

CU Buffs' quarterback Connor Wood ready for challenge ahead

Third-year sophomore prepared to battle for starting job

By Kyle Ringo Buffzone.com
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:02/20/2012 07:20:11 PM MST

2012 CU football schedule

Sunday, Sept. 2 - Colorado State, at Sports Authority Field at Mile High

Saturday, Sept. 8 - Sacramento State at Folsom Field

Saturday, Sept. 15 - At Fresno State

Saturday, Sept. 22 - At Washington State

Saturday, Sept. 29 - UCLA at Folsom Field

Thursday, Oct. 11 - Arizona State at Folsom Field

Saturday, Oct. 20 - At Southern California

Saturday, Oct. 27 - At Oregon

Saturday, Nov. 3 - Stanford at Folsom Field

Saturday, Nov. 10 - At Arizona

Saturday, Nov. 17 - Washington at Folsom Field

Friday, Nov. 23 - Utah at Folsom Field

Connor Wood is 1,000 miles from where he was a year ago at this time and right back in the same spot.

He transferred from the University of Texas to Colorado in early September after finishing third in a quarterback competition that really began in the Longhorns' weight room at this time last year. Texas was coming off a disappointing 5-7 season in 2010 and coach Mack Brown challenged his team to get better through open competition for every job.

Colorado is coming off a 3-10 season and has parted ways with nearly 30 seniors, creating a ton of opportunity all over the roster, but most notably under center where Tyler Hansen had been a starter in games in all four seasons of his career. Coach Jon Embree also encouraged an atmosphere of competition.

With spring practices at CU starting March 10, Wood is once again focused on earning the starting job and his first playing time at the collegiate level. It might be an advantage for Wood that he was in a very similar competitive situation a year ago.

"From my experience at UT, it made us become leaders through our actions and verbally," Wood said. "It challenged us as quarterbacks to really compete against each other. I believe it made Garrett (Gilbert), Case (McCoy), David (Ash) and I better quarterbacks through that competition in the spring and the summer. We were working our tails off trying to beat each other out, and I believe it made the team better.

"So I believe having this open quarterback competition will force all the quarterbacks on this roster to maybe get out of their comfort zone a little bit and to really step up."

Buffzone.com Mailbag

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There are a few subtle differences between the two situations of course. Wood, (6-foot-3, 220-pounds) will be competing against four other quarterbacks in Boulder this spring and fifth when freshman Shane Dillon joins the program in the fall. He widely is considered the favorite to earn the starting job among fans and media members primarily because of the fact that he came to Boulder from a nationally prominent

program and was one of the most highly rated quarterback recruits in the nation

two years ago at Second Baptist High School in Houston.

No other CU quarterback this spring has those credentials.

"I definitely feel some expectations coming from a place like that," Wood said. "To be honest with you, I really love having that expectation, having people look to me as a guy who can do some great things. Obviously I have to earn everything I get in the weight room. Nothing is going to be handed to me at all. But I do like to be a guy who people will look to with

expectations to lead a program and I like kind of that pressure that comes with the job. That's a quarterback. That's the title of it."

Wood grew accustomed to the starting role during his high school career. He played running back in Pop Warner and middle school football before finally trying his hand under center briefly in the eighth grade after some encouragement from his older brother Jeff who was the starter at Second Baptist before Connor.

A senior teammate who played quarterback suffered a nasty sprained ankle when Connor Wood was a freshman and it thrust him into the starting role there early. He kept the job until he graduated. Wood passed for nearly 2,700 yards and ran for almost 700 more as a senior, accounting for 32 touchdowns.

He redshirted in 2010 at Texas and believed he had a good shot at earning the Longhorns starting job last summer. He decided to transfer in August when faced with the idea of spending multiple seasons on the sideline before getting his opportunity to play.

Colorado offered a pro-style offense, with good coaching and a chance to play in a conference rated second to none when it comes to producing great quarterbacks.

There is also one very noticeable similarity between the looming competition in Boulder and the one he encountered last year at Texas. Most of the players involved are young with multiple seasons of eligibility ahead of them. That makes winning the job this year even more important because the quarterback who does will be in the best position going forward as long as he plays well.

Nick Hirschman, the player expected to present the biggest challenge for Wood this spring and summer, is a third-year sophomore with limited playing time under his belt. Wood also is a third-year sophomore and all the other quarterbacks who will stake a claim to be the Buffs' next starter are younger, with the exception of Brent Burnette, who is a senior.

"It is an important time for our football program," Wood said.

Wood said he believes it is always best for a football team to know who its starting quarterback will be throughout the entire offseason, but he also saw how competition at the position last year at Texas fostered competition at other spots and helped the whole team.

"It challenged everyone on that roster and I believe it's the same way here, 3-10 is not acceptable and it's not our standard," Wood said. "I believe that no spot is secured for sure going into spring. So everyone is going to have to work their tail off and it's going to bring out the best in everyone. It's going to break some guys. It's going to make some guys better. But I think the constructive competition within the team is going to be great for us."

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