



*Freshman Gerald Thomas displayed his trade against Sacramento State.
Photo Courtesy: Tony Harman*



Brooks: Thomas' Past Puts Present In Perspective

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BOULDER - If [Gerald Thomas](#) chooses, he can tell his Colorado teammates a little something about dealing with adversity. And, if he wants, he can add some perspective with this postscript: those struggles the Buffs endured in September weren't real life struggles at all.

An engaging freshman with a high-wattage smile, Thomas played high school football in the Dallas suburb of The Colony. How he got there, then moved on to CU, is an adventure that helped shape his outlook and teach him the value of adaptability. And much more.

Thomas, his mother, father and their extended families lived in New Orleans before Hurricane Katrina devastated parts of the city in 2005. The Thomas family - 13 of them - relocated for two months in Plano, Texas.

"It was me, my mom, my grandparents, baby cousins, uncles . . . everybody," [Gerald Thomas](#) said.

They all stayed in a hotel . . . room. One hotel room.

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"There were two beds," Thomas recalled. "We took off the mattresses, put them against the door and slept on them and on the beds (frames). My great grandpa was kind of sick at the time . . . we did what we had to do and got through it."

They lived on food provided by federal agencies and local organizations and wore clothes donated by groups in the surrounding area. "People helped as much as they could; it was really nice of them . . . I ate free through almost all of middle school," said Thomas, who was 12 at the time and is an only child.

In time, his grandparents and other relocated relatives returned to New Orleans and their homes on the West Bank. His grandparents' house, he said, suffered more damage than the house he had grown up in. Still, his mother and father decided they would remain in Texas - a decision based partly on what they considered a better educational opportunity for Gerald in Texas as well as that state's high school football reputation and opportunities it offered. They moved from Plano to The Colony, near Dallas.

"My mom thought Texas was the football capital of the U.S., so she wanted me to stay there and go to school," he said. "It was tough at first, just seeing my (extended) family every now and then. The hard thing wasn't making friends, it was losing friends. I got close to a lot of people and ended up staying close to a lot of them."

"But moving from New Orleans to Texas was tough because I have my Southern accent . . . people at first couldn't understand what I was saying. I had to change that. But I adapted, and football took my mind off of things and it worked out for the best I think."

School got harder, Thomas said, but that turned out to be a blessing for him: "I think Texas (middle and high schools) pretty much set me up for what to expect; it was a big jump from New Orleans academically. But that was a good thing . . . in the long run, Katrina probably wasn't that bad for me."

At least not as bad as it was for some. And on the football front, Thomas, a speedster with sure hands, quickly excelled. He ultimately set receiving records at The Colony High School for catches (127), yards (2,345) and touchdowns (22). He also ran track, winning the district championship in the 400-meter dash.

Football recruiters from a broad area - Boise State, Arizona, Arizona State, Iowa and CU were his final five from among more than a dozen offers - took notice. His very early personal choice was Texas Tech: "I was a Red Raider in my head for a long time," he said. He visited the Lubbock campus, where he met fellow Texas high school receiver [Jeffrey Thomas](#), who also eventually signed with CU and will reenroll in January. ([Gerald Thomas](#) is in close contact with Jeffrey and says with a laugh, "If he ever has any change of thought I'll make sure I get him back.")

As happens in the recruiting process, one school cools on a prospect while another school's interest heats up. A week before national signing day last February, Texas Tech and TCU tried to reenter the picture with [Gerald Thomas](#). ASU, he said, also was pushing hard and until he studied the Sun Devils' returning roster and their commitment list, settling in Tempe was a consideration.

Other schools - Texas, Oklahoma State, Nebraska - showed interest in him as an athlete. But he knew what that meant: "They wanted to put me at DB." CU wanted him solely as a receiver, which is what Thomas wanted.

He called Buffs receivers coach [Bobby Kennedy](#) and committed before seeing Boulder. Said Thomas: "I committed before my visit, but once I visited it made it all clear. I thought it would play out for the best, and it has."

Kennedy said Thomas "had done his research; he knew our receiver situation. One thing I respected about him is that there was no wavering. He made this decision and said I'm going to do it. (Other schools) got on him because he had a pretty good senior year, but he was a guy who kept his word. He's a straightforward guy, a fun guy to be around."

At 5-11, 175 pounds, Thomas isn't what Kennedy calls "a big, pretty receiver." But he has other attributes - namely his speed, his ability to "burst" and change directions and find seams in the defense. And then there are his hands. Said CU coach [Jon Embree](#): "He catches the ball with his hands. When you're a smaller guy, if you catch the ball against your body it's trouble. He was just a natural ball catcher with his hands."

Added Kennedy: "Everybody looks for the 6-foot-3, big pretty guys, this and that . . . and obviously Gerald is not that size. But he has a different skill set from those guys - good hands, the ability to make people miss. But he still has to learn to lower his shoulder and say, 'This is what I can get' rather than trying to dance around. But that's a growth process he's got to go through."

Through the Buffs' first five games, Thomas has made 10 receptions for 115 yards. He's also been used as a runner, gaining 44 yards on five carries. In CU's lopsided loss to UCLA, he had one carry for an 11-yard loss - the first time he's lost yardage this season.

Thomas - "GT," "G-Money," "G-Baby," or "Two-Five" (his number) to his teammates - said he's been utilized about as he expected: "I know the coaches are trying to figure things out with all of us (young players) and see what we're comfortable doing. I think every week since CSU they've tried to use me more in the game plan. I'm fine even being used as a distraction (decoy) if that helps my team."

"I was kind of nervous, but as the weeks have gone on I've found out that nobody is really going to be faster than me. I've beaten a couple of guys deep and that helped my confidence knowing I can play with these guys."

With Jeffery Thomas unavailable and [Paul Richardson](#) electing to take a redshirt season while rehabbing from knee surgery, [Gerald Thomas](#) is one of the Buffs' few deep receiving threats. On-lookers might believe the fleet freshman could be used more, and Kennedy concedes, "There's no doubt that I could be playing Gerald another 10 or 15 more plays a game, but I also want to have a good balance with it."

And there's a good reason for that. While Kennedy called Thomas' playing time through five games "significant for a true freshman," he added, "The thing that I'm always conscious of and cautious about is there's a fine line between playing guys (early) and letting them have success. You want to put them in situations where they can be successful. The thing you worry about with young guys is that if you play them too much and overuse them and they don't have success, they can lose confidence. Sometimes it's tough to get that stinger back."

"The thing I realize about Gerald - and really with any young guy - is that they're going to be better in their second and third year than they are in their first year. What you want to do is continue that growth rather than stunt the process . . . keep feeding them, keep growing them and they're going to get better and better."

"We know we've got some talented young guys. I tell (Thomas), 'You're a freshman, but you're really not. You've got playing experience now.' With younger guys we live with their mistakes and hopefully they don't continue to make them."

After this weekend's bye, the Buffs play Arizona State on Thursday night, Oct. 11 at Folsom Field (7 p.m., ESPN). CU goes into the season's final two months 1-4 overall and 1-1 in the Pac-12 Conference. ASU, which also has a bye this week, is 4-1, 2-0 under first-year coach Todd Graham.

Thomas, understandably, is disappointed with the Buffs' first month. "It's tough right now," he said. "We didn't expect all this (losing) to happen in the first part of the season. But we're going to stay together as a team and finish out the season as strong as we can. We know we're young and have years ahead of us to get better."

"That's the good thing: We brought in, what, 27 freshmen and 13 of them are playing. We're playing so many redshirt freshmen and sophomores. We're all still so young; I just turned 18 in May. We're one of the youngest teams in the nation."

"People (in the media) forget that; they're busy quoting the bashers. They'll be the same people, when we're

winning ten games, they'll be back around for us. I don't let that affect me at all. I know how some fans are; I try to focus on the team and just getting better. That's what we're all trying to do."

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SHOW MENU



Football: CU Buffs' Derrick Webb enjoying leadership role

By Brian Howell Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

Ask most players on the Colorado football team and they'll tell you that nobody hits harder than Derrick Webb.

A junior linebacker from Memphis, Webb has made more than a few opponents and teammates sore.

With the Buffs sitting at 1-4 during their bye week, Webb is proving to be more than just a big hitter, though. The 6-foot, 230-pounder is emerging as an emotional leader on and off the field.

"I just really started that," he said. "I usually try to let my play and my work ethic speak for me, but when I feel like it's time for something to be said, I don't have a problem speaking to my teammates, because I feel like I've earned that right and I've got respect in the locker room, so I'm able to do that."

When the season began, that role didn't figure to fall to Webb. The Buffs have two senior linebackers -- Jon Major and Doug Rippy -- who have exceptional ability to go along with their experience. That duo was highly regarded coming into the year.

Rippy, however, has played just 30 snaps all season after injuring his knee on Sept. 8 against Sacramento State. Major played just 28 snaps in the Buffs' loss to UCLA last week after a leg injury. He had been healthy up to that point, but was given a rest from time to time during the first four weeks.

"I have (become more of a leader) and it's been explicitly stated to me from my head coach (Jon Embree)," Webb said. "When I'm out there with Brady (Daigh) and Woodson (Greer), I'm the elder, I'm the veteran on the field."

Webb has played like a veteran from the start of the season. In the opener against Colorado State, he had 12 tackles, a sack and three tackles at the line of scrimmage. He's currently third on the team with 37 tackles and is tied for the team lead with four third-down stops. His 275 defensive snaps is a team-high for linebackers (Major has 268 snaps).

"That's good for me. I'm getting more reps, more experience pretty much," said Webb, who started six games a year ago. "That works to my benefit."

"I think I've had some good games and I've had some average games. I'd rather have more games like the CSU game, 12 tackles, but I play hard on special teams and defense. If I evaluate from an effort standpoint, I'm happy with how I've been playing all year because I give my all every play."

That's part of why Webb has become a leader for the Buffs. CU has just eight seniors on the roster and only four of those play defense. Of the four, two -- Rippy and safety Ray Polk -- have been sidelined with injuries most of this year. That has left CU in desperate need of some leadership from its other classes, and Webb has filled that void.

"I didn't really see myself coming into this role; it just kind of happened naturally, but I'm definitely comfortable with it and I embrace it," he said.

Looking forward, Webb is likely to get some senior help soon. The Buffs are off this week and don't play again until Thursday when Arizona State comes to Folsom Field. By then, Major, Polk and Rippy are all expected to be healthy and ready to play. If they are, it'll be the first time the Buffs will have their three starting linebackers on the field at once since very early in the Sacramento State game.

"We've been talking about it all offseason, the things we'll be able to do with all three of us out there playing," Webb said. "I feel like we complement each other so well."

Even with Major and Rippey on the field by his side, Webb said he won't back down from his new role as a leader.

"I continue to play my game and continue to try to bring guys along the best way I can," he said. "There's nothing wrong with having emotional leaders."

In fact, having emotional leaders may be of utmost importance to the Buffs as they look ahead to the final seven games of the season. Webb hopes to play well on a personal level, but he also hopes his leadership can keep his teammates confident and keep their heads up throughout the remainder of the season.

"What's more important to me is the mental aspect of it," Webb said. "I want to make sure guys are ready to go, ready to play, ready to finish out this season strong and know that we've still got a goal to accomplish. As long as I can get that into them and hold that mindset and spread it around the locker room, I feel like our season will be able to finish out pretty strong."

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TD makes journey worthwhile for former Colorado walk-on Dustin Ebner

By Tom Kensler The Denver Post The Denver Post

Posted:

DenverPost.com

BOULDER — Colorado's Dustin Ebner said his touchdown reception against UCLA last weekend felt like slow motion.

A former walk-on, the senior from Arvada was about to reach the end zone for the first time in his college career. Teammates were well aware of the impending milestone, even if many others at Folsom Field didn't exactly know who No. 83 was. The receiver, after all, looked too thin to be Will Pericak, the Buffaloes' standout defensive lineman who also wears jersey No. 83.

Although CU quarterback Jordan Webb had put plenty of zip on the ball, the 17-yard completion couldn't happen fast enough for Ebner. A UCLA cornerback was just a step or two behind, and a Bruins safety would be closing in.

A collision, perhaps a violent one, was inevitable. "You're just hoping the ball gets there before the safety," Ebner said.

Colorado ultimately lost 42-14 to UCLA. But at the time, Ebner's touchdown was big. Midway through the second quarter, and with CU down just 14-0, Webb put the ball where it needed to be for a skinny post pattern.

The touchdown catch was only Ebner's fifth career reception. A fifth-year player, Ebner (6-foot-1 and 185 pounds) walked on at CU from Pomona High School in 2008 and was finally placed on scholarship before this season.

"At that moment, I thought that all the hard work I had done paid off," Ebner said.

Teammates mobbed Ebner like his catch had just sent Colorado to the Rose Bowl. Everyone knows about the perseverance required for a former walk-on to survive this long and especially to get noticed.

"That touchdown was just awesome to see," said CU sophomore wideout Tyler McCulloch. "To know what Dusty has done to get to this point, and the type of leader he is, it's just awesome to see that happen."

A second-team all-state selection during his final year at Pomona, Ebner caught three passes for the Buffs in 2009 as a redshirt freshman when the CU offense, then under coach Dan Hawkins, employed receiver "groupings" that required more wideouts for the rotations. Ebner figured to get even more looks as a sophomore, but his season was lost before it began when he suffered a leg fracture during August camp in 2010.

Then, Colorado made a coaching change and Ebner had to gain the confidence of a new staff. He played in only five games last fall and did not catch a pass.

In any program, walk-ons come and go. But Ebner said he never thought about leaving CU, even knowing that he likely would be a go-to receiver at the Division II level or perhaps higher. He has good speed, having set a school record at Pomona with a 49.25 clocking for 400 meters.

"I don't like quitting something I start," Ebner said. "When I decided to come here, I told myself, 'No matter what happens, I will stick it through.' "

Buffs blood runs deep in the Ebner family. He followed his father and older brother Derek to Colorado. A younger brother, Drew, was a walk-on receiver for the Buffs last year but quit football and transferred to Colorado State to

pursue a degree related to fish and wildlife, a field of study that CU does not offer.

"We were so happy for Dusty on that touchdown," Webb said. "But to be honest, when I first got here (this summer as a transfer from Kansas), I didn't realize Dusty had been a walk-on. He was making plays against our older defensive backs."

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The Field House — Blogs — The Denver Post

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Colorado aiming to improve third-down efficiency

By **TOM KENSLE** |  No Comments

BOULDER — Colorado converted just two-of-15 third downs last Saturday in the 42-14 home loss to UCLA, so it is no surprise that third-down efficiency has been a focus of CU's bye-week practices.

"That was our special category today," Embree said following Wednesday's practice. "We went third-and-10, third-and-8. Today was third-and-long and Red Zone (situations).

"We go live. And the coaches don't know what the situation is until I call it out."

Embree said the offense converted about 40 percent of the third downs in practice Wednesday.

"That's something you can live with," he said.

Through five games, Colorado has converted 32.5 percent (25 of 77) of its third downs. The Buffs' opponents are at 40.3 percent (29 of 72).

ARTICLE PRINTED FROM THE FIELD HOUSE

<http://blogs.denverpost.com/colleges/2012/10/05/colorado-aiming-improve-thirddown-efficiency/25184/>

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The Field House — Blogs — The Denver Post

OCTOBER 5, 2012, 5:40 AM

Colorado emphasizes tackling during bye week

By **TOM KENSLE** |  No Comments

BOULDER — Knowing that poor tackling has been an issue all season, Colorado has spent considerable time working on tackling during the bye week, CU coach Jon Embree said.

“We have to have more than one guy to the ball, that’s a big part of tackling,” Embree said. “We just have to do more of what we did this week (in practice). We did a lot of tackling. In normal periods where we just ‘thud,’ we went ahead and let the guys tackle.

“The unique thing about football is, sometimes you can’t practice things without actually doing it (at full speed). But then there’s the risk of getting guys hurt (in practice). There’s that fine line, at times. But with us having a bye week, we just threw caution to the wind and let’s go.”

ARTICLE PRINTED FROM THE FIELD HOUSE

<http://blogs.denverpost.com/colleges/2012/10/05/colorado-emphasizes-tackling-bye-week/25182/>

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