



QB Connor Wood (5) will have to prove himself in August camp competition.

Photo Courtesy: CUBuffs.com



Brooks: Buffs' No. 1 QB Decision Could Be Prolonged

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BOULDER - Given the circumstances, the Colorado Buffaloes coming out of spring practice without a starting quarterback isn't so startling. But how about this: QB coach Rip Scherer says the Buffs could enter the 2012 season with the search for Tyler Hansen's replacement still underway.

In truth, that scenario probably doesn't fit in the "startling" category either; it's one of several at the position that CU could be dealing with at the conclusion of August camp. But few persons (probably Scherer included) will argue that it's where the Buffs want to find themselves in early September. In quarterback competitions to determine a first-year starter, the best-case scenario usually is having a No. 1 identified at least two weeks before the opener . . . and even earlier, if possible.

Scherer said a decision might not be made "until well into the preseason - and that's in fairness to the other guys, especially Nick (Hirschman)." He then added, "This is coach (Jon) Embree's final call, but we might not make a decision until into the season - depending on how the competition looks between those guys. That's a possible scenario if nobody separates themselves in training camp. Then you might go into the season. You just have to let it play out. So I don't think we want to paint ourselves into a corner one way or the other."

After Thursday's practice, Embree said Wood had "finished (the spring) strong," but added that Wood "needs to relax . . . sometimes he presses, whether it's over-gripping the ball or trying to throw it real hard. He just needs

to relax. But he had a good spring."

Embree also said he was anxious for the preseason camp competition because "it forces them to push themselves and be 'on' every day; every pass counts."

CU's spring competition at the position didn't develop as planned. Hirschman, a sophomore who saw limited duty last fall, broke a bone in his right foot several days before spring drills began and was lost for all 15 practices. Thus, the duel between Hirschman and transfer Connor Wood, also a sophomore, was put on hold until August, leaving Wood and redshirt freshmen John Schrock and Stevie Joe Dorman as Scherer's spring QBs.

It would have been unrealistic, Scherer indicated, to expect Wood to virtually close out the competition in 15 practices. That it will run into August and perhaps beyond, Scherer said, "is more an indication that we want to have an opportunity to evaluate Nick and Shane (Dillon) than it is an indictment (of Wood). I did not go into this spring feeling like we had to, or necessarily would, come out of the spring with a starter. Because of the extenuating circumstances of a young freshman that we have a lot of confidence in and a guy that's been in the offense that's demonstrated some good things in the past . . .

"Now, if Connor would have just been lights out, that scenario might have changed. But my expectation level with Connor was more realistic than that. He didn't have any 'reps' in the offense (last fall) so there was still going to be a learning curve. It was going to be hard for a guy to go from not knowing the offense to being an accomplished starter in 15 practices. This has been an opportunity for Connor to grow and get a lot of 'reps' and make up some ground - not necessarily on the field but on himself in terms of learning the offense. So when preseason does come it'll be a little more of a level playing field for him."

The Buffs signed Dillon, a lanky Californian (6-6, 195), in their 2012 recruiting class, and he, too, will factor into the August competition. Dillon is on campus, has attended practices since mid-week and will stay through this weekend's spring game (Saturday, 5 p.m., Folsom Field). Said Scherer: "We're taking advantage of every opportunity we have (to get him up to speed). He's very eager, very capable. We've been feeding him information since signing date and will continue to do so."

Dillon will return to campus for summer school and should benefit from spending more time with the other quarterbacks, Scherer said, adding that while CU currently was limited in how it can assist Dillon, "He's done a great job of staying up with our spring practices on Hudl (an innovative software program). He's been able to keep abreast of things."

The unplanned, but extended spring time with the No. 1 offense was beneficial for Wood. If he emerged from spring drills with any edge, said Scherer, it was this: "The edge will be that he has 15 days of reps that the other guys haven't had." Still, Wood, who transferred from Texas last fall and spent the 2011 season running CU's scout team, was in learning mode from start to finish. He switched from trying to master opponents' offenses to trying to master the Buffs' - which wasn't a flip-of-the-switch proposition despite the numerous off-season hours he spent studying tape.

Said Wood: "Football is football no matter where you go. I can see how this offense relates to previous offenses I've been in; it's just different terminology and different protection calls. But there's always going to be things as a quarterback you've got to learn . . . it's a process wherever you go."

While Wood downplayed the difficulty of the transition, as well as his rediscovering his "groove" after not having been under center in a game situation since his senior season in high school, Scherer described the situation for what it is. He noted that Wood taking the majority of the spring snaps with the No. 1s offered an opportunity to "grow at the position and in the offense. He's making progress. Neither he nor anyone is nearly where we need to be, but he's getting better every day."

The expanded spring work, Wood said, has allowed him to "gain a ton of experience . . . I've made a lot of strides toward what we want as an offense from this position. It's been a great deal for me to get back into it. I'm pleased but can never be satisfied. I just want to get better."

Wood seemed confident he had shown Scherer and the offensive staff that he can "make all the throws. I just need to continue to try and be consistent and go in day-in/day-out and make the throws I need to make. I believe I can make them all."

He also believes his CU resume, however brief, will benefit him: "Every year there's not a clean slate; you're evaluated on what you've done, it's a continual deal. Coach Rip has an idea of what I can do, he's seen me."

The prospect of the competition spilling into preseason camp comes as no surprise to Wood. He knew Scherer would offer Hirschman and Dillon "fair shots, and that's what I would expect . . . it's a business and coaches have to put their best guys on the field. They want to make sure because there's a lot to lose. It would be a disservice to the team any other way. You have to give everybody a fair evaluation."

With Hirschman sidelined, Schrock, a walk-on last fall, might have benefited as much as Wood from the additional work. Scherer called Schrock "real solid . . . he gives you a lot of confidence that he's going to do the right thing. He makes good decisions. Probably right now of all the quarterbacks, he knows the offense better than anybody."

"That's a credit to him, his work ethic and his intelligence. There's a comfort level with John. At the very least, there's always going to be a role for him. Now how that role plays out depends on how the other guys come in and how he fares in competition."

None of CU's current QBs are cut from the same mold as the mobile Hansen, although Scherer wouldn't characterize the group as "just complete pocket guys. We can still move them and maintain the movement portions of our offense. They may not be as proficient as Tyler to make plays off rhythm when things break down, but that part remains to be seen when we're playing 11-on-11 on Saturdays."

Whoever winds up as the starter, said Scherer, "We've got big shoes to fill. Tyler, I thought, was a very good quarterback. The shame of it is he should be back this season - but that ship has sailed. We need to see consistent execution out of that position. We don't need to see sporadic greatness and then drop below the line. I'd rather see steady execution and productivity and then from that point we can grow week to week through the season."

"Whoever our quarterback is, he's going to be a first-year starter . . . whoever that guy is will be better in game eight than he is game one. But we need to make sure by game one he's good enough in making good decisions and in his leadership and understanding of the offense that we can take advantage of the plays that come available to us. But at the same time we don't want to hurt our offense. We've got to minimize our turnovers, our mental mistakes and allow the experienced parts of our team to take over - allow the offensive line to be a factor, allow the running backs be factors . . . then allow that position (QB) to continue to grow during the course of the season."

BUFF BITS: Thursday marked the Buffs' final day of spring work on the practice field. "We got it in the books," Embree said, noting that he was pleased overall with the 14 drills leading up to Saturday. He said the Buffs' effort was obvious, allowing him and his staff to concentrate on coaching and calling that "refreshing." . . . As has been the case for previous spring scrimmages, limited numbers in both lines - particularly the D-line - will limit the "live" work on Saturday to about 30 plays. Embree said there also will be seven-on-seven passing work, red zone work and kickoff coverage. Asked what he wanted to see from the final afternoon of spring ball, he answered, "I want to see everyone walk off the field (healthy)." . . . Receiver Paul Richardson, who suffered a torn ACL and cartilage damage in Monday's practice and is expected to miss the 2012 season, is scheduled to undergo surgery this coming Monday . . . With Richardson working as a return specialist and now sidelined, Embree said this season's punt/kickoff returners probably haven't arrived on campus yet . . . Embree said the offensive line has "done well" this spring and is shaping up to be the team's "veteran group." . . . Sophomore Cordary Allen, who has moved from running back to tight end to defensive end, has missed spring drills with a shoulder injury. "He didn't get a lot accomplished," Embree said . . . Defensive backs Greg Henderson (funeral) and Josh Moten (academic work) missed Thursday's practice but will participate on Saturday . . . Embree had more praise for converted tight end Nick Kasa, saying the senior's spring learning curve went from "up to way down to way up." Kasa made several red zone catches Thursday that impressed Embree, who said, "He's starting to get a feel for

things." Among those attending Thursday's practice was Sonny Detmer, the father of former CU quarterback Koy Detmer and former BYU QB and Heisman Trophy winner Ty Detmer. Sonny Detmer is the grandfather of CU redshirt freshman QB Stevie Joe Dorman. Sonny also was Dorman's high school coach (Somerset, Texas) and Koy was Dorman's position coach in his senior season Former Buffs defensive back Clyde Surrell (2000-03) showed up Thursday in a red and white warm up suit, which got Embree's attention for all the wrong reasons. Nebraska isn't on the schedule anymore, but red still isn't a preferred color at CU. Embree said it showed that maybe "a softer, more sensitive side" was taking hold at CU because otherwise "me, 'EB' (Eric Bieniemy) and Kanavis (McGhee) would have put him in the creek." Maybe Surrell forgot, maybe it was something else. "Was that a Run DMC outfit or what?" Embree asked. "I'm not giving him money to get new clothes."

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SHOW MENU



CU Buffs' Tony Jones ready to take his game up a level

By Ryan Thorburn Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

Tony Jones is listed at 5-foot-7 and 175 pounds.

Has his game grown enough to carry Colorado's offense?

Throughout spring practices, teammates and coaches have raved about Jones' development and performance.

Jones has seized the starting running back position entering fall camp and likely will have his number called frequently this fall considering:

- CU's offensive line is the most experienced unit on the team.
- If Connor Wood wins the starting quarterback job he will be making his first Division I start on Sept. 2 against Colorado State in Denver.
- CU's most dynamic skill player, junior wide receiver Paul Richardson, is expected to miss the entire 2012 season after tearing the ACL in his left knee on Monday.
- Offensive coordinator Eric Bieniemy's basic philosophy is: "You run the ball to win championships."

Buff fans will get a chance to see how far Jones has come during the spring game at 5 p.m. Saturday at Folsom Field.

"I'm a lot more confident," Jones, a redshirt sophomore, said of his role on the team after a year in Bieniemy's system. "I know the playbook. But I still go home and study my playbook, on top of studying my school work."

For the past two seasons, Jones was an understudy to Rodney "Speedy" Stewart, who finished his career second on CU's all-time rushing list behind Bieniemy.

"I learned a lot from Speedy working with him and coach Bieniemy. Speedy is a heck of a guy and he took me under his wing and definitely taught me a lot," Jones said. "I'm grateful for that. He was one of the best running backs that played here, other than coach Bieniemy. It was a pleasure working with Speedy and getting to know a lot of things that he knew and that I didn't know."

In addition to rushing for 854 net yards on 189 attempts in 2011, Stewart was CU's leading receiver

last season with 45 catches.

- Have a question for our reporters about any of the CU athletic teams, ask it here in our weekly mailbag.

Toney Clemons, who is out of eligibility, finished with 43 receptions for 680 yards. Richardson added 39 catches for 555 yards.

That makes Jones, who had 27 receptions for 168 yards, the team's most productive returning target in the passing game.

"He has done an outstanding job of running the ball and catching the ball," Bieniemy said. "The thing that we need to continue to work with is pass protection, just understanding and knowing all the calls and making sure who we block and when to block them."

Jones had 78 carries for 297 net yards and two touchdowns last season. For what it's worth, he scored two touchdowns in CU's most recent scrimmage.

Right now it sounds like Josh Ford, D.D. Goodson and Justin Gorman are chasing Jones for first-team reps.

Donta Abron, Terrence Crowder and Davien Payne arrive this summer as part of the 2012 recruiting class, while fellow 2012 recruit Clay Norgard is already on campus and participating in spring ball.

"I've told these kids, 'Your interview sessions is now,'" Bieniemy said. "When these younger kids come in they're going to get every opportunity to show what they can do. So let's make sure we're putting the right stuff on tape."

Jones, a high school All-American from the legendary Don Bosco Prep program in New Jersey, showed flashes of potential last season while subbing for the injured Stewart at times. In the second half of a lopsided loss at Washington he was the bright spot with 14 carries for 49 yards and a touchdown.

The coaching staff has reported witnessing explosive plays from Jones throughout the closed-door spring sessions.

"He has had a very productive spring. He has accepted the challenge and he's been out there working hard every day," Bieniemy said. "From where he started last year and even throughout the season, to see where he is now, he has made tremendous strides.

"I just want him to keep working on it because the sky could be the limit for him."

Size did not matter for Stewart, who played big for the Buffs at 5-6, 175 pounds.

But head coach Jon Embree told Bieniemy, who was also a small yet powerful running back, to

start recruiting players that he literally had to look up to.

"I'm not taking anything away from Rodney and Tony; I love those guys," Embree said during the 2011 season. "They've been good players for us, and Tony will be. But it's comforting to have a Chris Brown. They wear the other team down. When you're trying to salt a game away, when that big battering ram keeps coming, it helps."

Until the next Brown, one of the stars of the Big 12 championship team in 2001, walks through the door at the Dal Ward Center, it appears that Jones will be carrying much of the load for CU's offense.

"It starts with my offensive line. They've done a hell of a job run blocking. I'm grateful for that," Jones said. "They tell me that if I keep running the ball like I have been, they'll keep blocking. I tell them if they give me a hole, I'll definitely take it."

Mike Bohn, CU Buffs hoping to exceed season-ticket numbers from last year

By Kyle Ringo Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

More than a few eyebrows raised in February 2011 when University of Colorado athletic director Mike Bohn targeted 25,000 as the number of football season-ticket holders he wanted to reach last fall.

Bohn and his staff managed to exceed the lofty goal, adding approximately 6,000 new season tickets and raising the total number to 25,172. It was the first time CU sold more than 25,000 season tickets in one season since 2003.

This spring the focus has been to expand that most loyal group of fans again and the first benchmark in the process arrives Friday with the deadline for season-ticket renewals.

"Renewals are robust at this time and the deadline is sneaking up," Bohn said. "We'll continue to follow up with those we haven't heard from, and we anticipate continued momentum."

In an effort to help sustain that momentum, Bohn said the department decided to lower the cost of tickets per game in four of the five seating areas in the stadium bowl with the lowest priced seats in 2011 remaining the same price this season.

The required donation that accompanies season-ticket purchases in premium seating areas also remained the same. Current and retired faculty and staff continue to have the option to sit in Section 220 and pay only the cost of the ticket with no donation. All others choosing to sit in section 220 must pay the donation.

Seats in tier levels one and two dropped from \$67 per game in 2011 to \$60 this season. Seats in tier level three dropped from \$45 per game to \$42 and seats in tier level four dropped from \$33 per game in 2011 to \$32 this year.

While the cost per game has dropped this year, the overall cost of season tickets is rising because there is a full slate of home games.

CU had only five true home games in 2011 because of a scheduling quirk caused by its move to the Pac-12 Conference. The Buffs will play six games in Folsom Field this fall, including five Pac-12 games. The annual meeting with Colorado State in Denver is also part of the season-ticket package as usual, meaning fans are paying for seven games this year instead of six last year.

Colorado will host Sacramento State on Sept. 8 in the home opener. It will be only the third time in the modern era CU has played a team from a lower division. Sacramento State is a Football Championship Subdivision (Division I-AA) team.

The Buffs also host UCLA on Sept. 29 and Arizona State in a Thursday night game Oct. 11. CU

will host three opponents in November starting with Stanford's visit to Boulder on Nov. 3. Washington comes to town Nov. 17 and Utah makes its first visit to Boulder since 1961 on Nov. 23 in the regular season finale.

The program drew an average of 50,355 fans to home games during its first season in the Pac-12 last season.

"We recognize the terrific momentum we have and the reception to our pricing strategies from last season and we wanted to do all we could to ensure that we maintain that high intensity of support from our season ticket holders," Bohn said. "We are hoping to exceed the season-ticket number from last season this season and we didn't want price to be a significant barrier in fans purchasing season tickets."

Some CU fans dislike the idea of having the CSU game included in the season-ticket package because the game is played in Denver and seating availability varies. CU initially seats all season-ticket holders in the upper-level seats and provides them with the option to upgrade to seats in the lower bowl or club level at an additional cost.

Bohn said renewal letters went out later this year than they have in the past because he was working on a possible change in the schedule well into March. That change didn't materialize.

"We wanted to make sure it was right when it went out," Bohn said.

CU Buffs football notebook: April 13

By Kyle Ringo Buffzone.com Writer Boulder Daily Camera

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Colorado conducted the 14th practice of spring on Thursday with a lot of players unable to participate because of injuries. The group has grown considerably since spring ball began and many familiar names will also be held out of Saturday's spring game.

When asked what his goal for the spring game was, Embree responded by saying, "I want to see everybody walk off the field. That's all I want to see."

Embree said the spring game will include about 30 live scrimmage plays, the same as in each of the previous three spring scrimmages. There also will be about 20 7-on-7 plays, some red zone work and kickoff coverage and punting work on special teams.

Former Buff defensive back Clyde Surrell visited practice wearing a bright red addidas track suit, clearly violating the unofficial "no red" rule that has been enforced in the program through the years because of the rivalry with Nebraska.

Embree was asked about seeing Surrell strolling the sidelines in his red outfit.

"It shows there is a sensitive, more softer side because usually me, (Eric Bieniemy and Kanavis McGhee) would have put him in the creek for wearing red down here like that. I don't know if that's a RunDMC outfit or what. I'm not giving him money to try to get new clothes."

Legendary Texas high school coach Sonny Detmer, the father of former Buff Koy Detmer and grandfather to current Buff quarterback Stevie Joe Dorman attended practice. ... Embree said his punt and kickoff returners in 2012 likely haven't graduated high school yet. ... Cordary Allen has been sitting out practices with a shoulder injury. Embree said Allen hasn't benefited much from spring ball, which is a concern because Allen switched positions for the third time in his brief career prior to spring. He moved from tight end to defensive end. He was originally recruited as a tailback. ... Defensive backs Greg Henderson and Josh Moten missed Thursday's practice. Moten was working on some school work and Henderson flew home to California to attend a funeral. Moten will be back for the spring game. Henderson will not. ... Former Buff Daniel Sanders visited practice.

CU Buffs' Paul Richardson upset about knee injury to end season

By John Henderson *The Denver Post* *The Denver Post*

Posted:

DenverPost.com

BOULDER — Paul Richardson, already an amateur expert on knee injuries, remembers his first thought as he laid on the Colorado practice field turf Monday. He had spent the last half of last season hobbling around with a torn MCL. He knew the feeling. This time it was worse.

So was his first thought.

"I hope I didn't tear my ACL," he said.

Sound diagnosis, Dr. Richardson. He was right. Thursday he had only a slight limp and a light black wrap around his left knee. It all masked the severity of an ACL injury that will knock the junior receiver from the 2012 season.

Cynics could say it knocks Colorado from the 2012 season, too. In second-year coach Jon Embree's continued rebuilding plan, Richardson merely represented 85 percent of the returning offensive production.

"I'm pretty bummed," Richardson said Thursday. "I already told the guys they have to step up. After I have my surgery (Monday) and am on the road to recovery I'll make sure I'll stay near and be on top of them."

Richardson not only was Colorado's best returning offensive threat, he was having a great spring. He showed the country his massive potential with school records of 11 catches and 284 yards against California. Combined with inconsistency and his MCL he finished with a relatively modest 39 catches for 555 yards and five touchdowns.

This spring, which ends with Saturday's spring game at 5 p.m. at Folsom Field, Richardson has taken it to another level the 3-9 Buffaloes would like to reach.

"He had an OK year," Embree said. "What you saw was what he was capable of and this spring he was consistent in what he was capable of. He has turned the corner in every phase of his life."

Colorado already had to find a new starting quarterback, a new starting tailback and another deep threat to take pressure off Richardson. Sophomore Connor Wood, the transfer from Texas, appears to have the inside track on the quarterback job and now is throwing to receivers with almost as little experience as he has.

"I feel I would've brought a lot to the table, especially with us not having a set quarterback position — yet," Richardson said. "I feel I would've given whoever was going to be the new quarterback a good effort both down field and in the quick game. Hopefully, that doesn't cripple us."

For the record, Colorado's next most productive wideout last year was Keenan Canty, who's back after catching all of 14 passes for 161 yards. This is one reason insiders' highest hopes right now lie with — and we're not making this up — a true freshman.

Nelson Spruce, a PrepStar All-American from Westlake High in Westlake Village, Calif., is opening eyes this spring as an early arrival.

"He has a different skill set," Richardson said. "He's a good athlete. He works hard. He makes plays. He makes catches in the middle of the field in the outfield, going under coverages, across coverages. He's just a good all-around athlete. He'll definitely be one of those guys to step up."

As Embree alluded, the good news for Richardson is his non-football life will continue upward. By sitting out next year and with two more seasons to play, graduation will be as easy as an out pattern.

He's on pace to graduate in December 2013 but said he'll likely spread the workload. Another positive: perspective on injuries.

"Fortunately, I can come back from mine but for those who can't come back, we need these degrees to fall on because without degrees those people are working in fast food," he said. "You need degrees on top of degrees nowadays."

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