

## Mike Klis: Former CU Buffs Solder, Smith find Super success in NFL

By Mike Klis *The Denver Post* *The Denver Post*

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NEW ORLEANS —They were like sunbeams during an otherwise dark period.

Nate Solder and Jimmy Smith posted a combined 13-23 record with no bowl appearances in their final three years as starters for the Colorado Buffaloes.

Yet, both were first-round picks in the 2011 NFL draft. And both have been to Super Bowls within their first two years — Solder as a rookie offensive tackle and tight end for the New England Patriots last year, Smith as a nickel corner Sunday for the Baltimore Ravens.

How can not one, but two first-round talents play on college teams that went 5-7, 3-9 and 5-7 over three seasons?

"We never really got it going when I was there," Smith said. "But we're in the best bowl now."

There's no need to stop the presses for this, but there was a woeful disconnect at the end of the Dan Hawkins era. It was so bad, Hawkins helped get two head coaches fired in three years — himself late in 2010 and Jon Embree after 2012.

All new CU coach Mike MacIntyre needs now is about 10 more Solders and Smiths. The tall, lean and swift Smith was a playmaking cornerback at CU, but he has been hampered by injuries almost from the start of his NFL career. He strained his groin in his rookie training camp, then suffered a severe high ankle sprain in his NFL debut.

This year, he had surgery to repair a sports hernia. He's back, but hardly at 100 percent.

"You don't become 100 percent from sports hernias unless you rest it for a while," Smith said. "I haven't been resting it. I've been fighting to get back.

"It's been rough. Been a rough start. I've been hammered some by these injuries the first two years. But the best years are yet to come."

The best part about Smith's NFL career is it's been trouble-free off the field. He entered the draft with character flags after a couple of failed drug tests.

"I made a couple bad decisions, and I got tagged or labeled," he said. "But nothing changed. I'm just being me."

And he credits his time at CU with helping him grow up. Just because a program doesn't win doesn't mean the college experience can't help a kid.

"It shaped and molded me into the person I am," Smith of his CU experience. "I wouldn't have traded anything for it."

She said it. The first e-mail response I received from the Broncos raising ticket prices: "Oh, boy, now it costs

me 4.2 percent more to watch Manning take a knee!"

Harbaugh vs. Harbaugh. Easily my favorite moment during Super Bowl week was the Friday morning joint news conference of John and Jim Harbaugh. John is the coach of the Ravens; Jim is coach of the San Francisco 49ers.

May the best brother win.

I'm like most people: I like John better. He seems like the better guy. But it also seems like Jim is better in sports. He's taller, bigger, a better football player.

And it also seems like Jim is the better coach. John is a very good coach. But Jim is special, maybe the best all-around coach since Jimmy Johnson.

Remember a couple of years ago, when no one thought a successful college coach could make it in the NFL? Jim Harbaugh went from 12-1 with a convincing Orange Bowl win for Stanford in 2010 to the NFC championship game with the 49ers in 2011 and now the Super Bowl in the 2012 season.

John is the underdog in this coaching matchup.

Kaepernick vs. Flacco. The Harbaughs were the first to remind the media Friday this is about the players they coach, not the coaches. Which is why I believe the quarterbacks are the primary reason for the unpredictability of this Super Bowl.

I'm fascinated by the 49ers' Colin Kaepernick, maybe because I haven't seen another quarterback quite like him. But there will be tough days ahead.

And during my Tuesday Morning Quarterback rankings the past two years, the Ravens' Joe Flacco has been one of the most difficult to evaluate. He is a top-10 talent but also inconsistent.

The Super Bowl has had better quarterback matchups.

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## Dathan Ritzenhein heats up USA Cross Country Championships despite bitter cold



By [Peter J. Wallner | pwallner@mlive.com](mailto:pwallner@mlive.com)

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Dathan Ritzenhein endured icy conditions in St. Louis, Mo., on Saturday, Feb. 2, to finish second in the USA Cross Country Championships.

Chris Derrick, a 22-year-old making his professionally-sponsored debut, won the 12K race in 35 minutes, 38.6 seconds despite a wind-chill temperature near zero at Forest Park. Ritzenhein was about six seconds behind at 35:44.1 Matt Tegenkamp was third in 35:55.8.

Rounding out the top five were Elliot Heath (35:56.1) and Benjamin True (35:56.6)

Derrick, from Naperville, Ill., and 2012 Stanford University graduate, competed against Ritzenhein in the 10,000 meters at the U.S. Olympic Trials in June 2012, when he finished fourth, one spot behind Ritzenhein and two behind Tegenkamp.

The 30-year-old Ritzenhein, a 2001 Rockford High School graduate, traded the lead with Tegenkamp after 8 kilometers. By the 10K mark, Derrick had caught up and was alternating out front with Ritzenhein.

It was Ritzenhein's first race since the Chicago Marathon in October when he turned in the third-fastest time by an American in 2:07.47.

Heading into the race earlier this week, [Ritzenhein said he was "refreshed" and "ready to start the year off with a bang."](#)

Last year, Ritzenhein reached his third Olympics when he qualified for London in the 10,000 meters. He finished 13th in 27:45.89.

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### Back-up role a boon for Nate Tomlinson

- by: *Russell Gould*
- From: **Herald Sun**
- February 03, 2013 12:00AM

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**PLAYING second fiddle to Jonny Flynn isn't a problem for Nate Tomlinson, whose increasing on-court presence for the Melbourne Tigers could be crucial to their play-off aspirations, which go on the line today at the Cage.**

Tomlinson, fresh from a stellar four years playing at the University of Colorado, started the season behind veteran point guard Kevin Braswell but was still racking up around 15 minutes each week.

Braswell's early season demise, however, led to the arrival of former NBA

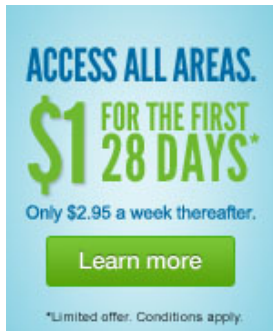


Nate Tomlinson is making the most of his opportunities alongside Jonny Flynn. Picture: Richard Serong  
*Source: News Limited*

starter Flynn and as the American assumed control, Tomlinson's minutes were halved.

The 23-year-old son of coaching guru Bill Tomlinson played as little as four minutes late last year as Flynn chewed up close to 35 minutes each week.

But as the defensive focus of opposition teams started to stifle Flynn, Tigers coach Chris Anstey saw an opening for Tomlinson to act as a second ball-handler and allow the import more freedom to move - and score.



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It's worked, too, with Flynn averaging 20 points per game in recent weeks as Tomlinson's time on court increased and he's now back to averaging 15 minutes a game.

Anstey said it was always going to take time for Tomlinson to adjust to his first season in the NBL but his teammates' growing confidence made him an important cog in the Tigers unit.

"We always expected Nate when he came in to be able to contribute. We told everyone he was the one guy we wanted out of college this year and we stand by that," Anstey told the Sunday Herald Sun.

"It has taken him some time to adjust to a different style of basketball but I think he has been outstanding.

"And he has earned his minutes through the way he plays, the way he trains, the way he communicates when he is on the floor, he makes good decisions and gets us doing what we need to do.

"As much as anything he has earned the respect of his teammates every day and he gives us a different look with two absolute ball carriers on the court and if we are struggling with pressure we have the option of doing that.

"At the start of the year we thought anything we got from him would be a bonus but he is turning into a really important piece of what we are getting done and a guy who will have a large say in how successful we are this year."

Today's clash with Cairns will help determine that success after fourth-placed Wollongong's win over Adelaide on Friday night.

Melbourne, in fifth, must win today to stay in the hunt for the fourth and final play-off berth. A victory could also kill off sixth-placed Cairns' challenge for that spot.

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