



CU's Smith sets sights on Salaam's mark

Junior aims for Buffs' all-purpose yards record

By Kyle Ringo

Wednesday, April 15, 2009

BOULDER, Colo. — Josh Smith tried to be as fearless as possible on the football field last fall while he was scared to death.

The Colorado wide receiver won the kickoff return and punt return jobs in fall camp but wasn't fully prepared for the fear he felt standing back there waiting for kicks to fall out of the sky with opponents barreling toward him.

The thing is, you never would have known it by the way he performed.

He opened the season against Colorado State with a kickoff return for a touchdown. The highlight made SportsCenter. He came very close to returning several more kickoffs and punts for scores throughout the season en route to a historic year.

Smith finished with the second most all-purpose yards in a single season in CU history. The only player to ever gain more in one year was former tailback Rashaan Salaam, who rushed for more than 2,000 yards in 1994 and won the Heisman Trophy.

It has been nearly five months since the season ended and Smith is still awed by his name being mentioned along side Salaam.

"That was big for me honestly," Smith said. "For it being my fourth year overall playing football in my life, to even be mentioned with somebody with a name as big as Rashaan Salaam and to have anything over 1,000 yards in any position is always good. I was at 2,000 and that was like, 'Wow.' "

Smith finished the year with 1,987 all-purpose yards. He set school records with a total of 1,568 return yards and 50 kickoff returns. He also gained 387 yards receiving and 32 rushing.

And now that he has flirted with Salaam's record of 2,349 all-purpose yards, he wants to break it.

"I'm a winner. I want to take it all," he said. "I want to be on top of that list."

All indications are he will get his chance. Coach Dan Hawkins said he has no problem with Smith working all three jobs again this fall during his junior season as long as he continues to prove to be the best option through spring and fall camp.

Smith sure looked the part in the Buffs' first scrimmage this spring. He returned two kickoffs for 121 yards, nearly taking the opening kick back for a touchdown.

He said he will probably always have butterflies spinning in his stomach every time he goes back to return a kickoff or punt, but he is no longer filled with anxiety about the idea. He has learned to use the adrenaline to his advantage.

"He's going to be more confident back there," special teams coach Kent Riddle said. "He's got to understand when he's got a little bit more time and when he's got a little bit more room, when he needs to accelerate and when he can try and create something.

"All that comes from experience and confidence and he had a couple tough ones last year. When guys hit you before the ball gets there and you bounce back. That shows something. We're going to be a little bit better around him and be able to make some things happen that way, too."

Smith finished last season ranked in a ninth-place tie nationally in all-purpose yards with Darius Marshall from Marshall University. The Buff was third in all-purpose yards in the Big 12 behind Missouri's Jeremy Maclin and Oklahoma's DeMarco Murray. He should be a threat to top the list in 2009.

Perhaps the most impressive part of Smith's season last fall was that he continued to play week after week despite two separated shoulders.

He probably would have had a bigger year in the offense if not for those injuries. They limited what he could do at times with his arms, making him an unreliable receiving target.

This is the biggest reason he disappeared from the offense for long stretches but remained a playmaker on special teams.

"I got to say I was pretty banged up," he said. "It was real difficult not being able to practice without the blue jerseys each week with the two separated shoulders and all the pain from all the cortisone shots they gave me after practice on Fridays and in the morning before games.

"It was just like I started feeling like some sort of hospital patient because nobody likes needles, you know what I mean? But you've got to do it. You've got to get those shoulders numbed up so you can at least go out there and get something out of each game and out of each practice.

"Without it, you're pretty much useless. There were a lot of weeks I'd wake up and it was like I had to do crunches or sit-ups just to get out of bed on a Sunday morning because you don't have no shoulders.

"You don't even really know all the things you need shoulders for until you don't have them any more. I just had to make my arms into a little cross angel and lift up."

Smith said he wants to do all three jobs again this year and he believes he can improve on last season. He said if another player proves he is the best man for one of those positions, he will be fine with it because it will be best for the team.

But he doesn't believe that will happen because his year of experience has given him more confidence and he is healthy once again.

"A lot of people made jokes like, 'Man, you sure took a lot of risky punts,' " he said. "I was like, 'Well, what else am I back there for? I'm not really the fair catch type of man, unless I'm for sure to get blown up.' I don't care if I get one positive yard. It's going forward."



Brown still recovering from giardia

Senior CB has lost significant weight

By Kyle Ringo
Tuesday, April 14, 2009

Cornerback Cha'pelle Brown is probably doing more standing around holding his helmet this spring in practices than he has in all the practices during his previous three seasons in the Colorado football program combined.

Brown has been a heavy contributor in the program since the day he arrived in the summer of 2006 as a freshman from La Puente, Calif. He hasn't been able to do much at all this spring after contracting giardia in the offseason.

The illness is caused by a microscopic parasite that usually gets into a person's system by eating contaminated food or drinking tainted water. It has done a number on Brown, causing him to lose significant weight from his already diminutive frame.

He was 5-foot-7 and 180 pounds last season. He would not say exactly how much weight he has lost, but he said he believes he is through the worst and is beginning to regain some of it.

"I've got a long way to go, but I'm all right," Brown said. "I've got a lot of weight to gain back and get back healthy."

When he does return to full contact work, Brown figures to be one of the leaders of the defense next fall. It's hard to believe he's already a senior. He has played in every CU game during his career, a run of 37 straight. He's one of the smartest players on the roster and has a way of finding a way to make plays, even when pitted against much bigger opponents.

He said he is trying to encourage his teammates and help younger players understand their assignments this spring while also listening to secondary coach Greg Brown and defensive intern Ashley Ambrose so that when he does return, he can step right in and perform at a high level.

"I'm not healthy yet, so I don't feel like the old man," Brown said. "I'm the young guy trying to catch back up."

Brown is just one of a handful of defensive backs who has been shelved for a variety of reasons this spring. Jonathan Hawkins and Jalil Brown recently returned from injuries that had kept them out of much of the first two weeks of action. Anthony Wright has missed all of spring after suffering a partially torn ACL in a non-football related matter. Paul Vigo pulled his hamstring on the first day of spring ball and is only now getting back to full strength and Ben Burney has been limited while still recovering from five surgeries in the past year.

"It's frustrating, but everything happens for a reason and everybody goes through something," Cha'pelle Brown said. "So I guess this is my test, and I've just got to try to get through it and be strong and be back soon."

Notable

Coach Dan Hawkins said Friday's scrimmage will be either in the bubble or on the practice fields and closed to the public. ... Hawkins said to this point in camp, Taj Kaynor, Eugene Goree, Marquez Herrod and Will Pericak have stood out in the competition for playing time on the defensive line. ... Running back Darrell Scott produced several highlight-reel plays in Tuesday's two-hour practice. ... Seth Lobato, a standout football and basketball player from Eaton High School, will walk-on with the Buffs at quarterback in the fall.



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Woelk: Put power run game on wish list

By Neill Woelk

Wednesday, April 15, 2009

BOULDER, Colo. — I realize this might be heresy in the day and age of the spread offense. I realize the fad of the day is to have football teams chuck it all around the field whenever and wherever possible.

But given my druthers, I'd like to see the Colorado Buffaloes line up this year and play some smashmouth football. Just for the heck of it.

It wouldn't have to be every play. Maybe not even every series.

But often enough that teams in the Big 12 would have to respect CU's ability to run the ball -- in any situation. Often enough that when the Buffs faced third-and-short on the goal line, everyone in the stadium would know what they were going to do -- and they'd still be successful doing it.

Darrell Scott right, Darrell Scott left, Rodney Stewart around the corner. Good old-fashioned, run-it-down-their-throats football, the kind that wears on defenses, the kind that works in any weather.

Most importantly, the kind that takes advantage of a stable of solid running backs and an offensive line big enough to make it happen.

Before you completely dismiss it as the ramblings of an old geezer who grew up watching the Big Eight (remember that conference?) and refuses to admit that we've moved into the 21st century, think about it for a second.

The Buffs have the backs to do it. Between Scott, Stewart and Demetrius Sumler, the Buffs have what could be one of the best group of backs in the Big 12 next season. No joke.

Meanwhile, they have depth problems at receiver and their quarterback play ... well, let's just say it wasn't considered a huge strength a year ago.

But did you know the Buffs had the seventh-leading rusher in the Big 12 last season? Yep. Despite missing three-plus games with a broken leg, Stewart ran for 622 yards on less than 15 carries per game. Stretch those numbers to 20 carries per game -- and put it over a 12-game season -- and you have an 1,100-yard year.

That would have put a running back at No. 3 in the conference a year ago.

(If you remember that OSU's Kendall Hunter led the Big 12 in rushing last year with 1,555 yards, give yourself a gold star. If you remember the days when 1,555 yards was just a pretty good season in the Big Eight, give yourself an old star.)

As for linemen, the Buffs are loaded up front. Plenty of big, strong, mean folks that would like nothing better than to line up every play and knock someone on their keester.

"When you're pass blocking, you're doing a good job and still going backward," said 6-9, 310-pound tackle Nate Solder. "But when you run block, you can just dominate a guy. You can just put him into the ground.

"There's no doubt which one is more fun."

The Buffs didn't exactly have much fun with their running game a year ago. CU finished 10th in the Big 12, producing just 124.5 yards per game on the ground. There have been years when that wasn't a particularly good half for CU's running game.

But, says O-line coach Denver Johnson, the Buffs' running game should be markedly improved this year.

"We've got the right guys to do that," said Johnson when asked if CU could line up and play a little smashmouth once in a while. "You take a guy like big ol' Ryan Miller, that plays right into his wheelhouse. Our guys would embrace that kind of plan, no doubt."

CU head coach Dan Hawkins has no design to play smashmouth for 60 minutes. But Hawk would like to get to the point that his team runs and passes equally well. He envisions a balanced attack that would force teams to respect both aspects of CU's offense.

To get there, the Buffs' running game will need some legs.

"We certainly want to put some power and assertiveness back into our running game," Johnson allowed. "We're getting there. I definitely think we can do that."

That would be fun. Just for old time's -- and old timers' -- sake.



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Turnovers stressed for Buffs' defense

By Patrick Ridgell
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BOULDER — In the strange world of college football, coaches say turnovers can change games — and seasons. So read nothing into the fact that over the past decade, Colorado's best season with turnovers came in 2006, when it had a plus-8 margin, meaning the team forced eight more turnovers than it committed. That season, the Buffs went 2-10.

Defensive coaches emphasize creating turnovers and offensive coaches strive to avoid them. They always have, and always will, because success can hinge on them. For proof, remember CU's victory against Eastern Washington last year, when Cha'pelle Brown's interception and return for a touchdown in the final moments earned the winning points. Or the Texas A&M game, in which a last-minute rally ended when quarterback Tyler Hansen threw a pick.

At CU this spring, where the Buffs are coming off their worst turnover margin in years, several defensive players have said forcing turnovers is being stressed more than usual. When they came up with none during Saturday's 125-play scrimmage, defensive coordinator Ron Collins voiced his concern.

EXTRA POINTS:

Hawkins said that if bad weather hits Friday, as is predicted, CU's scrimmage will be in the bubble and closed to the public. ... Hawkins named Goree, Taj Kaynor, Marquez Herrod and Will Pericak as defensive linemen who are standing out through nine spring practices. ... Asked again about junior kicker Aric Goodman, who's trying to rebound from a 5-for-14 season, Hawkins answered, "The true joy and the true victory is the guy keeps throwing himself out there. Imagine yourself in his shoes when you run out in front of 50,000 people and the whole stadium is booing you? What does that do for your character and your development if you handle that right."

Patrick Ridgell can be reached at pridgell@times-call.com.

"You go 100 plays, you need some turnovers," Collins said. "But it's a credit to the offense, too. They did a great job. "I thought we had a couple of opportunities that we looked at on film where I thought we could have created some turnovers. We dropped a couple of interceptions we could have had, and we probably could have had a couple of swipes at the ball when they were running it.

"That's the learning curve. We have to take advantage of those opportunities."

Collins said that during recent film sessions, coaches pointed to examples from Saturday of times when ball carriers did not secure the football, creating opportunities to swipe it free that were not seized.

"We tell them it's a missed opportunity for a big play," Collins said. "They have to learn from film and come out and practice it."

CU finished tied for ninth in the Big 12 in 2008 with a turnover margin of minus-7. That was its worst effort since minus-8 in 1992, a year the Buffs went 9-2-1 and finished second in the Big 8.

Collins said that if a team finishes each game plus-1, making it plus-12 for a season, it exponentially increases its chances of winning.

"If you go plus-2 (per game), you should be one of the top 10 teams in the country," Collins said.

MINOR SCARE: The tornado that hit Murfreesboro, Tenn., last Friday had one Buffalo scrambling for the phone.

Defensive tackle Eugene Goree attended high school there and has family living in the town. He learned about the tornado when he logged on to the Internet on Friday and read about it tearing through central Tennessee.

"My heart almost jumped out of my chest when I saw that," Goree said.

"Everything is cool."

Goree said he called home right after learning the news, and reported Monday that his family and friends are OK. According to the Associated Press, the tornado killed two people, injured dozens and destroyed at least three dozen homes in Murfreesboro, where about 100,000 people reside. It lies 30 miles southeast of Nashville.



Today
Now: 48°F Partly Sunny
High: 62°F - Low: 37°F

Tomorrow
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High: 52°F - Low: 28°F

Wednesday, April 15, 2009

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CU's Kaynor going all out for last season

By B.G. Brooks
[bbbrooksrn@aol.com](mailto:bbrooksrn@aol.com)

BOULDER — It was more like being slapped by the obvious than having an epiphany, but University of Colorado senior Taj Kaynor realized during winter conditioning work that time is running short for him to impact the defensive line.

Thus, the 2009 season "means everything to me," said Kaynor, a gregarious Cherry Creek High School product who has been on an almost constant weight-gaining mission at CU.

Still light for a defensive lineman at 265 pounds, the 6-foot-5 Kaynor believes the Buffaloes will be faster overall on defense this season.

"It's been showing in spring ball," he said. "I think I've seen eight, nine, 10, 11 guys get to the ball more than I ever have."

Some schematic defensive changes will "allow the linemen to run a lot more, and that's a big difference for us up front," Kaynor said.

"I was talking to George (Hypolite, former CU starter at defensive tackle) and told him they changed up the defense, and he said, 'Oh, man ... as soon as I left.'"

"Those guys (last year) were great, they're my boys forever. But our standard is going to be different; our D-line is so different from what they had. We're going to have a lot of accomplishments they didn't just because of the personnel we have and the way the defense is structured this year."

Kaynor has worked himself into the mix for playing time, prompting this from coach Dan Hawkins: "Taj has really had a nice spring ... he's shown a lot of fire and passion. The light's kind of come on for him. It's been tough on for the last couple of years."

Hawkins also singled out the April work of converted tight end Will Pericak, whom Hawkins said can play either end or tackle; end Conrad Obi and nose tackle Eugene Goree.

Those players are underclassmen with ample time remaining to fulfill potential in their college careers.

Not so for Kaynor.

"I'm trying to make my stand, to leave my mark," he said. "This is my time to shine and I feel like we're going to have the tools (on defense) to do it."

NO RUSH FOR CAPTAINS: Historically, Hawkins likes to have team captains in place by now, assuring that summer conditioning work and unsupervised seven-on-seven passing drills will be well-coordinated.

CU might or might not have its captains elected by the end of the spring semester, but Hawkins isn't concerned.

Through his winter "accountability groups," he believes enough solid leadership was identified to make naming captains a low priority item — for now.

"It's not just one or two guys ... we've been working with nine or 10 — our leadership groups," Hawkins said. "It's been a lot of guys. There's a lot of guys I feel like we can go to whatever it is (at issue) — whether it's the tempo of practice, or downtown or study hall or whatever."

Looking to the future, he also wants "to bring along younger guys and give them some autonomy as well" for leadership roles.

BUFF BITS: If the forecast for rain holds, Friday's scrimmage will be conducted in the Buffs' practice bubble, making it closed to the public because of a lack of sideline space for spectators, Hawkins said. ... Kicker **Aric Goodman** has been mostly superb through spring drills. He's trying to bounce back from an up-and-down 2008 season, and Hawkins said Goodman is handling that past adversity well: "It's a direct correlation with how you handle life."



CATEGORY: College football, Colleges, Insider, Sports

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