



Quarterback Brent Burnette comes to CU from Arizona Western College.
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Brooks: Burnette, Lewis Get Jump-Start With Buffs

BOULDER - Colorado heads into Wednesday's national signing day with a pair of newcomers already on campus and taking spring semester classes.

Both believe their January arrival will help them get a head start academically. Their front-end participation in new speed, strength and conditioning director Malcolm Blacken's vastly revamped off-season program can't hurt either.

Timing is everything, and Brent Burnette appears to be arriving at CU at the right time. He's a pro-style quarterback coming to a football program that's going to that style of offense.

Alex Lewis is an offensive lineman who was hyped to sign with the Buffaloes a year ago. He didn't care much for the "grayshirt" philosophy until it was explained more in depth to him - and now believes it might be one of his best decisions ever.

A closer look at the two Buffs who've already landed in Boulder:

BRENT BURNETTE

When CU hired Jon Embree as head coach in early December, one of his first calls went to close friend/colleague Eric Bieniemy. Once on board with the Buffs, one of Bieniemy's first calls went to Burnette.

"'EB' had a contact for him," said Embree, who watched tape of Burnette and immediately said let's go after him. Embree believed he had to add another quarterback to the roster. His first priority was to find a junior college QB who had two years of eligibility remaining, and Burnett fills both of those requirements.

"We'll have him for two years, and he'll compete to start this year," Embree said.

The ideal situation is to have a QB in each class, thereby eliminating gaps and hopefully simplify the recruiting process by making the situation more attractive to prospects. By adding Burnette, Embree has a senior (Tyler Hansen), a junior (Burnette), a redshirt freshman (Nick Hirschman) and an incoming freshman who is expected to sign on Wednesday. (Those are scholarship players; the roster includes a walk-on and at least one other returning player who could get a spring look at quarterback.)

Burnette, who played in high school at Maryville, Tenn., is listed as 6-foot-3, 215 pounds, but probably is closer to 6-2. He played eight games last fall at Arizona Western College in Yuma, his one season there cut short by a rib injury he says has "healed 100 percent."

Kansas, Louisville and Cincinnati showed interest in him after a lone junior college season that saw him pass for 1,219 yards and 11 touchdowns (six interceptions). As a high school senior - at the conclusion of a 60-0 career run that saw Maryville win four state championships - Virginia, Buffalo, North Carolina and Middle Tennessee State chased him.

He wound up signing with MTSU, rather sheepishly explaining that it was fairly close to home and he had several former high school teammates already enrolled there. After redshirting in 2008, he played in nine games in 2009, including the New Orleans Bowl, where he passed for the go-ahead touchdown in a win against Southern Mississippi. He said he left MTSU for the JC route to do specifically what he's done - move up a level.

Burnette, whose first trip to Colorado was to play a little league baseball tournament in Wheat Ridge when he was eight years old, likes what he's walking into at CU.

"The coaches told me what they wanted to do, what they wanted to install, and after talking to them and hearing them describe the pro style, that just really got me excited," he said. "It's the type of offense I'm used to . . . it's definitely my style of play.

"They've said what they (Embree, Bieniemy) did in the NFL, that's what they're going to bring to the college level - all NFL terminology. We'll be speaking the same language that the NFL does. I'm really excited to be in that type of offense, to do what the guys in the NFL do."

He also likes the fact that they told him the competition will be "wide open . . . that's what's so nice - new coaches and a new offense. I guess everybody is on the same level in getting to know the offense. That was definitely big for me. Coach Embree, Coach Bieniemy and Coach (J.D.) Brookhart

(who visited Burnette in Knoxville) - talking to all of them, I was just very impressed from the start."

Burnette believes his strength as a quarterback is, well, winning. "Everywhere I've been, I think I can win," he said. "A lot of people can throw, a lot of people can make the reads - all that stuff. But I guess you separate good quarterbacks from average quarterbacks by winning. I've been able to do that, and hopefully I can bring it here. Then, I feel like I can make all the throws and all the reads on the field."

He considers himself mobile, but adds, "I'm going to look to throw it first . . . I can get away, but when I'm scrambling, running around, I'm still going to have my eyes downfield look for a receiver. But if I have to, yes, I will run. That's not a problem at all."

Burnette has been with his new teammates for about a month and says the transition is less complicated than he might have thought. There's no shortage of help in any area, and he's been impressed by the overall off-season work ethic and the talent he sees among the guys catching his passes.

"A great bunch of athletes - the receivers and the tight ends . . . great skill position guys," he said.

Playing just one season at both MTSU and Arizona Western, it's not surprising that Burnette's four high school seasons still stand out as his best football memory. An unbeaten career and four championships is "something that'll always rank at the top of my list," he said. "It'll be pretty hard to top."

That doesn't mean he won't try.

ALEX LEWIS

There's an interesting gene pool in play here - particularly for an offensive lineman.

Lewis might get his size and temperament from his father Bill, a former NFL O-lineman for eight years, and his flexibility and footwork from his mother, Kimberly, a lifelong dancer who formed the Phoenix Suns dancers and now operates a studio in the Phoenix area.

Alex Lewis was recruited by CU during the 2010 cycle and was persuaded to delay his enrollment - or grayshirt - until the start of the 2011 spring semester. And that took some persuasion.

"At first I really didn't like it at all; I wasn't open to it," he said. "On a Wednesday night, the week before signing day, coach (Denver) Johnson (former CU line coach) flew down to Arizona the night before I was going to commit to Air Force. He talked about the grayshirt process and I told him I wasn't fond of it.

"But he went down the list and explained how I'd really get 51/2 years of scholarship. That's what really opened up my mind. Architecture (his major) - you need a masters . . . that really opened up my mind to grayshirting. I really want to get my degree or pre-degree here, then get into graduate school.

"The hurdle in grayshirting is the long period of time you sit out of football. It's tough to watch; you don't play, you don't hit anyone. So when I come up here and get to train with the team, I'm never

hating practice anymore, never hating workouts. I'm loving it; it's way better than sitting at home."

Lewis, from Mountain Pointe High School in Phoenix, used his season out of football to concentrate on conditioning. He also took one course at Mesa Community College.

The pair of Arizona Pac-10 Conference schools didn't offer Lewis and he initially committed to Michigan State. CU got on board with the grayshirt offer, but he was cool at first to that and visited Nevada-Las Vegas, which turned him off. Air Force entered the picture and he was set to commit a week before 2010 signing day.

Then, Johnson, who since has been hired as Tulsa's O-line coach, visited the Lewis home and made a final quality pitch to at least visit CU. "I did and fell in love with it," Lewis said.

The 6-6 Lewis has added 20 pounds since graduating from high school and now weighs 275. By the end of the current school year, he hopes to be at 295 - another 20-pound gain that might be difficult with spring drills looming.

CU O-line Coach Steve Marshall has spoken with Lewis about playing left tackle or center, the latter position the same his father played at Nebraska and with the Raiders, Cardinals and Patriots. Alex Lewis played center as a high school sophomore, then switched to left tackle out of necessity. He "loves" the left tackle spot - maybe some of it comes from his mom's footwork - but "could learn to love center too with my father giving me pointers."

Lewis described his temperament as "gentle" off field, but "mean and nasty" on the field. He played for a run-oriented high school team but says he has a love for pass protection that will help accelerate his learning in that area.

CU's change from former Coach Dan Hawkins to Embree didn't give Lewis pause about staying with the Buffs. "Absolutely not," he said, noting a high school change from his junior to senior seasons produced a successful turnaround. "I made a commitment and I will stick to it - just like anything else in life and school," he said. "If you don't stick to it, you'll fail . . . I think it's a great choice."

Bill Lewis now does radio in Phoenix - *Doc and Lew*, with Doc being former Broncos O-lineman David Diaz-Infante. Lewis traditionally has brought his family to the Vail area for R&R every winter. And there's still a tie with Nebraska: One set of Alex's grandparents lives in Lincoln, but there was no lure or desire to join them.

"I hated, despised Nebraska," Alex said. "Before I got any offers, my dad asked me if Nebraska or Colorado offers you, who would you choose? Nebraska was out the door . . . I went to their camp and didn't like much about it at all."

With the Buffs headed to the Pac-12 and the Cornhuskers to the Big Ten, their football paths might only cross in the Rose Bowl. Lewis said that would be "cool." He admits he'll never know what he missed in the CU-Nebraska Big 12 series, but then he doesn't seem to mind.

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