



The second season of a head coach's tenure at his new school is often the most challenging. The roster is usually half the players that the previous staff recruited, with the other half those that he brought in.

And in the University of Colorado's case, there are six players, all seniors, still on the roster that were signed by the coaching staff two head coaches ago.

But there is little cause for concern in this regard for second-year CU head coach **Mike MacIntyre**. Almost the entire team bought into all the changes that come with the changeover in staffs, the end result producing a 4-8 record in 2013, a three-win improvement from the year before.

"Our significant progress really can be attributed to three different areas, first and foremost was that the players bought into what we were doing," MacIntyre said. "After that, the way we practiced with repetition and the way the coaches prepared them for games."

In addition to the improved digit in the win column, the Buffaloes improved in 29 major statistical categories (and in a few minor ones), in most cases rather dramatically. Emphasizing taking care of the football and minimizing mistakes, especially unforced ones, also were evident. Colorado set a record for the fewest fumbles in a season with just 14 while reducing penalties dramatically, committing just 52, the fewest since 1985 and ending the season with just 10 over the final four games, a 50-year program low for that long of a span.

Confidence was attained right from the start with a 41-27 win over Colorado State in the season opener, as MacIntyre became just the second head coach among the last 15 dating back to 1932 to win his first game at the reins of the CU program (joining Rick Neuheisel, who won his inaugural in 1995 at Wisconsin). Sure the team still endured some lopsided losses, but for the most part, the Buffs were much more competitive against those teams that had bested them the previous year, along with avenging a 2012 loss to CSU.

"Attitude and confidence in what you are doing is everything," MacIntyre said. "The culture had to change to where when our guys stepped on the field that they had to believe that they could beat anybody. By the end of the last season, that change took place."

Can the Buffaloes keep improving in 2014? One reality is that CU did defeat two FCS teams in his first season, and none are on this year's schedule. Colorado could very well match its record from a year ago, yet own two more wins against similar competition. MacIntyre isn't making any predictions for a win count, something smart coaches seldom if ever do.

"The goal is simple, and that's to just walk out there every time believing you can win," he said. "When you do that, the wins will come, but I'd never state any kind of number as a goal. Obviously we'd like to get the program back to the point where, at the very minimum, we are playing in a bowl game every season."

A bowl invitation requires six wins. Can Colorado reach that number this season? While that obviously remains to be seen, longtime observers feel MacIntyre has the program headed in the right direction. There are 50 lettermen and 15 starters returning from his first Buffalo team, and a need-based recruiting class is expected to fill in many holes on the depth chart. And often the forgotten ones – the redshirt freshmen – play a larger role than anyone thinks; 12 out of 21 true freshmen were redshirted in 2013, and 10 of those players were in the two-deep at the end of spring practice.

But it has not been a total youth movement by any means; nine seniors ended the spring atop the depth chart at their respective positions, including both kicking specialists, as did eight juniors. It might just be the perfect blend for the program to move forward, and more evidence might be in the selection of this year's captains, which took place at the end of the April drills.

Six players were voted as captains by their teammates: three seniors, guard **Daniel Munyer**, defensive tackle **Juda Parker** and safety **Terrel Smith**; junior receiver **Nelson Spruce**, and for the first time in school history, a sophomore was elected captain, and two at that, linebacker **Addison Gillam** and quarterback **Sefo Liufau**.

Competition will continue into August drills at most positions, as very few are likely locked up.

Most of the captains are probably secure at their spots, with the exception of Smith, who is returning from shoulder surgery and a redshirt year and has yet to practice at full-speed. And Liufau was being challenged by fellow sophomore **Jordan Gehrke**, the



WR Nelson Spruce



end result being that the Buffs appear to have at least two quality signal callers under center.

Offensively, the Buffs started all five linemen the entire season for the first time in over a decade, and three of those players return: Munyer, senior guard **Kaiwi Crabb** and junior tackle **Stephane Nembot**. That trio won't likely be unseated, thus the battle for the center and one tackle spot to determine this year's men in the trenches. Junior **Christian Powell** ended the spring number one at tailback, and essentially also at fullback, but there's a hoard of talent behind him. Tight end and the other two receiver positions will shake out in camp.

On defense, senior cornerback **Greg Henderson** is coming off a breakout season (four interceptions), and junior tackle **Josh Tupou** is primed for one, especially if one values the opinion of CU's seniors: he was the first player chosen in the player draft for the spring game. There's more youth on the defensive side of the ball, but veterans **Jered Bell** (senior safety), **Ken Crawley** (junior cornerback) and **Woodson Greer** (senior outside linebacker) should all figure prominently into things come the season opener. The kicking specialists are more than likely set. Seniors **Darragh O'Neill** (punter) and **Will Oliver** (placekicker) are back, both in position to be four-year regulars, a rarity at any school. Both have enjoyed three solid seasons, and should compete for their respective national awards at their positions (Ray Guy and Lou Groza). O'Neill, an inside-the-20 specialist (if not closer to the goal) and Oliver, who made a combined 47-of-54 kicks a year ago (including all 30 PATs to extend his streak to 60) are two of the best in the country.

One season often isn't long enough for a team to establish an identity, and that's no difference in CU's case. But MacIntyre likes what he saw and intends to build on it.

"We haven't completely established an identity yet, but we are well on our way," he said. "We cut down dramatically in turnovers and penalties, two things you almost always control, last year, and recorded some all-time lows; we had the fewest fumbles in school history for example. But we need to play with better effort and more consistency and become a team that limits its mistakes – one that people refer to as, 'they won't beat themselves.'"

"We talk about the process of continually building in every area – small increases in everything we do and developing in every phase – strength and conditioning, academics, culture, practice habits, studying film, etc. – positive and consistent increases a little bit each day."

What should also help is the fact that the staff returns essentially intact. All nine full-time assistants are back for year two, as are most of the support positions, sans two of the four graduate assistants moving on.

The schedule appears to be a little tougher than in 2013; the Buffaloes do play the same nine Pac-12 opponents with the sites reversed and again have CSU in Denver. Hawai'i will visit Boulder, replacing Central Arkansas, and CU will travel to the northeast for the first time since 1977, playing in Foxboro against UMass; that technically subs in for Fresno State, via Charleston Southern, who



CB Greg Henderson

CU scheduled after the Fresno game was cancelled due to the Boulder floods. CU opened 2-0 last year, but with the cancellation of the Fresno game, the Buffs had two consecutive bye weeks and lost the momentum they gained to open the season, especially combined with the gamut of emotions the team experienced by witnessing the devastation suffered by many from the record rainfall.

The 2014 season also marks the 20th anniversary of a very special season in CU annals – 1994 – the Buffaloes were 11-1 that year and finished as the No. 3 team in the nation. Much of this will be celebrated this fall:

Colorado saw its first player, not only at CU but in the state, claim a Heisman Trophy when **Rashaan Salaam** was rewarded for his 2,055-yard season. **Chris Hudson** won the Jim Thorpe Award as the nation's top defensive back, while **Ted Johnson** finished as the runner-up for the Dick Butkus Award for the best linebacker. **Kordell Stewart** finished as the Big 8 Conference's all-time total offense leader, and on his way to that mark, threw what has become a well-known pass that covered 64 yards as time expired at the "Big House" in Michigan, caught by **Michael Westbrook** via a **Blake Anderson** tip, rallying CU to a 27-26 win in what is both known as "The Catch" and the "Miracle in Michigan." And to cap it all, **Bill McCartney** shocked the football world by announcing his retirement from coaching after 13 years in Boulder, exiting as the school's all-time winningest coach.