



Ohio duo take long journey to Boulder

Stewart, Rippy now CU teammates, roommates

By B.G. Brooks

Saturday, August 9, 2008

Since arriving in Boulder, Rodney Stewart hasn't let many days pass without showing his gratitude to longtime friend and roommate Doug Rippy.

They will be seen frequently on the University of Colorado campus during the next four years, Stewart being the little guy (5-foot-6, 175 pounds) with the high-wattage smile rarely switched off, Rippy being the big guy (6-2, 230) who appears more stoic.

They met four years ago at a basketball game in Ohio and never, ever could have guessed they would be reunited on a football field in Colorado. It happened by chance.

Rippy, of Trotwood, Ohio, was headed for Nebraska until rumblings of former coach Bill Callahan's firing surfaced. Stewart, of Columbus, Ohio, likely was headed for a Mid-American Conference or Atlantic Coast Conference school until CU assistant Darian Hagan resumed recruiting Rippy - and Rippy recommended his buddy.

Recalled Hagan: "I was talking to Rippy, and he was asking me if we were going to get Darrell (Scott). I was like, 'I don't know.' He said, 'I got this guy in Columbus nicknamed 'Speedy.' "

" 'Speedy?' " said Hagan, reacting as any running-backs coach would, whipping out his cell phone and begging Rippy to elaborate.

Rippy did, and Hagan took it from there, calling Stewart's high school coach, then flying to Ohio with CU running-game coordinator/offensive-line coach Jeff Grimes for a face-to-face meeting with "Speedy."

Rippy, who missed Friday morning's practice with a high fever but expects to return today, applauds Hagan for his follow-through: "It was great that he took time out of his day to check it all out. . . . That means a coach trusts you."

Stewart and Rippy have never competed against each other. A basketball player during his freshman and sophomore years at Linden-McKinley High School in Columbus before transferring to Madison High School in Trotwood, Rippy watched Stewart in his sophomore season when their schools played in football and kept track of him through their senior seasons, when Stewart rushed for 2,036 yards and 33 touchdowns at Columbus' Brookhaven High School.

As a high school junior, Rippy swapped hoops for football despite interest shown in him by basketball programs at Xavier and Toledo. Pegged by CU as an outside linebacker, Rippy played all three linebacker positions in high school.

Despite his commitment to Nebraska, Rippy had an interest in the Buffaloes but hadn't heard from them - an oversight Hagan blames on being told by a third party the distance factor was working against CU.

On their first meeting, Rippy let Hagan know that wasn't the case. And the Buffaloes had another in: Rippy's high school coach, Maurice Douglas, was a former Chicago Bears teammate of CU linebackers coach Brian Cabral.

When CU showed an interest, Rippy "jumped in with both feet," Hagan said.

Initially, Stewart reminded Hagan of two past diminutive players - Herchell Troutman and Roman Hollowell. When he saw more of him on tape and this week in practice, former Kansas State tailback Darren Sproles came to mind.

"He's got quick feet, fluid hips and he never stops, he's always going forward," Hagan said. "He had a 5-yard run (Friday) morning with probably six or seven cuts - and no one touched him."

Rippy wasn't there to see it, but his roomie undoubtedly briefed him and did what he usually does: "I thank him every day," Stewart said.

ETC.: Two high-profile 2009 recruits - receiver **Randall Carroll** (Los Angeles Cathedral) and defensive end **Nosa Equae** (Mansfield, Texas) - visited CU on Friday. . . . **CU fullback Maurice Cantrell is among 71 nominees announced for the 2008 Allstate AFCA Good Works Team. . . . The first full-squad practice, also the first in full pads, is scheduled for today (4-6:30 p.m.).**

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Longmont, Colorado
Saturday, August 09, 2008

TIMES-CALL

Publish Date: 8/9/2008

Buff's linebacker tackles challenges

Mohler primed to contribute this fall

*By Patrick Ridgell
Longmont Times-Call*

BOULDER — Shaun Mohler and Scotty McKnight are good friends. But this wasn't always the case.

Teammates at the University of Colorado, the two once were hated rivals in Orange County, Calif., when McKnight starred at Tesoro High and Mohler at Corona Del Mar.

After their senior seasons, they played on a county all-star team and became friends. McKnight, in fact, was an active participant last winter when the program swayed Mohler from his Nebraska commitment to CU. More notably, Mohler's arrival in Boulder came mainly thanks to sheer will and determination he forged through earlier struggles.

More on that in a bit. For now, Mohler and McKnight make no effort to deny it: They did not like one another.

"It was always a battle," Mohler said. "I was always trying to get after him because he was their best player. So I tried to hurt him every time."

Said McKnight, a sophomore receiver: "We used to go at it with each other. ... Me and him almost got into a brawl on the field one time. He was their guy on defense, and I was our guy on offense, so we'd go at it."

Officials and others stopped that brawl before it escalated into something too nasty. McKnight even derived some satisfaction by tormenting his rival. Mohler was Corona del Mar's quarterback during their senior seasons, in 2005. One time, McKnight intercepted Mohler, and as McKnight returned it, he saw an angry Mohler zeroing in for a big hit. McKnight stepped out of bounds just before Mohler could level him.

"That was probably one of the most memorable moments of my high school career," McKnight said with a laugh.

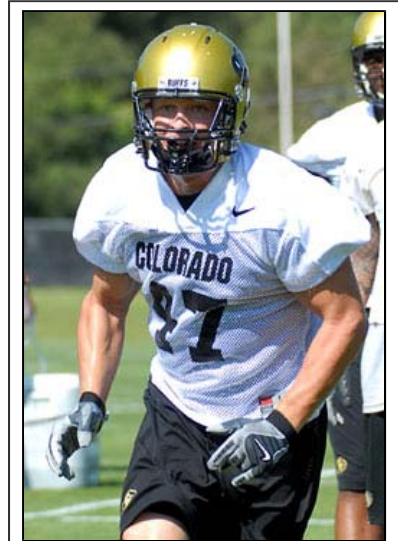
More memorable moments for Mohler appear near. He's playing on special teams and at linebacker, the position in which he thrived in high school and at Orange Coast College the past two years before transferring. CU coach Dan Hawkins said Friday that Mohler probably will not redshirt in 2008.

"That guy's on a mission," Hawkins said.

That mission is more complicated than it appears at first glance. It forced Mohler to complete eight courses since he committed to CU last December — two in OCC's winter session, six last spring and two more this summer — in order to gain admittance to CU.

Mohler admits there were times while he had his nose buried in studies for hours at a time that he thought he was crazy. Those thoughts grew, especially when he considered how gaining admittance at other places didn't require similar standards.

"I didn't know I had to take that many classes," he said, adding that he learned how many credits he needed only after he committed. Mohler said he might have reconsidered making his commitment had he previously known. He said he stuck to it because he liked CU linebacker coach Brian Cabral.



Colorado linebacker Shaun Mohler runs drills on the first day of camp on Tuesday. **Kira Horvath/Times-Call**

“There were some other schools he could have gone to that had lesser requirements,” McKnight said. “Juco to Colorado is hard to get in to. He just liked it so much and really liked coach Cabral and what they were going to do with him here that he just thought this was the best thing for him.”

Mohler is not the type who shies away from challenges. Ear infections plagued him when he was young. According to the Daily Pilot in Newport Beach, Calif., Mohler’s mother took her son to the hospital 98 times in one year when he was very young due to the constant infections.

He grew so used to having fluid drained that it stopped making him cry. Doctors eventually removed his adenoids.

Mohler does not dispute any of that. In fact, he said his ear infections didn’t abate until he was about 9 or 10. By then, other problems had arisen. He needed speech therapy for several years. He had a learning disability that required attention.

“It took me longer to pick up things,” Mohler said. “So I had to have another person say it over to me again. When the teacher was saying something, I didn’t fully understand it. I didn’t hear it the second time. It was always hard.”

McKnight said the learning disability showed Mohler’s mettle.

“He went through a lot of schoolwork,” McKnight said. “He’s very determined, very dedicated. He’s all about the sport of football.”

When McKnight was home in recent months, he’d call Mohler and invite him to eat at the Orange County restaurant where his mother is the chef. Mohler would always decline.

“He’d say, ‘I got homework going on. I’m trying to get this schoolwork done,’” McKnight said.

Mohler only shrugs at how he made it to Boulder.

“It was time management, making sure you get all of your work done,” he said.

Hawkins said it’s more.

“I think it’s a case of reaching down and finding those guys that have a zeal for that, have a passion,” the coach said. “He went through some emotions, I think, in essence of wondering where to go to school and what to do. I think once he made his mind up, he had a definite plan, and he was one of those guys where every time you talked to him, he knew exactly what it is he had to do and he was on it.

“It’s a real credit to him. Your heart goes out to those guys that are able to reach down deep and get it done.”

EXTRA POINTS: Hawkins said Will Pericak’s move from tight end to the defensive line is “probably” permanent. Hawkins believes Pericak can put on more weight and be a “stalwart” there. “It’s just where’s the best fit for him,” Hawkins said. “By and large, we coaches have been doing this for a while, and we can kind of take a look at a guy and go, ‘He’s better suited for this spot.’ I just think he’s better suited for that.” ... Today’s practice — the first in full pads and the first with the team combined — is scheduled for 4 p.m.

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Bufs' Katoa seeks right path

Freshman linebacker out to put felony charge behind him

By Kyle Ringo
Saturday, August 9, 2008

There have been times over the past six months when Lynn Katoa wondered whether he would ever have the chance to put on a Colorado football helmet and bang heads with teammates on the practice fields just North of Folsom Field.

The true freshman from Salt Lake City is finally getting that opportunity this week though he knows the carrot being dangled in front of the rest of the Bufs -- the possibility of playing time this season -- doesn't apply to him.

"Yeah, but I'm just trying to turn it into a positive thing," Katoa said. "I can't really just dwell on it. I look at it as I have another year to work on myself, my speed, my strength, my playbook and just everything that (assistant) coach (Brian) Cabral is trying to teach me."

Katoa was suspended by the school last spring after being arrested and charged with felony assault following an off-campus incident in February in which he allegedly hit one man while holding a rock in his hand and shoved another man's head into a wall. Katoa was angered by seeing a friend assaulted with a stun gun by another man who fled.

He plead guilty to a felony charge last month in Boulder County Court and received a deferred sentence, which will prevent the felony from appearing on his record if he stays out of trouble for three years.

Katoa can't play this season because he did not complete enough credit hours in the spring semester because of his suspension and is academically ineligible. Katoa is trying to put the incident behind him and focus on becoming just another freshman once again.

"I just want to go to school and show everyone that I'm not like a thug. I'm not a trouble maker," he said. "I just made a bad, stupid decision. I want to give back. Going to school and football is good, but I want to give in the community and things like that and just start doing the right things."

First day in full pads

Colorado coach Dan Hawkins acknowledged Friday there are a number of things coaches can only determine based on how players perform in full pads.

The CU staff gets its first look at the 2008 Bufs in full pads today, but Hawkins will likely warn his players to not get too excited before taking the field. Today is also the first full-squad practice (4-6:30 p.m.).

"I just think you need to be careful that first day in pads," Hawkins said. "Guys get all amped up and smack each other around and people get hurt."

Major talent

True freshman linebacker Jon Major seems to holding his own practicing with veterans in the afternoons this week. Major is wearing No. 31 and has shown an ability to read plays and get to the ball carrier quickly.

Major attended Ponderosa High School and spent plenty of time around the program last year. Visiting practices and watching the Buffs in person multiple times in 2007 might help Major get on the field in 2008.

Good omen

The Buffs open the season on Sunday, Aug. 31, in Denver against Colorado State at Invesco Field. The only other times the program opened a season on Sunday it finished the season in the national title hunt, despite either losing or tying the opener.

The Buffs won the national title in 1990 after opening that year with a Sunday game against Tennessee in the Pigskin Classic. The game ended in a tie. CU lost to Fresno State at home to start the 2001 season before going on to win the Big 12 championship and be left out of the national championship game in favor of Nebraska. The Buffs beat the Cornhuskers 62-36 in the regular season finale that season, but went on to lose badly to Oregon in the Fiesta Bowl.



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