

CU Buffs' options for replacing Paul Richardson lack experience

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Posted:

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With Paul Richardson tearing his left ACL in practice on Monday, the Colorado football team now has a major question at wide receiver.

Who will step up and become the leader on the field that Richardson figured to be?

"I don't know. I'll tell you at the end of the season," CU head coach Jon Embree said. "We'll see who takes advantage of the opportunity."

Fact is, nobody really knows who will become CU's top threat. Richardson, a junior, caught 73 passes for 1,069 yards and nine touchdowns during the past two years.

With Toney Clemons (43 catches for 680 yards and eight touchdowns in 2011) having graduated and Richardson (39 for 555 and five scores last season) now out, the Buffs will go into fall camp looking to replace not one, but two dynamic receivers.

"I would say this right now: with this group, it's all up in the air," receivers coach Bobby Kennedy said. "There's no clear guy yet that I've decided or coach Embree has decided that's going to step into that position."

The first place to look is the current roster. Sophomore Keenan Canty has more collegiate catches (14 for 161 yards) than any receiver on the roster and he's got speed to burn.

Another sophomore, Tyler McCulloch, caught 10 passes for 96 yards and a touchdown last year. DaVaughn Thornton, a converted tight end, is the only other receiver to have caught a pass in college. He has seven catches for 81 yards.

"P-Rich is a special guy to replace and I don't know if we can do that with one guy," McCulloch said. "Everyone who is part of the unit is going to have to step up."

While Richardson's injury is a major blow to the offense, it could provide the rest of the crew with a great opportunity. Freshman Nelson Spruce has had a great spring, while Canty and McCulloch hope to build off what they did a year ago.

"This spring, after my redshirt year, I needed it as a way to prove myself and prove I can be in the mix," Spruce said. "Coming into that mindset and focus, it really helped me and I've had a good spring."

McCulloch has had a good spring, too, but said he knows he's got to get better in a hurry.

"I've been improving a lot this spring, but now I just feel a real urgency," he said. "This is a chance for me to step up."

Richardson's injury may open the door for CU's newest receivers, too. Gerald Thomas, Jeffrey Thomas and Peyton Williams -- all from different high schools in Texas -- signed letters of intent in February and will arrive in the fall.

"It's tough because I was really looking forward to playing with him," Gerald Thomas said of Richardson. "Even if he wouldn't have gotten hurt, I was coming in trying to compete for his spot and everybody else's spot."

Like the veteran receivers, Thomas and Williams were disappointed to learn about Richardson's injury. Particularly Williams, who is recovering from his own ACL injury and was looking forward to learning from Richardson. Williams was injured in December and said he hopes to be cleared to play this summer.

"I'm running around and getting better. I'm way ahead of schedule," he said.

That's good news, because the Buffaloes might need him.