

Woelk: Good coaching more important than rankings

By Neill Woelk Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 02/03/2010 12:06:28 AM MST

It's here!

Thank goodness. The most overrated day in sports. The day that 18-year-old football players all over the nation sign letters of intent -- and otherwise normal, responsible adults become blithering idiots as they celebrate (or berate) their schools' recruiting classes.

No doubt, recruiting has become a business unto itself. In this economy, I'm all for any kind of business that provides a few jobs, and there are certainly jobs to be had in the recruiting industry.

When I first had the misfortune of being forced to pay attention to college recruiting (I still haven't forgiven former sports editor Dan Creedon), there were a couple of "experts" out there who printed a couple of magazines a year rating high school recruits.

Today, that has expanded exponentially. There are Web sites with analysts, gurus and insiders. ESPN has joined the fray. Pony up a few bucks a month, and you too can receive continuous updates from your favorite expert concerning the whims and musings of 18-year-olds everywhere. Find out who has verbally committed, who has de-committed and whether you should be committed for worrying about it.

There is even a vocabulary particular to recruiting (seriously, if I hear an 18-year-old kid has given a "soft verbal," I'm making sure he's not getting anywhere close to my niece. But that's just me).

And, there are the rankings. Grown men and women who are usually level-headed in most circumstances lose all touch with reality when it comes to recruiting rankings.

If your favorite team has atop-10 class, it's reason to celebrate. Drop into the 30s (or 40s or 50s), and it's reason to seek tall buildings with ledges.

There are those who swear by the rankings, those who swear at the rankings and those who believe the rankings can be used as one small piece of the puzzle when evaluating the overall health of a program.

Put me in the last group.

Revelation time: Great programs recruit great players. The cycle is self-perpetuating.

But the rankings are by no means a guarantee of anything.

Case in point: Michigan's last four recruiting classes have been ranked Nos. 2, 9, 10 and 6. Yet four years of the best players in the nation last year produced a 5-7 record for the maize and blue.

Then there's Cincinnati, which last year finished 12-1 and ranked eighth in the nation. Somehow, the Bearcats managed this despite not having a single class in the last four years ranked better than 51st (with two of those classes ranked Nos. 70 and 80).

Yes, I know. Texas has a top-ranked class -- and Texas will be good next year and the year after and the year after that. Ditto for Southern Cal, Alabama and Florida.

But I don't need to look at recruiting rankings to know that Texas will be a top-10 program just about every year in the foreseeable future. I don't need a guru to tell me that Alabama is likely to be pretty doggone good for the next half-dozen years.

Don't get me wrong. I know recruiting is important. I was around when Bill McCartney was signing classes that had names like Hagan, Bieniemy, Flannigan, Williams and McGhee. I remember when Mac signed a running back out of Southern California who played 8-man football in high school -- and Mac predicted great things for the kid. (Rashaan Salaam did turn out to be a pretty good player.)

But I've also seen plenty of kids with no hype attached to their name turn into very good players.

The key?

It's simple. As my good friend Joe tells me -- at least once a week -- "Coaching makes the difference."

Pair great recruiting classes with a bad coach and you won't have a good team.

Pair average recruiting classes with a great coach and you'll have a good team.

Pair great classes with a great coach -- and you have Alabama.

Which is why I'll be neither excited nor disappointed today when Dan Hawkins announces his latest Colorado recruiting class.

Rather, I'll wait until spring ball and fall camp to see what Hawkins is doing with the players he's recruited.

Stars and rankings? I honestly don't know how much stock to put in them. Kirk Ferentz's last three recruiting classes at Iowa were ranked Nos. 37, 40, 44, yet the Hawkeyes finished No. 7 in the nation last year. Who could have predicted that?

But this much I do know for dead certain: "Coaching makes all the difference."

It's time for Hawkins to make that difference.

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colorado football

Future CU quarterback Hirschman in rush to help

The QB from California's Bay Area is so eager to play for the Buffs, he arrived early.

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

Posted: 02/03/2010 01:00:00 AM MST



Nick Hirschman already is familiar with Folsom Field, having enrolled at CU last month to get an early start on his college football career. "I love it here," says the former California prep star, who graduated in December from Los Gatos High School. (Karl Gehring, The Denver Post)

At 6-feet-2 and 212 pounds, Colorado quarterback commitment Nick Hirschman figures he is about done growing. But he's just started to learn how to play the position.

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What else could anybody expect from a former California prep star who almost decided to play football at Harvard? "My sister went to Yale; that (razzing) could have been fun," Hirschman said. In the end, Hirschman's competitive juices led him to Boulder. By earning his diploma in December at Los Gatos High School (located in the Bay Area), Hirschman was able to enroll early at CU, where he began taking classes last month. Although already a Buffalo, he will be formally introduced as a member of Colorado's recruiting class today during national signing day activities.

"My dream since I was little was to play Division I football at a good, big program, and I am able to do that at Colorado, as well as get a first-rate education," Hirschman said. "I love it here."

Hirschman passed for 2,887 yards and 34 touchdowns last fall in leading Los Gatos to a division championship. He was intercepted just three times.

Rated a three-star prospect by Internet recruiting sites, Hirschman is considered one of the plums of a Colorado recruiting class that lacks four- or five-star pizzazz.

It's not fair to say Hirschman's only other choice was an Ivy League school. Several Pac-10 Conference programs and Tennessee showed interest, but he never gave them a chance. Hirschman extended an oral commitment to CU last June.

As Rivals.com recruiting expert Jeremy Crabtree points out, Texas quarterback Colt McCoy rated three stars coming out of high school.

"Nick made an unbelievable transformation from his junior year of high school to his senior year," Crabtree said. "If he keeps up that natural progression, he could be a heck of a get for the Buffs."

That goes back to Hirschman's yearning for learning. He's always had a love for the game and a penchant for making plays, noted his father, Bill Hirschman. But, following his junior season, Nick made a concerted, determined effort to reach another level. A first step was contacting quarterbacks guru Bob Johnson of Mission Viejo (Calif.) High School. Johnson runs the renowned "Elite 11" national quarterback camp and, at Mission Viejo, he coached his son, former NFL quarterback Rob Johnson, and New York Jets rookie Mark Sanchez.

Mission Viejo is in Southern California, Los Gatos in Northern California. So Nick and his father would hop on a plane, as often as weekly, and take a one-hour flight to see Johnson.

Hirschman's weight approached 230 pounds following his junior season. Johnson suggested he hit the weight room, drop some weight and add some muscle. Then they worked on quarterback mechanics, footwork, reading defenses, everything.

"Nick and his father were pretty adamant that

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Nick needed to improve, and that's a good thing," Johnson said. "We talk a lot about attitude. He wants to learn. He wants to grind. He has a great work ethic and study habits. He takes criticism well. All that will help him. Physically, he has plenty of arm strength. And I like his makeup."

Under the direction of coach Butch Cattolico, Los Gatos High has become something of a quarterback factory. Buffalo Bills quarterback Trent Edwards played for the Wild-cats before heading off to Stanford. So did Danny Sullivan, a senior starter last fall at Arizona State. Cattolico believes Hirschman has more arm strength than Edwards and a quicker delivery than Sullivan.

"Nick is really mature for his age," Cattolico said. "When there was a dropped ball or a sack, he didn't get rattled. He knows what really hurts is making a mental error that becomes a turnover."

Hirschman is already learning the CU offense from veteran quarterbacks Cody Hawkins and Tyler Hansen. The opportunity to get a jump on things by participating in spring practice will be huge, the newcomer said. Despite the Buffs' 3-9 record last fall, Hirschman said he never wavered from his June commitment.

"Wins and losses are going to come in football. Sometimes you're up, sometimes you're down," Hirschman said. "I know how hard everybody is working. When I met all the coaches, when I came out here and talked to everyone, this was just where I wanted to be."

Tom Kensler: 303-954-1280 or tkensler@denverpost.com

Bufs' young guns

CU quarterbacks

* Clark Evans, 6-foot-4, 225 pounds, redshirt freshman, Los Alamitos (Calif.) HS: Showed progress last fall on scout team. Potential disciplinary action by the university and/or team is unresolved regarding Evans being ticketed Dec. 14 when police discovered 1.1 grams of marijuana and a pipe in a dorm room. Nick Hirschman, 6-2, 212, Fr., Los Gatos (Calif.) HS: Completed 68 percent of his passes for 34 touchdowns against only three interceptions. Already enrolled for current semester and will participate in spring drills. Rated three stars by Internet recruiting sites.

* Seth Lobato, 6-5, 205, redshirt freshman, Eaton HS: Arrived last fall as a preferred walk-on and showed enough to earn snaps in practices and with the scout team while redshirting.

* Josh Moten, 6-0, 185, Fr., Carson (Calif.) Narbonne HS: Expected to be member of 2009 recruiting class but college-board issues caused him to delay enrollment until current semester. Dual threat who threw for 2,734 yards in 2008 and ran for 609. Will participate in spring drills.

Possible addition

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* Munchie Legaux, 6-4, 185, Fr., New Orleans Edna Karr HS: Expected to choose today between Colorado and Cincinnati. Extended oral commitment to CU in November but decided to take additional visits. No longer considering Arizona, according to Rivals.com. Three-star rating.

Tom Kensler, The Denver Post

Colorado, Colorado State recruits
Nick Hirschman QB 6-2 212 Los Gatos, Calif.
Eric Richter OL 6-4 315 Saddleback CC (Calif.)
COLORADO

Already enrolled

Name Pos. Ht. Wt. School

Committed

Jered Bell DB 6-1 185 Ontario (Calif.) Colony
Keenan Canty WR 5-9 160 New Orleans Karr
Justin Castor K 6-4 180 Arvada West
Corday Clark Ath 6-2 220 Phenix City (Ala.) Central
Kaiwi Crabb OL 6-4 272 Honolulu Punahou
Donnie Duncan Ath 6-0 185 Los Angeles Hamilton
Justin Favors TE 6-4 232 Trotwood (Ohio) Madison
Henley Griffon TE 6-5 217 Apopka, Fla.
Evan Harrington LB 6-0 220 College of the Canyons (Calif.)
Tony Jones RB 5-8 178 Ramsey (N.J.) Don Bosco Prep

Trea Jones RB 5-11 187 Wake Forest (N.C.) Rolesville

Munchie Legaux QB 6-4 185 New Orleans Karr

Alex Lewis OL 6-6 255 Phoenix

Daniel Munyer OL 6-3 270 Sherman Oaks (Calif.) Notre Dame

Kirk Poston DE 6-2 235 Houston St. Pius X

Justin Torres FB 6-3 230 La Mirada (Calif.) High School

Kyle Slavin TE 6-5 230 Chatfield

Chidera Uzo-Diribe DE 6-3 220 Corona, Calif.

Lowell Williams LB 6-2 210 Missouri City (Texas) Fort Bend

Name Pos. Ht. Wt. School

COLORADO STATE

Pete Thomas QB 6-5 220 El Cajon (Calif.)

Valhalla

Already enrolled

Name Pos. Ht. Wt. School

Committed

Shaquille Bell DB 5-11 177 Osceola, Fla.

Bernard Blake DB 6-0 177 Bastrop, Texas

James Boone WR 6-1 183 St. Cloud, Fla.

Bobby Borcky Ath 6-2 175 Orlando (Fla.) Lake Highland

Nordly Capi DE 6-2 242 Ocoee, Fla.

Kivon Cartwright TE 6-4 215 Pueblo South

Thomas Coffman WR 5-10 160 Austin, Texas

Tony Drake RB 5-9 176 Dallas Skyline

Charles Favors LB 6-1 230 Orlando (Fla.) Dr. Phillips

Marvin Ford DB 5-9 185 Orlando (Fla.) Dr. Phillips

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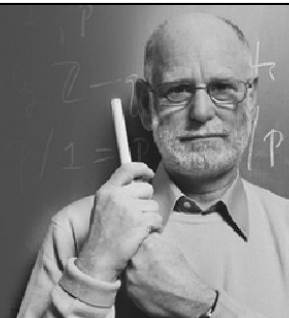


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 Glacier Peak
 Crockett Gillmore TE 6-6 226 Bushland,
 Texas
 Garrett Grayson QB 6-2 184 Vancouver
 (Wash.) Heritage
 Charles Green DE 6-2 221 Sanford (Fla.)
 Seminole
 Vance Green DB 5-11 200 Gilmer, Texas
 Mason Hathaway OL 6-6 270 Southlake
 (Texas) Carroll
 Marquis Hood LB 6-2 201 Orlando (Fla.) Dr.
 Phillips
 Josh James WR 6-3 211 Orlando (Fla.)
 Colonial
 Najee James DB 5-11 174 Orlando (Fla.)
 Evans
 Rashawde Meyers DE 6-3 215 Cocoa, Fla.
 Max Morgan DB 6-1 215 Greeley West
 Trevor Murphy DT 6-3 275 Jefferson, Texas
 Mason Myers OL 6-2 268 Moore (Okla.)
 Southmoore
 Eric Niederberger LB 6-1 205 Grass Valley
 (Calif.) Nevada Union
 Ty Sambrailo OL 6-5 273 Watsonville (Calif.)
 St. Francis Central
 Christian Stefo OL 6-5 315 Pomona
 Alex Tucci OL 6-3 295 Cypress Bay, Fla.
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