

Colorado football: Buffs' Uzo-Diribe tenaciously pursues turnovers

By Kyle Ringo Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera
Posted:

Buffzone.com

Football players are sometimes described as having a nose for the football. Colorado defensive end Chidera Uzo-Diribe has eyes for it.

Uzo-Diribe said he is always looking for the football when trying to tackle anyone who happens to be carrying it and doing so has helped him force five fumbles this season and 10 in his career. He leads the nation in forced fumbles entering the second half of the season.

"A lot of these guys tend not to have great ball security or protect the ball a lot," Uzo-Diribe said. "So when I see them trying to make a move or running with it out, I'm usually trying to go for the ball."

He hopes to separate an Arizona Wildcat from the football Saturday night at Folsom Field (6:07 p.m., Pac-12 Network) in a pivotal game for the Buffs' hopes of becoming bowl eligible this season. It's one of just three or four games remaining on the schedule that appear winnable for CU, which has lost 11 straight in the Pac-12 Conference.

Arizona has fumbled the ball 12 times in six games, but it has lost just four of them.

When Uzo-Diribe causes another fumble, it will be the 11th forced fumble of his career tying the Colorado school record held by former linebackers Brian Cabral (1975-77) and Barry Remington (1982-86).

Uzo-Diribe needs two more forced fumbles to tie the single-season school record of seven set by former linebacker Jashon Sykes in 1999.

Considering Uzo-Diribe spent the bulk of his time at CU playing under coaching staffs and support staffs that included Cabral and Sykes, you might expect him to credit them for helping him develop the skill. But Uzo-Diribe said he didn't really begin to focus on forcing turnovers until coach Mike MacIntyre and his staff were hired because this staff emphasizes takeaways.

"I think it's something I've really developed, actually, when these coaches got here," Uzo-Diribe said. "We've never really worked on stripping the ball as much as we do now. I don't think we've ever worked on stripping the ball like we do now. So it's definitely something I've worked on and got better at under this coaching staff."

Uzo-Diribe said under previous coaches causing turnovers was always mentioned, but this coaching staff sets aside portions of every practice to work on the skills that help create turnovers.

And it's not just defensive line coach Jim Jeffcoat working with Uzo-Diribe and his fellow defensive linemen. Each position group on defense rotates between each defensive coach

when working on turnovers. So defensive linemen are taught techniques for creating fumbles and work on catching balls with secondary coaches as well as defensive coordinator Kent Baer, who coaches linebackers.

Linebackers and defensive backs not only hear from their position coaches but they also spend a few minutes in each practice working with Jeffcoat, who forced 18 fumbles during a lengthy career in the NFL.

"Chidera is just a playmaker," fellow defensive end De'Jon Wilson said. "If he sees a play, he's going to get it whether that's tipping the ball or stripping it. He's going to do it. It's one of our drills we do every day and it works in the game."

Uzo-Diribe said developing a reputation as a guy who causes turnovers has only fueled his desire to cause more of them. He said he pays close attention in film study to how each quarterback, running back and receiver handles the ball. CU coaches also make a point at the beginning of each week to point out which members of the opposing team are fumble risks.

Uzo-Diribe gets excited to see the right guy with a loose technique running his way.

"I definitely think it's a skill, something you have to be conscious of and practice at in order to become good at it," Uzo-Diribe said.

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Kyle Ringo Blog: De'Jon Wilson inspired to find another gear

By Kyle Ringo Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

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Redshirt freshman defensive end De'Jon Wilson is beginning to earn more playing time midway through his second season in Boulder, in part, because he has modeled his practice habits after a veteran teammate.

Wilson said this week he has closely watched senior Chidera Uzo-Diribe all season and has tried to emulate Uzo-Diribe in every aspect of the game. Taking that approach along with committing to follow his coaching is leading to more playing time.

Wilson, a 6-foot-2, 250-pound product of Washington D.C., originally committed to Kansas in the 2012 recruiting cycle before changing his mind and coming to CU. He redshirted last season and is hoping to make an impact on the CU defense in the second half of this season as the Buffs try to make a run at becoming bowl eligible.

Wilson has played in five of the Buffs' six games so far this season with the bulk of his 55 snaps on defense coming last week against Charleston Southern. Coach Mike MacIntyre said he has liked what he's been seeing from Wilson in recent weeks in practice and as long as the focus and intensity continues, Wilson can expect to be on the field more often on game days.

"Just practicing hard and really learning and really diving into the playbook and talking with coach and listening to what they have to say," Wilson said when asked why he's starting to get more opportunities. "I really think that plays a major role, just me listening and doing the things that I need to do. They're saying I'm really improving on film.

"It's all about the technique with them guys. So I really had to get my technique down and stop false stepping a lot."

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