



Senior linebacker Doug Rippy is eyeing a Thursday night return against ASU.  
Photo Courtesy: CUBuffs.com



# Brooks: Rippy Eagerly Awaits Prime Time Comeback

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**BOULDER** - Doug Rippy has been watching and waiting. He's been wondering some, too. Senior seasons aren't supposed to unfold like his has. Last year's serious knee injury was overcome only to repeat it to a lesser degree with the other knee early this September.

But that's all behind him now. There's more than enough of his final season of college football remaining to reclaim and make it worthwhile.

After a three-game absence, Colorado's senior middle linebacker is set to return Thursday night against Arizona State at Folsom Field (7 p.m., ESPN). That leaves seven games - seven difficult games - in his CU career, and Rippy intends to make the most of them.

"I'm excited . . . I feel like it's been a very, very long time," he said before Monday's practice. "I'm feeling 100 percent.

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Injuries like this take time, but now I can't tell there was anything wrong with my right knee - the one I had repaired. That's a good thing, and I'm feeling great.

"There are seven games left and it's my senior year. You don't expect things to happen, especially your senior year. It happened. I think it might have been a good sign to get me to quit worrying about my other (right) knee. I'm just ready; I feel like myself."

The injury to Rippy's right knee required surgery and forced him to sit out the last half of the 2011 season. He tweaked his left knee in game two this season and spent the next three weeks as a spectator. Touted as one of the Buffs' top two or three returning defensive players, his leadership as well as his on-field ability have been missed.

Veteran linebackers coach Brian Cabral will be happier than most to welcome Rippy back, but he still plans to be cautious about how he uses him. "I'll break him in (slowly)," Cabral said. "I'm not going to throw him to the wolves . . . but, yeah, we can sure use his leadership."

After a bye week that saw the team get a couple of days (Friday/Saturday) off, Rippy and the Buffs plunge into their final seven games with a 1-4 overall record. Their lone win came at Washington State two games ago and leaves them at 1-1 in the Pac-12 Conference's South Division. ASU leads the South at 2-0 (4-1 overall) and also appears to be prospering statistically under first-year coach Todd Graham.

Rippy called the bye week beneficial from the standpoints of recuperation and refocusing. "We'll get some guys back," he said, "and mentally, I felt like we needed a break, some time off. It was rocky start to the season. Guys needed to get refocused.

"These past three or four weeks helped me get refocused and get back on track. Coming off an injury, you're worried about it. You want to go out and play, but at the same time, sometimes physically you feel all right, sometimes you don't. I feel like I'm back now."

From his vantage point on the sidelines the last three weeks, Rippy said he couldn't question the Buffs' "effort, our toughness." But he added that he saw a leadership void: "The same guys can't lead all the time. Other guys have to step up. Once we get that, I think we'll be fine. We have a lot of young guys playing; with that being said, they make a mistake and sometimes they might get down on themselves. Other guys have to pull them out of that."

In Rippy's place in the middle for the past three games, Cabral has plugged in sophomore Brady Daigh. "He's done very well," Cabral said. "That position for the future looks very bright."

Daigh's strongest suit might be as a run-stopper against two-back offenses - an alignment that's not so prevalent in the spread-it-out, throw-it-around Pac-12. But, Cabral adds, "I've been very, very pleased with how he's responded to spread teams."

That's what Rippy, Daigh and the Buffs will encounter on Thursday night. Under Graham, the Sun Devils have been among the conference's most prolific offensive teams. Averaging 38.4 points a game, they're second (behind Oregon) in scoring and fifth in total offense (456.2 yards). Quarterback Taylor Kelly, ASU's heir to Broncos backup Brock Osweiler, leads the Pac-12 in passing efficiency, having completed 92 of 136 for 1,292 yards, with nine touchdown passes against only two interceptions.

CU defensive coordinator Greg Brown said Graham's offense features "an extreme amount of misdirection" with Kelly running a variety of option plays. "And they've got guys. As good as people as they had last year, they're every bit as good if not better."

Plus, the Sun Devils might be more disciplined under Graham than in their final season under Dennis Erickson. Said Brown: "There certainly seems to be a disciplined approach and he's (Graham) gotten it out of them. There doesn't seem to be a lot of freelancing. People are where they're supposed to be and doing what they're supposed to do. They're executing. They're really good."

Defensively, ASU also is among the Pac-12's leaders, ranking first in scoring defense (13.6 points), total defense (276.2 yards), pass defense (137 yards) and pass defense efficiency (90.2 rating, four TD passes).

"They're executing at a very high level," Brown said. "They're a no-huddle team and like most people (in the Pac-12), they're going at a break-neck speed, coming at you 100 miles an hour . . . you look at their statistics, where they are, and it's justified. They're an excellent team."

ASU was among others receiving votes in this week's AP national rankings, but CU's next three opponents - at Southern California, Oct. 20, 4 p.m. MDT; at Oregon, Oct. 27; Stanford, Nov. 3 - all are positioned in the Top 25. The Trojans are No. 11, Oregon is No. 2, Stanford is No. 17.

Rippy said that stretch, followed by Arizona, Washington and Utah, is "what we're here for. Those guys put on their pads the same way we do . . . I look at it as a challenge. I didn't get to play (last season) against some of these teams we're playing. I feel like if our mentality and effort matches theirs we'll be fine. We've just got to have that 'punch first' mentality."

Rippy's knee injury kept him out of last season's "blackout" game against USC, yet another reason he's anticipating Thursday's visit by ASU. The "blackout" concept - CU fans decked out in black - "is good," he said, "but at the same time, that's just for the fans. We play for Colorado and the people that played behind us. That's the main thing. I think a lot of people forget that because your name is on the back of your jersey. The first thing I play for is the guys around me and the guys who played before me here. Once you figure out the tradition here it means a lot."

**BUFF BITS:** The Buffs' Sunday and Monday practices, said coach Jon Embree, were physical and productive. He characterized Monday's work as being better than Sunday's and said Tuesday "has to be even better . . . then we go play." . . . With an open date last Saturday and this week's game on Thursday, the Buffs have the equivalent of two bye weeks - or at least two Saturdays open. That's fine with Embree, who says he isn't opposed to playing on "any day of the week - as long as it's at home." . . . The Buffs will be "head-to-toe in black" against the Sun Devils, said Embree, including wearing black helmets . . . Sophomore Connor Wood, who apparently is over a sternum ailment, will enter Thursday night's game backing up starting quarterback Jordan Webb.

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SHOW MENU



## Football: CU Buffs calling on Kenneth Crawley

By Kyle Ringo Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

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Cornerback Kenneth Crawley hoped to be making a big impact on the Colorado defense midway through his first college season, but it's safe to say he didn't plan to be leading the team in tackles.

Crawley, a true freshman from Washington D.C., has logged more playing time for the CU defense than anyone except junior safety Terrel Smith, with whom he is tied for the team lead in tackles at 40 through the first five games. Teams haven't been shy about running and throwing the ball to Crawley's side of the field, which has given him plenty of opportunities to make plays. He's still looking for his first interception, but he has managed to get his hands on a few passes.

"You would always prefer that the corners are not making the tackles," defensive coordinator Greg Brown said. "That means that ball is somehow getting back there where the corners are having to make the tackles. Of course you prefer that not to be, but also, that's part of the deal. If the ball is back there and you're a corner, you'd better make the tackle."

Crawley has no problem with that. He's the first to admit he's been burned a few times in the early going, but he's mature enough to understand even the best players have their tough times and learning experiences.

"Since I'm a freshman, teams are going to try to go at me and go deep," Crawley said. "I've got to expect more. Going into the games I've got to expect they're going to come at me early."

The Buffs play host to Arizona State on Thursday night in front of a national television audience on ESPN. The Sun Devils bring an explosive offense to town and that means Crawley figures to be a busy man once again.

"They're really good," Brown said. "Their timing is impeccable. The quarterback's grasp of what they're doing. It's pretty obvious that they're all on the same page and they can hurt you bad if you make a mistake."

"So many of their passes come off things that look like runs and have the ability to be runs. Yet, the quarterback has the ability to pull up short of the line of scrimmage and throw the ball."

CU coaches have asked their young cornerbacks to play well off the line of scrimmage at times this season. Sometimes it's an effort to disguise coverages and other times it's meant to help the players to prevent giving up deep balls.

Crawley admits there have been several times he has lined up deep when he wasn't supposed to. It's part of the learning process. So is dealing with not always making plays he made growing up.

"You're right there on the receiver and they just make a nice catch," he said. "You look back on those plays and think, 'I could have done one more extra thing to get that ball.'"

Crawley, who also returns punts for the Buffs, has had some frustrating moments during his initiation to the college game. There have been times where he felt he had good coverage only to see the ball completed anyway. He said the speed of the game and the talent of opposing quarterbacks and wide receivers is taking some time to adjust to.

"Ken is on track to be a very good player here," Brown said. "He's a true freshmen and he's doing things that we

never asked Jimmy Smith or Jalil Brown to do at this age."

Crawley has a competitive personality and a drive to be the best. He has been looking forward to gauging his skills against some of the elite players in the Pac-12 Conference. Two weeks ago against Washington State wide receiver Marquess Wilson, Crawley came away feeling like he performed pretty well, particularly in the second half.

This week the challenge is ASU wide receivers Rashad Ross and Jamal Miles, who have combined for 28 catches but only one touchdown this fall.

### Sun Devils lacking CBs

CU coach Jon Embree can relate to what his counterpart at Arizona State is going through. Sun Devils coach Todd Graham says his team is woefully thin at cornerback and he has experimented this week in practice with wide receiver J.J. Holliday playing the position.

Last year Embree had the same problem and used former wide receiver Jason Espinoza and running back D.D. Goodson in the secondary. Both players actually started games for the Buffs on defense in 2011.

"One of the things that is concerning is just lack of depth at that cornerback position and really (we are) just trying to look for some guys to help us on third down, help us in depth," Graham said during his weekly press conference.

### Notable

Embree said he expects safety Ray Polk to return to the lineup for the first time since the season opener. However, running back Christian Powell (thigh) and defensive tackle Justin Solis did not participate fully in Monday's practice and might not be able to play. Embree said Connor Wood will be the backup quarterback again this week after missing the past two games with an injury. ... Embree has been dealing with a chronic cough that continues to show up during his interviews. He has had it through much of the first month of the season. ... Kickoff for CU's game at Southern Cal on Oct. 20 has been set for 4 p.m. The game will be televised on the Pac-12 Network.

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## Colorado's Nelson Spruce the next Scotty McKnight

By Tom Kensler The Denver Post The Denver Post

Posted:

DenverPost.com

BOULDER — Here's the required job description for a slot receiver: courage to go across the middle, quickness to separate from defenders, dependable hands and the ability to pluck a pass from just inches above the ground.

That describes Colorado redshirt freshman Nelson Spruce. He loves nabbing those low throws with circus-like moves.

Entering Thursday night's home game against Arizona State (4-1, 2-0 Pac-12), Spruce leads the Buffaloes (1-4, 1-1) in receptions (24), receiving yards (260) and catches of 10 or more yards (14).

At times, especially when catching the low ones, Spruce looks part tumbler, part Houdini.

"Nelson has a knack for getting his body in crazy places; he can really contort," CU wide receivers coach Bobby Kennedy said Monday. "He gets his head around quick."

Quarterbacks are taught to throw low on routes in the middle of the field to avoid interceptions. As coaches like to say, throw low so if the receiver doesn't make the catch, nobody will.

At 6-foot-2 and 195 pounds, Spruce isn't one of those Smurf-sized receivers. He can bend, twist and turn to get down in a hurry while remaining focused on the pass. In a short time, Spruce and CU quarterback Jordan Webb have developed timing and chemistry.

"With those low ones, fans might think that's a bad ball," Spruce said. "But Jordan works on those throws so receivers aren't stretched out.

"There's a lot of traffic in the middle. Coaches tell us to 'get big' and shield the defender and make the catch. A lot of times, they're low."

Spruce, from Westlake Village, Calif., in suburban Los Angeles, has been compared to former Buffs slot receiver Scotty McKnight (2007-10). Spruce has viewed game tape of the former New York Jets receiver and knows that's a huge compliment.

McKnight, also from suburban L.A., is CU's all-time leader in receptions (215) and receiving touchdowns (22). McKnight was picked in the seventh round of the 2011 NFL draft by the Jets but these days may be best known for dating actress Hayden Panettiere.

The inevitable comparisons between Spruce and McKnight in style of play are valid, Kennedy said. Kennedy coached at Texas while Mc Knight played for CU. But in reviewing game film of upcoming opponents during his years in Austin, Kennedy saw a great deal of footage of McKnight while evaluating Big 12 defensive backs.

"Scotty may have had a step on Nelson, just a tad faster but not much more," Kennedy said. "The thing that Nelson gives us is obviously he is dependable and has good hands. He runs good routes.

"And he's just a redshirt freshman, so there's more ahead for him. He finds a way to wiggle through seams. He's doing a nice job."

Spruce sat out the 2011 season as a redshirt because CU had sufficient depth at wide receiver. He is on a pace to finish his first season with 58 receptions. McKnight caught 43 passes in his first season (2007).

Like McKnight, Spruce is developing into Colorado's go-to target when a sure catch is needed to move the chains. Spruce's best game came in the victory at Washington State, when he eight passes for 103 yards and a touchdown. Seven of his eight catches went for first downs.

Improvement seems to show weekly.

"With Nelson, the biggest thing is confidence," Kennedy said. "Now, he knows what's going on in the offense. His mind has kind of unlocked his body to enable him to play faster.

"Before, he was thinking about everything. Now he is just reacting."

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## Colorado coach Jon Embree likes Thursday night games, here's why

By **JOHN HENDERSON** |  No Comments

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Colorado hosts Arizona State Thursday night, a nice chance for a 1-4 team to play on national TV. That's one reason Buffaloes coach Jon Embree likes Thursday night games.

"I like it because we didn't get a bye last year," Embree said on Tuesday's Pac-12 Conference coaches call.

"We didn't even have half a bye. For me, this is good. I like the Thursday night game. It's special to be able to be on it. There are a lot of good things about playing on Thursday night. I'm used to it because in the NFL we had Thursday night and Monday night.

"You have to learn to handle it. It's good also because it gives a couple natural breaks for players. They'll get Friday and Saturday to recuperate then come back Sunday. I like it."

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**<http://blogs.denverpost.com/colleges/2012/10/09/colorado-coach-jon-embree-likes-thursday-night-games/25259/>**

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