2. Defensive end Chidera Uzo-Diribe — Quarterbacks in the pass-happy Pac-12 will pick you apart when they have time. The Buffs absolutely, positively need a big junior year from Uzo-Diribe (6-3, 250), their best pass rusher.
3. Linebacker Doug Rippy — Before being felled last fall by a knee injury, the senior from Ohio was CU's best defensive player. If he hasn't lost a step or any aggressiveness, his return will be huge for the Buffs.
4. Cornerback Greg Henderson — After earning a starting job last season as a rookie, it's imperative that the 5-11, 185-pounder have an even more consistent season year as a sophomore. If Henderson can be a shut-down corner on the right side, it will enable CU safeties to help out true freshman Kenneth Crawley on the left side.
5. Defensive tackle Will Pericak — The Boulder native, perhaps best known for the odd "Pre-check" pronunciation of his last name, has been solid throughout his career. Colorado needs him to take the next step and be spectacular. If Pac-12 teams find they can run the ball on the Buffs, it opens up infinite options in the passing game. That's trouble.

Honorable mention: outside linebacker Jon Major, nickel-back Parker Orms, inside linebacker Derrick Webb, inside linebacker Brady Daigh.

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AUGUST 30, 2012, 10:56 AM

## Colorado football's top 5: keying the offense

By **TOM KENSLE** |  No Comments

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**BOULDER** — Here is the second in a series to Colorado's top 5. Keep in mind, reporters were kept out of practices so this ranking was developed from interviews with dozens of coaches and players during fall camp.

Colorado's top five as keys to the offense:

1. Quarterback Jordan Webb — I have always contended that the quarterback is more important to the success of a college football team than it is in the NFL or even in high school. At 6-foot-1 and 205 pounds, the Kansas transfer isn't prototypical QB size. But it speaks volumes that he could win the job two weeks into August drills while beating out players that had been in the system. Coaches rave about his competitiveness, toughness and decision making.
2. Tailback Tony Jones — It's not going to be easy filling the shoes of Rodney "Speedy" Stewart, who became a four-year starter and finished as CU's second all-time rusher behind Buffs legend (and current offensive coordinator) Eric Bieniemy. But Jones, about the same size (5-7, 190) as Stewart, may be a more consistent runner than Stewart, who was always looking for the long gainer. Don't be surprised if Jones tops the team in receptions. Like Speedy, he has excellent hands.
3. Left tackle David Bakhtiari — CU's best offensive lineman, the 6-4, 295-pound junior is on some national award watch lists and deservedly so. There was talk in the offseason that Bakhtiari might move to guard in order to allow sophomore Alex Lewis (6-6, 285) to play left tackle. But coaches chose to keep Bakhtiari as the protector of the quarterback's blind side and shifted Lewis to left guard.
4. Wide receiver Nelson Spruce — The redshirt freshman from suburban Los Angeles might be Colorado's next Scotty McKnight in that the 6-2, 195-pounder runs exceptional routes and has soft hands. Also, he is said to have sneaky speed. With homerun threat Paul Richardson (ACL surgery) having decided to redshirt this season, CU must move the chains playing small ball. Look for Spruce to be a frequent target on third down.
5. Tight end Nick Kasa — The former national blue-chip defensive end from Legacy High School has found a home at tight end, and the senior has one season to salvage an otherwise disappointing college career. The guess here is that he does. At 6-6 and 260 pounds, he will be a matchup nightmare for safeties and linebackers.

Honorable mention: wide receiver Tyler McCulloch, center Gus Handler, right tackle Jack Harris, wide receiver Gerald Thomas

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## Football: CU Buffs backup QBs have seen field in past

By Kyle Ringo Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

History says Connor Wood better be ready.

The Colorado football program certainly isn't alone in having to turn to its second-- or even third-team quarterback often through the years. But it has become a near certainty during the past decade that coaches will need a quarterback other than the starter to take meaningful snaps at some point in the season.

Wood, a third-year sophomore who transferred to CU from Texas at this time last year, was named the backup to Jordan Webb this week in the season opener against Colorado State.

Coach Jon Embree said coaches chose Wood as the backup in Week 1 because he made better decisions and was more consistent in practice this week. Embree said Wood will have to continue to earn that job in the coming weeks as he continues to battle with fellow third-year sophomore Nick Hirschman.

"I'm confident and I don't think we have to adjust anything from an offensive standpoint," Embree said about the possibility of having to turn to his backup. "He can go in and run the offense and be fairly efficient at it."

Regardless of who is the backup each week, it seems likely CU coaches will have to call on Wood or Hirschman at some point this season.

The last time the Buffs had one quarterback start every game and take just about every meaningful snap was 2007, when redshirt freshman Cody Hawkins led the Buffs to a 6-6 regular season record and a bowl game.

Tyler Hansen came close last year, but a concussion led coaches to start Hirschman at Arizona State in the middle of the season. Hansen ended up playing most of the game however with Hirschman being limited by a foot injury.

The backup role might be perfectly suited to Wood at this point in his development after he lost the starting job to Webb in camp. He will undoubtedly get some opportunities at some point this season late in games that have already been decided.

"I play my best ball when I'm holding on to the game loosely," Wood said earlier this year. "When I'm white-knuckling the thing... You know if I perform well, I'm happy. If I don't perform well, I'm not happy. It's too much pressure. So when I'm just holding the game loosely and picturing it as just a game and having fun out there, it's a joy to play."

Follow Kyle on Twitter @KyleRingo

## Buffs turn to Kansas transfer at QB

Aug. 30

coloradoan.com

### Jordan Webb file

- Position: quarterback
- Height: 6-1
- Weight: 205
- Year: Junior
- Hometown: Union, Mo.
- High school/previous college: Union/Kansas
- Notable: Webb, a two-time all-state quarterback in high school in Missouri, stated 19 games during the past two seasons at Kansas before completing his degree in three years and transferring during the summer to Colorado for graduate school. He has two years of eligibility remaining.

### Ramblings

C'mon Rams fans let's hear you. Join CSU football reporters Kelly Lyell and Matt Stephens on their live blog on Coloradoan.com as they answer questions about the CSU-CU game starting at 1 p.m. before the game, during the game and going an hour past the game. It's easy to join, just visit Coloradoan.com. Post-game we will have CSU coach Jim McElwain's interview as well as player interviews.

BOULDER — While most college quarterbacks use spring to jockey for position, Jordan Webb was frantically completing work on his undergraduate degree at the University of Kansas.

Maybe, spring drills are overrated.

Two weeks ago, the quarterback who started 19 games for Kansas during the past two seasons, was named the starter at CU by second-year coach Jon Embree after winning a three-man race for the job. Webb, a 6-foot-1, 205-pound junior from Union, Mo., where he was an all-state quarterback as both a junior and senior at Union High School, will play his first game for the Buffs on Saturday in the annual Rocky Mountain Showdown in Denver against CSU.

"It was difficult, but I worked really hard and I knew that if I did, it would pay off some way or another," Webb said at a news conference Tuesday.

While Nick Hirschman was sidelined with a foot injury and Texas transfer Connor Wood was prepping to be the starting quarterback for the University of Colorado last spring, Webb was taking advantage of an NCAA rule that allows athletes who have earned their degrees to transfer without penalty for graduate school, earned his bachelor's degree in psychology in three years and was in Boulder by the end of May.

He participated in summer workouts with the Buffs, learned the playbook and gained the trust of his teammates and eventually his new coach.

"He's just a competitor, you can just tell," said teammate Parker Orms, a junior safety. "He's a baller. He's good at his position, and he can throw the ball, he can run a little bit, and we're just excited to see a new guy out there and see how he does."

Webb started seven games and played in nine as a redshirt freshman at Kansas in 2010, throwing for 1,195 yards and seven touchdowns. Last year, he completed 179 of 281 passes for 1,884 yards and 13 touchdowns, with 12 interceptions, for the 2-10 Jayhawks.

Webb, 21, likely would have been the Jayhawks' starter again this season had the school not changed coaches, firing Turner Gill at the end of the season and replacing him with former Notre Dame coach Charlie Weiss. Dayne Crist, a former Notre Dame quarterback, transferred to Kansas to play for Weiss, who immediately announced he would be

the starter, as did former Brigham Young quarterback Jake Heaps, who will be eligible next year after sitting out this season.

So Webb packed up his bags and headed to Boulder, confident he could earn the starting job.

Webb was a quick learner, Embree said, and a natural leader.

“He was good with decisions; where to go with the ball, when to run, when to work the pocket,” Embree said. “He is very good at making decisions.”

Webb is more of a pocket passer than the quarterback he’s replacing, Travis Hansen, who was a senior last year. He’s a player the Colorado State University defenders are studying this week, senior linebacker James Skelton said, but not necessarily one that they’ve singled out for extra attention. Safety Trent Matthews, in fact, didn’t even know who Webb was Monday, when he was asked about the CU quarterback during a news conference.

“No disrespect, but at the end of the day, he’s just another quarterback,” Skelton said.

Embree and the Buffs hope he’s a lot more. They’re counting on Webb to help them bounce back from a 3-10 season last year, Embree’s first as the head coach at his alma mater, and lead CU to its first winning season since 2005.

“I believe in him and have confidence in him,” Embree said. “He will be a good player for us in that position. ... His teammates have taken to him, and I’m excited to see him play.”

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