



2013 OUTLOOK



Every football season has its positive moments, and every team does a few things well. But coming off the school's worst season record-wise in modern history, 1-11 with the win by one point, no one wants to listen to a roll call of what in fact was good.

The media is always quick to say or write that what happened lately is always the best or worst of something. Yes, the 1-11 record was statistically the worst, and eight of the losses came by 25 points or more, but there were a couple of other Colorado teams in the modern era (post-World War II) that were comparatively worse.

Regardless, then-athletic director **Mike Bohn** just wasn't convinced that the Buffaloes under former coach **Jon Embree** would be much, if any, better in November 2013 than they were in November 2012, and thus he made a change at the top. No one can argue about Embree's passion for his alma mater, but a 4-21 record over two seasons and declining interest (and \$2.5 million in lost ticket revenues) were culprits he couldn't overcome.

Enter "Mr. Fix It." Bohn pried **Mike MacIntyre** away from San Jose State, where in three years he engineered a turnaround of massive proportions, seeing the Spartans go 1-12 in his first season (2010) to 11-2 last fall with a win over Bowling Green in the Military Bowl.

Now he's been asked to do the same in Boulder, where the Buffs haven't finished with a winning record since going 7-6 in 2005 and no appearance in the postseason since a 30-24 loss to Alabama in the 2007 Independence Bowl, the last time CU was bowl eligible.

The cupboard isn't bare, as MacIntyre himself noted following his first spring practice in Boulder; there are pockets of talent throughout the depth chart. Some players need more experience; others need improved or different coaching, and most need an influx of confidence.

All nine assistants are also new, the first time since the change from Bill Mallory to Chuck Fairbanks (1978 to 1979) that at least one wasn't retained. And with the previous staff on board for two years, most of the players are on their third position coach. But by the end of spring ball, a new attitude was installed, all the feeling each other out was complete, and in the end, there was just one player who decided to transfer, considered very low for a coaching change.

Colorado has 57 lettermen returning this fall, 55 from the 2012 team, with two others from the previous season: they break down into 24 on offense, 29 on defense and four specialists; the Buffs lose 18 lettermen off last year's team (12, 5 and 1, respectively). As far as returning starters are concerned (minimum six starts), CU returns eight on offense and nine on defense, or 17 overall.

The Buffaloes led the nation last year in the most games started by true freshmen with 57, including the high of 38 on defense; Maryland was a distant second overall with 39. History shows those kinds of numbers usually pay off down the road, and with so many young kids thrown to the fire, the experience gained is invaluable. It did in the mid-1990s, after CU true frosh started 29 games in 1991, the previous high before last year's team almost doubled the number.



WR Paul Richardson

The offense will be bolstered by the return of wide receiver **Paul Richardson**, a Biletnikoff Award candidate who missed the entire 2012 season after tearing knee ligaments in the spring. Back and healthier than ever, he showed in this year's spring scrimmages what the offense was missing a year ago – a playmaker who could extend the defense. With no consistent downfield threats, opponents often loaded eight, even nine defenders in the box to limit the running game. Junior **Tyler McCulloch** and sophomore **Nelson Spruce** having proven to be solid receivers with good-to-great hands, and the addition of **Jeff Thomas**, who was with the team briefly in August before returning home due to family issues, and the conversion of **D.D. Goodson** from tailback to receiver give Richardson a couple of other speedsters in the receiving corps.

As far as who will be throwing them the ball, **Connor Wood** ended the spring atop the depth chart, though he had been more or less tied with Nick Hirschman before he decided to graduate early and pursue his academic and football career elsewhere (he eventually selected Akron). Wood will continue to compete in August with incoming recruit **Sefo Liufau**, along with a late addition, junior college transfer **Jordan Gehrke**, and sophomore **Stevie Joe Dorman**. Senior **Jordan Webb** is rehabilitating a torn ACL and may be available at some point in the midseason, and redshirt frosh **Shane Dillon** decided to transfer and play college basketball, quitting football in doing so.

Running back appears to have the best depth on the squad, with several players that offer different talents. Sophomore **Christian Powell** successfully converted from fullback to tail-



back and led the team in rushing last year with 691 yards and is on the Doak Walker official watch list. Junior **Tony Jones** is the fastest of the group, senior **Josh Ford** has good vision and a tendency to pop for a big gainer (though suffered a high ankle sprain that required surgery and is likely out until October), sophomore **Donta Abron** averaged five yards a crack last fall and junior **Malcolm Creer** is one year removed from major knee surgery and is looking more like his old self.

Tight end is fairly wide open with the competition there expected to last deep into August. Junior **Kyle Slavin** ended the spring atop the depth chart, with fifth-year senior walk-ons **Scott Fernandez** and **Alex Wood** tied behind him in the backup spot. Two freshman redshirts should be in the mix this fall as well, **Sean Irwin** and **Austin Ray**.

The offensive line took a hit in the offseason when All-Pac 12 tackle David Bakhtiari declared for the NFL Draft (Green Bay made him a fourth round pick) and junior-to-be Alex Lewis transferred to Nebraska. However, **Gus Handler** returns at center, once again a Rimington Award candidate, senior **Jack Harris** and sophomore **Stephane Nembot** return at tackle (both shared time on the right side last year), and **Daniel Munyer** is back at guard. Those four provide a solid nucleus to build around, and it's very likely true freshmen will fill in the two-deep.

MacIntyre eventually wants to run an offense that is based on the pistol formation, but until CU can field all the necessary components to run it effectively, fans will see multiple schemes that will best try to take advantage of the players on the roster.

The Buffs will play a 4-3 base defense, but with all the spread offenses in college football these days, expect plenty of nickel as well as other creative formations to try and slow them down. CU is about as deep along the front four (ends and tackles) as it has been in a long time, led by senior **Chidera Uzo-Diribe** (a Bednarik Award watch list member) and **Nate Bonsu**, juniors **Juda Parker** and **Kirk Poston**, and sophomores **Tyler Henington**, **Samson Kafovalu**, **Justin Solis** and **Josh Tupou**.

Just six lettermen return at linebacker, led by two seniors, **Derrick Webb** and **Paul Vigo**; Webb is on the official watch list for the Butkus Award. Two incoming freshmen enrolled in January, **Addison Gillam** and **Markeis Reed**, so they gained valuable experience as the depth is largely untested at the position (three of the six have largely lettered on special teams). Junior Brady Daigh missed much of spring drills due to injuries and when healthy, is expected to fill one of the starting spots.

For the second straight year, there are only a handful of upperclassmen in the secondary's three-deep, including two seniors this fall after just one last year. The difference this year is that there are four sophomores and one redshirt freshman instead of five true frosh. Those four second-year men, **Kenneth Crawley**, **Jeffrey Hall**, **Marques Mosley** and **Yuri Wright** played a combined 1,595 snaps from scrimmage and playing in the Pac-12 Conference and its renowned quarterback strength, definitely were thrown into the fire. The hope is now that they've paid the price that freshman often pay at positions in the secondary, the unit is on its way to becoming a team strength. Senior safeties **Parker Orms** and **Terrel Smith** will provide leadership, while junior **Greg Henderson** has blossomed into a quality Pac-12 corner.

Key players return on special teams, including juniors **Darragh O'Neill** (punter) and **Will Oliver** (placekicker) and senior snapper **Ryan Iverson**. O'Neill and Oliver had enjoyed two solid seasons, although Oliver didn't have many chances to kick in 2012 (6-8 FG, 28-28 PAT). O'Neill, a Ray Guy Award candidate, has already punted 150 times in his career, averaging 43.1 yards per punt which ranks him seventh all-time at CU; his 46 kicks inside-the-20 rank fourth most. Senior **Justin Castor** was set to bolster the placekicking game, but suffered a complex hip injury that might require surgery and is out for the season. As far as who will be returning kicks, the coaches didn't settle anything in the spring and will continue the competition in fall drills; last year, Mosley emerged as a threat on kickoffs, averaging 26.1 yards for 21 returns, which included a 100-yard run back for a touchdown against Utah. He was second in the Pac-12 and 20th in the NCAA.

The schedule is comparable to last year's, with CSU in Denver and Fresno State at home while Central Arkansas replaces Sacramento State in the non-conference portion. In the Pac-12, the Buffaloes have four of the nine league tilts at home (Oregon, Arizona, California, USC) with trips set for Oregon State, Arizona State, UCLA, Washington and Utah; Cal and OSU are league games for the first time for the Buffs, swapping out for Stanford and Washington State. The Buffaloes also will benefit from two open weeks, one after the non-league slate and the other after the first trio of conference games, about the best places byes could come.



DE Chidera Uzo-Diribe