



CB Burney ready to return to Buffs

Coming off five surgeries, Buffs CB will participate in spring ball

By Kyle Ringo
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BOULDER, Colo. — Benjamin Burney hasn't been heard from on the football fields at Colorado in more than a year, but there might not have been a busier player on the roster in that time.

A fifth-year senior-to-be in the fall, Burney has been through surgeries and rehabilitation on five different body parts. He has written a 500-page book, is shooting a feature-length movie -- spending \$10,000 to do so -- and has worked hard in the classroom putting himself in position to graduate in May.

With spring practices kicking off in 12 days, Burney estimates he is about 80 percent recovered and expects to be on the field competing, though he might do so in a reduced role initially. He has discovered a lot about himself, including how much he loves the game and that he can succeed without it.

"I always wanted to get out of it. I wanted it to be done. I wanted to be healthy," Burney said of the past year. "But about halfway through, I was like, 'I need to cherish this moment, not being able to have my full potential and not being able to do what I can do because it means I have to stress and strain to express myself in different ways.'

"Really what it came down to this whole year was not really being focused on football but being focused on what I can do once I'm back healthy." Burney had surgeries done on both shoulders, both wrists and a knee since January 2008. He estimates the costs for all his medical issues at \$500,000. Burney said during a 10-month span, he spent only three weeks free of any drugs, crutches, braces or casts, and, at times, those restrictions on his life nearly drove him mad. Twice he was forced into metal braces after shoulder surgeries that kept his arm in one position for six weeks, ruining his sleep the entire time.

"The worst part I think was that I don't think it was smart for me to get so many surgeries back-to-back-to-back because mentally it was like really draining," Burney said. "What it did was it kind of made me feel self-conscious about myself. I was getting really small and really skinny. I didn't like coming around Dal Ward, even though I had to, because players would clown and be like, 'Oh my god, you look like you were in the Holocaust or anorexic.' And I was like, 'Thanks man. I appreciate that.' I'd be wearing these big old shirts trying to cover up my lack of muscle and everything.

"You know they're joking, but after awhile you start looking at yourself and you know it really is true because I was like this Adonis-like figure and when I lost all that, when I lost that basic faade of a Division I football player, it made me start questioning like my life and how I thought and how I act and how I treated people. So basically them insulting me so much, humbled me a lot."

His teammates might have had fun at his expense at times during the past year, but they will be happy to

get him back on the field next fall. He undoubtedly improves a defense that will rely on its linebackers and secondary next season as the defensive line matures.

Burney has played in 36 games in his career, including 13 starts at cornerback opposite former All-Big 12 Conference cornerback Terrence Wheatley in 2007. That year he tied for the most snaps from scrimmage by any player, despite playing with a body that would require those five surgeries at season's end. Burney believes when he gets his strength back, he will be better than ever.

"Knowing I'm only at 80 percent right now makes me really confident for when the summer comes and I do have all my muscles back and I have all my speed," Burney said. "Basically, my body wasn't made for football, but after getting all these staples and sutures and stuff in me, I'm now made to play football.

"It's kind of strange how I basically smacked God in the face and said, 'You didn't do a good enough job with my body.' "

Burney was raised in a football family and probably learned toughness there. His father spent the past six seasons coaching the defensive line for the Denver Broncos, which only fed his desire to one day play professionally. But Burney has a wide variety of interests and an outgoing spirit that allows him to try anything once.

Last summer as his teammates prepared for training camp, he began writing short stories on Facebook.com. His friends loved them. So he wrote more and more. Burney spent one day during fall camp writing for more than 12 hours. His roommate, defensive lineman Taj Kaynor left for camp at 7 a.m. and Burney was sitting in his chair writing. When Kaynor came back after 7 p.m. that night, Burney was still in the same spot typing.

"I think it was just hard for him not to be in the mix of everything, you know?" Kaynor said. "Seeing him in the locker room I think it's one of his favorite parts just because he's in the mix with everything again. He had to be by himself for a little while."

By Thanksgiving Day, one day before the Buffs' season ended in heartbreak at Nebraska, Burney finished his first book. It is based on his experiences in college football and stories from current and former teammates and friends. He calls it "a coming of age story." The still untitled book is supposed to be released March 28 by an Internet publishing company.

"Really, it was like venting for me, a way to get everything off my chest and get through it and out of it," Burney, who will publish the book under a pseudonym said. "You know, critique my life and other people's lives and how we live, and what kind of factory we're in in NCAA football.

"It's all controversial. It's rated R. It's basically sex on paper. Hopefully people see beyond all the graphic nature and the sex and the cussing and all the stuff we do to see the true meaning underneath because there is definitely something that is there."

Burney doesn't shy away from anything on or off the field. His movie covers more hot-button material.

It's called "Memories of Heaven" he hopes to complete it this summer. He said it is a critique on religion and "hood life" in which he plays Lucifer. He wrote the script and has spent \$10,000 on equipment and film to make the movie.

Other current or former Buffs with parts in the film include Alonzo Barrett, Brad Jones, George

Hypolite, Jimmy Smith and Kaynor.

"I've been busy because I knew I would get really depressed or upset in a sense if I just focused on football all the time," Burney said.



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