

Hall Of Fame Profile: Matt Russell

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Established in 1998, the University of Colorado Athletic Hall of Fame honors those who represent what it truly means to be a Buff. One of 12 individuals that will be inducted this month is former CU linebacker Matt Russell after making a tremendous impact on the program during his four-year career at Colorado.

Born on July 5, 1973, Russell was recruited by the Buffs after a successful high school career at Belleville East High School in Belleville, Ill. Rated the No. 10 and No. 3 linebacker prospect in the country by PFR and SuperPrep respectively, Russell chose Colorado over offers from the University of Illinois, the University of Iowa and Clemson University.

For Russell, it was an easy decision. "Back when I was in high school, I came to visit Boulder and we drove over that hill on U.S. 36 and I saw campus and I knew it was a done deal. I knew exactly where I was going to school," says Russell.

As a freshman in 1993, Russell came into the program and was quick to make an immediate impact on the field. His first season as a Buff, Russell set the record for freshman tackles in a season with 85. By his junior season (1995), Russell was named a third-team All-American, a first team All-Big Eight Conference selection and the recipient of Colorado's Dave Jones Award, presented to the team's most outstanding defensive player.

With an impressive first three seasons at Colorado, Russell's greatest accomplishment came during his senior year in 1996. A first team All-American and a first team All-Big 12 Conference player, Russell's career as a Buff concluded with one of the greatest honors in college football when he was named the winner of the 1996 Butkus Award. Awarded to the nation's top linebacker, Russell was just the second CU player to receive the accolade.

Even when asked 16 years later about that moment in 1996, Russell is quick to give credit to those that made the achievement possible. "I felt a great sense of accomplishment. It's obviously a great individual honor, but it was honestly a compliment to our whole defense. The Butkus Award is an award where you really have to be on a successful team. I was lucky to be surrounded by great teammates," says Russell.

Along with his teammates, Russell credits legendary linebackers coach Brian Cabral for his undeniable influence on his career. "Coach Cabral is a real technician. His strong suit is his ability to teach his players how to play and how to win. I think I really benefitted from him. His impact on my career was greater than any coach I ever played for," says Russell.

By the end of his career at CU, Russell was the second all-time leading tackler in Colorado history (446) and set a record for most unassisted tackles (282) that stands to this day. Between 1993-96, Russell played in 44 career games, starting 40. After an impressive college career, Russell was drafted by the Detroit Lions in the 1997 NFL Draft (130th overall). Playing in 14 career NFL games with Detroit, a pair of knee injuries ended his promising professional career.

After his time with the Lions, Russell spent the 2000 season at Colorado assisting with CU's defense. He then spent seven seasons scouting in the NFL with Philadelphia (2006-08) and New England (2001, '03-05). In 2009, he joined the Denver Broncos as their director of college scouting and in 2012 was named director of player personnel.

For Russell, his love for the University of Colorado is something that hasn't faded over the years. He is just as passionate about the university as he was during his playing days.

"I think there's a great sense of honor that comes with being a Buff. I'm very proud of the university, very proud of the guys I played with and the coaches I played for. There's a great sense of pride and a great sense of happiness when I think about being a Buff. If I had to make the decision of where I was going to go to school all over again, it wouldn't take me more than 10 seconds to go right back to CU. It's great to be a Buff. I'm very proud," says Russell.

Along with his numerous accomplishments as a Buff, Russell views his induction into the CU Athletic Hall of Fame as one of the accolades he is most proud of.

"It's great. It is a great honor to be in a class with so many people that were so good at their craft. The University of Colorado means so much to me. To be inducted into the Hall of Fame is something that you have for the rest of your life. It's very humbling and it's a great honor. To be honored by a university that you love so much, it's incredible."