



By: CUBuffs.com
Sophomore Nelson Spruce (22) has a dozen catches in CU's first two games.

Brooks: Spruce Benefits From Attention Given 'P-Rich'

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BOULDER – If Colorado quarterback **Connor Wood** has been elated by this season's return of receiver **Paul Richardson**, **Nelson Spruce** isn't too far behind on the happiness index.

In the Buffaloes' first two games, Wood and "P-Rich" have teamed for 21 completions worth 417 yards and four touchdowns. Those stats make Richardson the nation's No. 1 receiver in yards per game (208.5), No. 2 in receptions per game (10.5), and No. 3 in total receiving yards (417).

But nestled just behind Richardson on CU's stat sheet is the remarkably consistent Spruce, who finished 2012 as the Buffs' leading receiver with 44 catches for 446 yards (three TDs). Already this season Spruce has 12 receptions for 161 yards and a score, and at that pace for 10 more games – provided the Fresno State washout is replaced – Spruce would eclipse his 2012 work.

If he doesn't finish as the Buffs' 2013 reception leader, well, no worries as long as the W's outnumber the L's and the program continues to make the progress it exhibited over the season's first two weeks. Of course, the fleet Richardson also factors into that conversation, offering defenses a fleeting look that CU opponents didn't get last fall.

"P-Rich" is a blur, a burner who can outrun most of the corners he faces and run under most of Wood's passes. He's the guy defenses identify first when the Buffs line up, but he's moved around enough by offensive coordinator **Brian Lindgren** and receivers coach **Troy Walters** to pose major headaches for defensive coordinators.

And while that doesn't remove all the coverage pressure from Spruce and CU's other receivers, it can undoubtedly reduce it.

"Richardson makes the big plays, draws attention from the defense so that frees up guys like me and D.D. (Goodson) and Ty (McCulloch) to kind of do our thing," Spruce said. "He gets double covered and when he's not, the defense still is usually cheating a little bit toward his side. That tilts the field for us."

Richardson said CU's first two opponents – Colorado State, Central Arkansas – "played the safety over the top a lot with me. And even when they play me 'man,' they're keeping the safety over the top."

And that usually puts Spruce in one-on-one coverage, which given his route-running ability offers him the advantage. Said Richardson: "He's really good with his routes and he catches the ball . . . it gives him an opportunity to show his skills. He's making plays for us."

Spruce, a third-year sophomore, is making his mark with consistency and durability. He won last

spring's Iron Buffalo Award at his position for his work in the weight room and in conditioning. In August, he further impressed Walters by never missing a practice in preseason camp.

"That's how he's been day in and day out," Walters said. "There were no ups and downs; every day he came out with great energy and effort. He ran great routes and caught the ball. He did everything well. I told him if he practiced like that he would be rewarded in the game – and he's definitely been rewarded."

Pretty sure that Richardson's return would command a defense's attention, Walters issued a challenge to Spruce and the other wideouts, virtually assuring them that "they're going to have the opportunity to make plays. We have a game plan going into every game; if they want to double 'P-Rich' then other guys are going to have to step up and make plays."

That's what Spruce has done. Richardson's top receiving game has been 11 catches for 209 yards against UCA while Spruce had eight catches for 99 yards against CSU. With Richardson completing his knee rehab last fall, Spruce submitted two games with eight receptions (8-103 yards vs. Washington State, 8-64 vs. CSU) before catching a career-high 10 balls (98 yards) against Utah.

But in becoming only the third freshman to lead the Buffs in single-season receptions, Spruce hit that milestone despite a case of first-year hesitancy. "I think I was thinking more about the speed of the game," he said. "Coming out this year, having that year of experience under my belt, I think I've played faster, less hesitant."

Of course, it also helps being in an offense that favors the pass as much as this one. "I like it," Spruce said. And what's not to like for a receiver? The Buffs are averaging 41 pass attempts (28 completions) and 370.5 passing yards a game. "We've been throwing the ball a bunch," Spruce added.

Spruce might not have Richardson's blinding speed, but he's by no means a slug. "If a DB wants to sit on him, he can run by him," Walters said. "We work on the 'burst' technique, where you give the defender the illusion that you're going to go deep . . . so I haven't seen too many defenders just sit on him. They respect his speed."

Also, Richardson and Spruce are two of Walters' best "hands-on" guys. Both rarely catch the ball against their bodies, preferring to snag it with their hands. Plus, said Walters, Spruce couples good vision with his able hands: "He watches the ball come in and grabs it. That makes him dangerous."

Richardson recognized what his return might mean for Spruce and his buds, telling him in camp he "needed a lot out of him. I needed him to step up and help lead the troops. He's done that, plus he's playing well. He's a kid who does the right things."

In watching Spruce develop for two years, Richardson said the most noticeable change has been in Spruce's maturity and increased self-confidence: "He's recognized that I'm not the only guy out here and he can hold his own. I've been happy to see that."

Spruce simply wanted to do it right and stay consistent, which along with leading by example are personal sources of pride. He also has prided himself in being available for Wood or any of the QBs when they need a receiver for passing work.

"Along with not missing practices, I want to be out there and available whenever for the quarterback, making every catch," he said. "I think that's a big part of my success. The saying here is 'you can't make the club in the tub.' As long as you're out here practicing and the coaches can look at you for a certain amount of reps, that's good."

Lindgren and Walters set weekly goals for the offense as a whole and the receivers as a group. That hasn't been done in the past by positions, but it's a change Spruce embraces: "It makes you work harder during the week. I really like it."

Aside from those, Spruce also entered August camp with a list of personal goals. But he wants to keep those to himself until season's end. If he and the Buffs can build on what they've accomplished in the first two games, chances are good that Nelson Spruce won't mind sharing come late November.

NOTABLE: Coach **Mike MacIntyre's** team practiced on grass for the first time in nearly week on Wednesday morning. MacIntyre told the media the session went well on a day that was spent preparing for Oregon State, the Buffs' opponent on Saturday, Sept. 28 . . . Freshman safety and special teamer **Tedrick Thompson** is continuing to make strides in practice, MacIntyre said. Thompson leads the team in special teams points (six) after the first two games . . . All eight assistant coaches will be on recruiting assignments over the next two days and therefore will miss Thursday and Friday's practice sessions. MacIntyre and his team will work with a skeleton crew staff for the next two days . . . Backup quarterback Sefo Liufau, a true freshman, as impressed his coaches with his work ethic and is making

great strides as he continues to learn the offense. "He is staying focused and preparing like he's going to play. He has handled his role well," MacIntyre said . . . Oregon State quarterback Sean Mannion has been a focal point of CU's game planning efforts early in their preparation for the matchup in Corvallis. MacIntyre lauded the senior's arm strength and accuracy during Wednesday's brief post-practice media session.

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Colorado Buffaloes Football

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Colorado football: Nelson Spruce capitalizing on new system, Paul Richardson's return

By Kyle Ringo Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera
Posted:

Buffzone.com

One wide receiver on the Colorado football team ranks among national leaders in receptions and receiving yards at this early stage in the season.

While Paul Richardson draws the attention of defenders and defensive coordinators each week, another Buffs receiver is quietly off to a great start and playing the best football of his young career.

Third-year sophomore Nelson Spruce is well on his way to establishing new career highs if he can continue his pace of six catches a game for 80 yards.

"I think it's a mix of things," Spruce said explaining his improved production. "I think having P-Rich back is helping the offense in so many ways and then this new offense I feel really comfortable in. I feel I've built a really good chemistry with Connor (Wood). So I'm a year older. I think it's just a bunch of things coming together really."

Spruce is averaging more than 3 yards a catch more this season than he did last season when he led the team with 44 catches for 446 yards. He had three receptions that covered more than 20 yards all of last season. He already has two catches for more than 20 yards in the first two games this season.

Spruce says the big plays Richardson makes and the attention defenses must pay to him have alleviated some of the pressure on him, freeing him up to run great routes and make plays.

Spruce is making a habit of moving the chains. Two-thirds of his catches so far have gone for first downs.

"I'd say I'm a reliable receiver and I take pride in that," he said Wednesday as the Buffs began preparations for their first road trip of the season to Oregon State on Sept. 28. "I make sure to kind of keep the drive moving and keep our offense in a good rhythm. I think it's a product of our offense and the type of routes we're running are kind of based on those quicker throws just to move the chains."

Spruce was put in a difficult situation last season, asked to be the featured receiver in the Buffs' old West Coast offense after Richardson suffered a season-ending injury in the spring. It was a role he wasn't comfortable in. Spruce did what he could each week but with no consistent speed threat to complement him in the offense, the Buffs struggled.

Spruce said he finally feels like he's able to show what he's truly capable of in this new system with more playmakers around him, especially Richardson.

"I think his route running has improved a lot," quarterback Connor Wood said. "He's done a really good job of cleaning up the top of his routes and coming up quicker and understanding his strengths. He knows what his strengths and weaknesses are and he's been working hard to capitalize and make those strengths better."

Wide receivers coach Troy Walters encouraged all of CU's wideouts to set goals for themselves at the beginning of the season. Spruce said he never has been the type to set specific goals for himself at the beginning of the season, but he set the bar high this season.

"I actually think it is good and week in and week out you want to work harder because you know what you set for yourself," Spruce said. "So that kind of drives me as well now."

He wasn't willing to share those specific goals just yet but says he feels comfortable that they're achievable based on his first two outings and the fact that he's now playing in a system that is tailored to the talent available and allows players to play fast without hesitation.

"I'll tell you at the end of the season if I accomplished them," Spruce said.

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Colorado football: Tedric Thompson embraces every opportunity

By Kyle Ringo Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

Colorado freshman Tedric Thompson had a blueprint for earning playing time in his first season at the college level before he arrived in Boulder and took part in his first practice with the Buffs.

Thompson's older brother, Cedric, is a junior safety at Minnesota this fall. Cedric Thompson earned playing time during his freshman season by embracing the opportunities he had on special teams.

Tedric Thompson decided to take the same approach in his first fall camp in Boulder and through the first two games he is leading the Buffs in special teams points. Thompson is a starter on the kickoff, kickoff return and punt return teams. He is a backup on the punt team.

"I have a lot of different roles, but whichever role they give me I just try to watch it on film and try to get in with coach (Toby) Neinas and see what is the best position they can put me in to make plays," Thompson said.

Thompson, one of seven true freshmen who have played this season at CU, hasn't played a down on defense where he is listed as the backup strong safety behind senior Parker Orms. He says he is feeling more and more comfortable with his responsibilities within the defense and believes he could make more plays than mistakes if coaches need him on defense.

For now, Thompson is happy to be contributing in whatever way he can in the kicking game.

He's already learned some hard lessons, having been on the field for three big returns the Buffs have given up. He said one of his mistakes played a big part in Colorado State getting a big second-half return in the season opener. He said he filled the wrong gap in coverage allowing the return man to slip through into the open field.

"The first thing I did when I got home was watch that play over and over to see what I did wrong and asked coach Neinas what I did so I can try to not make those mistakes again," Thompson said.

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Howell blog: CU Buffs like Severson's potential as kick returner

By Brian Howell, Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

It's not often that linebackers get the assignment of returning kickoffs, but true freshman Ryan Severson is not the typical linebacker.

The 5-foot-10, 200-pounder from San Jose, Calif., has the tools that Colorado head coach Mike MacIntyre was looking for to fill the kick return role.

"He's extremely fast; he's a 10.6(-second), 100-meter guy," said MacIntyre, whose son, Jay, played with Severson at Valley Christian High School. "He's very durable."

Severson, who played linebacker and running back, along with returning kicks, in high school, impressed CU's coaches throughout the fall. It was evident early in camp that Severson would not be redshirting.

"I'm very excited. I came out and had a great fall camp," said Severson, who rushed for 1,951 yards and 32 touchdowns as a high school senior last year and was named the San Jose Mercury News offensive player of the year. "I got some playing time on special teams, which I'm excited for."

In Colorado's season opener, sophomore Marques Mosley was the deep man on kickoff returns, with Severson also back. In Week 2, against Central Arkansas, it was Severson lining up deep.

UCA's first two kicks went into the end zone for touchbacks. On Severson's first opportunity at a return, he fumbled the ball and it went out of bounds at the 2-yard line, pinning the offense deep. Not the start he wanted.

"I was so excited, because it was finally the first time I was going to actually get to return," Severson said of that play. "All the other times I just had to knee it down. I took my eyes off it for a quick second with the excitement, and then (the fumble) happened. I was down and walked off to the sideline and coach was there and he said, 'Keep your head up and get them next time.'"

On his next chance, Severson had a nice return of 29 yards. His last chance was a solid, 21-yard return.

"I was so thankful to get another chance," Severson said. "That's all I wanted at that point. I just wanted to get one more chance at it just to show myself and I did."

MacIntyre gave Severson another chance because he likes the potential Severson has in this role.

"He's young and he'll keep getting better and better," MacIntyre said. "He had a good one the other night and he'll end up breaking a couple, for sure, before it's over."

Severson also said he's been comfortable at linebacker and that he's done a good job of picking up the CU defense. There could be an opportunity for him down the road at linebacker, too.

"I do see a future for him as a linebacker, especially in today's football when you need speed and athleticism on the field," MacIntyre said. "He's kind of that guy."

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Kyle Ringo Blog: Fresno State's classy move will benefit Boulder flood victims

By Kyle Ringo Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera
Posted:

Buffzone.com

Members of the Fresno State Student Athlete Advisory Committee and Red Cross volunteers will collect donations for Colorado flood victims before the Bulldogs home game against Boise State on Friday night.

Fresno State was scheduled to play the Buffs in Boulder last Saturday but the game was postponed and might ultimately be canceled in the wake of historic and deadly flooding in and around the Boulder area and throughout Colorado.

It's just one of several classy responses from Fresno State since the game was postponed. Fresno State officials first offered to send a plane of student-athletes to help CU recover from the flooding while it was still ongoing last weekend. CU officials did not accept the offer because they didn't want to put anyone else in harm's way.

Here's a tip of the cap to everyone in the Fresno State community for handling the situation in a first-rate manner and for the help offered and given.

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CU Buffs football uses extra time off to work on anemic running game

By John Henderson The Denver Post The Denver Post
Posted:

DenverPost.com

BOULDER — For any hyper college student, three weeks off from anything is a long time — unless it's Western Civ. The Colorado Buffaloes are champing at the bit, with the flood postponing Saturday's home game against Fresno State, giving them a three-week gap between games.

One Buffalo, however, isn't complaining. Sophomore tailback Christian Powell still is nursing a slowly healing thigh bruise that may be the crux of CU's subpar rushing attack.

In their two wins, the Buffs have averaged only 96.5 yards rushing per game. That ranks 107th in the country and 10th in the Pac-12. With this Saturday's bye providing an in-season minicamp, guess where the first-year CU staff is concentrating.

"We're working that hard," said coach Mike MacIntyre.

The running game has been hidden by a lethal passing game. But the Buffs soon will find pass defenses better than Colorado State's and Central Arkansas'. They can't go into Pac-12 play averaging only 2.7 yards per carry.

And they can't have their longest run from scrimmage be 31 yards from D.D. Goodson, a wide receiver. Or the second-longest a 19-yarder from quarterback Connor Wood.

"It's been a combination (of things)," MacIntyre said. "No. 1, we need to block a little bit better. Sustain blocks a little bit better. No. 2, the running backs must make a few guys miss here and there to bust one."

That is Powell's problem. Last year's leading rusher, one of the team's three "strengths" MacIntyre cited when he came to Boulder, took a helmet to the thigh in the season opener against CSU. He got dinged against Central Arkansas and had to leave both games.

It's one reason Powell has only 64 yards rushing, averaging barely 3 yards per carry. Junior Tony Jones leads the Buffs with 85 yards.

"It's a little minor setback," said Powell, who gained 691 yards last year despite missing two games because of injuries. "It's not where I'd like it. It's something I wish hadn't happened, but I'm going through it. It'll get better."

Powell figures he will be 100 percent by CU's next game, Sept. 28 at Oregon State (2-1). In the meantime, he must hang on to his job.

"There's competition every day," MacIntyre said. "We need some guys who will start breaking out and making some runs. Hopefully, a couple guys will do it."

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