



# Bufs' Smith a player with definite purpose

## Soph putting his name in CU's record books

By Kyle Ringo

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Regardless of how the season ends for the Colorado football team, it's safe to pencil in sophomore Josh Smith as one of the bright spots.

He's having an historic season, one that promises to leave his name in the record books.

Sure, there have been moments Smith would rather forget. His seven fumbles for starters, though only one of them ended in a turnover. There was also that first-quarter kickoff return against Texas the first weekend of October when Smith failed to take a knee in a proper, timely fashion and nearly cost his team a safety.

His production in the offense has faded during Big 12 Conference play, but he has remained the strength of several of the Bufs' problematic special teams units. And the truth is, Smith has been the team's most exciting player for most of the year.

Only four players in 119 years of Colorado football have produced more all-purpose yardage in a season than Smith. Their names are legendary: Rashaan Salaam, Eric Bieniemy, Chris Brown and Byron White.

Through 11 games, Smith has totaled 1,742 yards from receiving, rushing, kickoff and punt returns. He's on pace to finish with exactly 1,900 all-purpose yards, a feat accomplished only by Salaam and White.

"It's a huge deal to me," Smith said. "I try to focus more on winning games than anything on the statistic end of it, but I got to say that I'm pretty proud of myself and myteammates, who got the good blocking done to help me put up those type of numbers."

Smith ranks 14th nationally in all-purpose yardage. He is second in the Big 12 Conference, trailing only Missouri wideout Jeremy Maclin, who has 2,207 yards doing all the jobs Smith handles for the Bufs.

Salaam ran for 2,055 yards and added 294 yards in receptions when he won the Heisman Trophy and set the CU all-purpose yardage record for one season at 2,349 yards in 1994. He did it all in 11 games.

White played just eight games back in 1937, when he ran for 1,121 yards and added another 849 in returns. Bieniemy played 11 games (1,818 yards) in 1990 and Brown played 12 games (1,784) in 2002.

While staring at an old photograph of White in the College Football Hall of Fame display hanging just inside the Dal Ward Center this week, Smith said he is honored just to be mentioned with those esteemed figures from the program's past.

Smith is just completing the fourth season of football in his life. He played only two years in high school before coming to Boulder a year ago and is viewed as a player who still has an enormous amount of learning and growing to do.

"How raw is he as a football player? Extremely," coach Dan Hawkins said. "He's obviously doing a whole lot more mentally than he's done before and handling the whole practicing every day and playing hurt.

"You know, he's got to be a return guy in two spots as well as play receiver. I still think his potential is way up here."

His nephew, CU freshman running back Darrell Scott, said it has been fun to watch his uncle improve at the game they both now love so much. Smith first started playing when Scott was already making a name for himself as a sophomore in high school.

"He didn't know what he was doing," Scott said with a chuckle. "He can do some crazy things now."

Smith said one of the biggest compliments he believes he has received during his young football career is when he hears coaches talk about his untapped potential.

"It's nice to know I still have real big upside," Smith said. "I still haven't reached the core of my potential and have got a lot done in the process."

Colorado special teams coach Kent Riddle and wide receivers coach Eric Kiesau are most responsible for helping Smith reach that potential, and both believe he has come a long way in his first two seasons in the program. Riddle said he has been impressed with Smith continuing in dangerous return jobs with two aching and injured shoulders in the last month of the season, when he has also taken better care of the football.

"Most of that stuff came early when he was learning and he learned from it and moved on," Riddle said. "He's been very reliable for a guy who has been battling through injuries."

He proves his toughness by playing hurt, but Smith said he still feels new to the game much of the time and continues to search for confidence in much of what he is doing heading into the 12th game of his sophomore season. He always feels most vulnerable when looking up into the sky for kickoffs and punts as 11 opponents bear down on him at full speed.

"Regardless of how it looks, there is never not a time when I'm back there that I'm not nervous," Smith said. "It's the first year doing it for me, and it got a little bit better toward the end of the season, but most of the time I'm worried about not screwing up and running to the right return and catching the ball and not creating any kind of turnovers."

When those factors begin to subside for Smith and he begins to play with more confidence and a greater grasp of the entire playbook offensively, he could make his way to the top of all-purpose list.

"Josh is on his way," Scott said.

## **Notable**

The Buffs will conduct a mock game today at Folsom Field. It is closed to the public and the media. The

team will be off on Sunday before resuming preparations for Friday's regular-season finale at Nebraska. ... Safety Ryan Walters continues to wear a protective boot on his left foot and is questionable for the game. Fellow senior safety D.J. Dykes is unlikely to play as he continues to battle an undisclosed illness.



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