



Quarterback Connor Wood helps to instruct freshman wide receiver Jeffrey Thomas during Monday's practice.
Photo Courtesy: CUBuffs.com



Brooks: Day 1, Year 2 Smooths Out A Bit For Buffs

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BOULDER - For the Colorado Buffaloes and second-year football coach Jon Embree, Day 1 in Year 2 was almost night-and-day different from Day 1 in Year 1. The change was welcome.

"Oh yeah, oh yeah," Embree said Monday afternoon. "Whether it's effort in finishing, whether it's running to the ball on defense, whether it's staying up off the ground, knowing when it's your opportunity to make the play or not - they understand that now . . . A lot of little things that we were coaching last year we don't have to coach this year."

The Buffs were on the field twice Monday, the first time for a brief morning walk-through, the second for a fully scripted afternoon practice in shorts and helmets that lasted the better part of two hours.

"I thought it went well - not a lot of mental mistakes, more technical stuff, so that was good," Embree said. "It shows they've been working hard all summer and been in their playbooks . . . that was good to see. We moved

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faster and that was good to see, too."

Added senior tight end Nick Kasa: "We're just all a bigger family now. We know what to expect. We know they (the coaches) are going to be hard on us but it's not like they're being mean to us; they just expect us to be better."

The Buffs' intense summer work, which included player-run practices in addition to conditioning, was evident on Monday, said senior safety Ray Polk: "We were able to see all the work we put in over the summer pay off. It was a nice platform for all of us to push off of."

Embree's 2012 recruiting class was among CU's largest in recent years, and Kasa immediately noticed the difference at his position. Three freshmen - Vincent Hobbs, Austin Ray and Sean Irwin - have joined the competition and junior DaVaughn Thornton has moved back to the position after a stint at receiver.

Kasa called the influx of newcomers "a little confusing because there's a lot more young guys that aren't really attuned yet to the practice schedule, our plays and things like that. They're still working in but that makes it a lot better for us because we've got seven tight ends now instead of three, like we had in the spring."

After switching to the position last season from defense and spending spring drills trying to hone his receiving skills, Kasa termed the first day of August camp "really good for me . . . there were no dropped balls. I enjoyed it a lot. It was good to just play some football again, but I'd rather put the pads on."

Kasa said he felt "so much more comfortable" at tight end than he did during spring work. "I started feeling a little more comfortable then, but just the whole summer doing all stuff, doing research and studying, I'm really more comfortable with the offense."

QB WATCH: Embree indicated before and at the recent Pac-12 Conference media day that his quarterback duel would involve three players - sophomores Connor Wood and Nick Hirschman and junior transfer Jordan Webb.

He reiterated that on Monday afternoon and said freshman Shane Dillon is a probable redshirt. Dillon underwent right shoulder surgery over the winter and, according to Embree, "is working his way back." Dillon, said Embree, has been cleared to practice, "but being cleared and throwing bombs 30 times is a little different."

Of the three-way, first-day competition at the position, Embree said the QBs "all had their moments, so I guess this competition is going to have to go at least two days now."

The trio will be evaluated on overall command of the offense and the huddle, how efficiently each gets plays in, then sends the offense to the line of scrimmage.

An accurate evaluation, said Embree, must wait until the team gets in pads and the QBs face a genuine pass rush: "It just gives you a sense of what might happen . . . we had a player here - (safety/linebacker) Brian Iwuh - who was awful in shorts. But as soon as those pads got on, the rest is history. You always have to temper your optimism a little bit."

Still, Embree said he expects a heated QB battle: "Oh, yeah . . . there's no doubt. They all flashed and had their moments - good and bad. I'm excited to see it; it's going to be a competitive battle."

When might it be decided?

"It'll probably happen after camp unless it just clearly separates itself," Embree said. "The thing for me is seeing (what happens) once we get going in pads, once we get into two-a-days and get a little tired, seeing how they react and seeing if it gets down to two how quickly that happens and if it does happen . . . I'd like to have it done sooner than later, that's for sure. But I still want it to be done right."

BUFF BITS: At the end of Monday afternoon's practice, Embree called junior fullback Alex Wood (Steamboat Springs), junior tailback Josh Ford (Denver) and junior tight end Scott Fernandez (Broomfield) to come and stand beside him before their huddled teammates. To a rousing ovation, Embree announced that the three walk-ons were being put on scholarship immediately. "They've all been in the program for two years, they've handled their business on and off the field," Embree said. He then added with a laugh, "But you know me; screw up tomorrow and you're back to the end of the line." . . . If the Buffs need a daily reminder of their 2012 goal to reach the postseason, it comes in this form: Day 1 saw them "breakdown" at the conclusion of practice with their usual "gimme a Black, gimme a Gold . . ." But they capped it with "1-2-3 BOWL GAME." Bet on that happening from now on . . . The only minor first-day injury Embree reported was suffered by freshman receiver Jeffery Thomas (leg). Embree said senior linebacker Doug Rippey (knee) "didn't do team stuff" while junior receiver Paul Richardson (knee) did little other than light running . . . Embree's post-practice media conference was interrupted by a campus emergency warning test siren that nearly made a Q&A session impossible. Embree delayed his answers on a couple of occasions while the siren blared . . . CU's defensive line numbers are significantly up with the addition of nine freshmen. Embree said it was nice to see the new bodies, noting "as long as they're not Kanavis (McGhee) and 'Tui' (Mike Tuiaosopo)." Those two are assistant D-line coaches. Embree said there's now "some stoutness" in the defensive line. "I'm excited to see those (new) guys in pads." . . . Another freshman who already has Embree's attention is safety Marques Mosley. He's been taken under Polk's wing, or Embree put it, "He's in Polk's hip pocket. That's good, having someone like Ray, with his work habits, showing a young kid how to do it. Marques has been working at safety . . . he's got a good chance. He's got great hips and he's into it, really into it. He's really smart, so I'm excited. I like all those guys; it's a little different from last year, no doubt." . . . The Buffs are on the field Tuesday morning for another brief walk-through before returning for afternoon drills set to begin at 4:45 p.m. The first day in full pads is Friday, with media day set for Saturday. All practices are closed to the media and public.

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SHOW MENU



Football: CU Buffs' QB Nick Hirschman feeling 100 percent

By Kyle Ringo Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

It has been one frustrating year for Colorado quarterback Nick Hirschman, but there were no traces of that on his face Monday as he joined his teammates on the field for the first practice of fall camp.

Hirschman endured three foot surgeries in the past 12 months, robbing him of confidence and some of his ability in limited playing time last fall. The surgeries also kept him out of spring ball entirely.

But he was back under center as one of three players battling for the Buffs' starting quarterback job as camp opened. He is competing with fellow third-year sophomore Connor Wood and junior Jordan Webb, who transferred to CU this summer after graduating from Kansas.

Hirschman said he is 100 percent healthy and has been since June.

"I feel fantastic," Hirschman said. "My feet feel back to normal and don't even notice them any more. It's great to be back out here, too. I had a real good day. It was fun."

With Hirschman out, Wood took all the first-team snaps in the spring and Webb brings two years of starting experience with the Jayhawks to the competition. Despite those facts, Hirschman said he doesn't feel any kind of disadvantage. He said all three players seemed to receive equal reps in the first practice and coaches have given no indication that will change.

"We're all coming in here just trying to compete and we're all working hard for the starting job," he said.

The Buffs only have one practice under their belts, but Hirschman said the quarterback competition already feels more intense than his previous two seasons. He said competition across the roster appears that way.

Coach Jon Embree said coaches probably won't make any kind of decision about who the starter will be until after camp ends Aug. 25. The starter would then have a full week to prepare for the season opener against Colorado State.

"It will probably happen after camp unless it just clearly separates itself," Embree said. "... I'd like to have it done sooner than later. That's for sure, but I still want it to be done right."

True freshman Shane Dillon, who is continuing to recover from shoulder surgery, will not be a factor in the quarterback competition and will likely redshirt, Embree said. Dillon has been cleared to practice but coaches are easing him back into a throwing regimen.

"They all flashed and had their moments," Embree said. "I'm excited to see. It's going to be a competitive battle."

Notable

Embree said the Buffs were sharper on the first day of camp than they were a year ago. He said the work players put in on their own in the summer showed on Day One. "A lot of little things we were coaching last year we don't have to coach this year." ... Embree said freshman wide receiver Jeffrey Thomas "got dinged a little bit." ... Wide receiver Paul Richardson was at practice and did some light running.

Football: CU Buffs' Ray Polk has sense of urgency

By Kyle Ringo Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

Fans are excited by the young talent in the Colorado secondary after watching the unit repeatedly blistered by Pac-12 Conference quarterbacks last season.

But senior free safety Ray Polk might be the key to improving the pass defense in 2012.

Polk generally deferred to older teammates in the past such as Anthony Perkins, Jimmy Smith and Jalil Brown, but now he will be the veteran face in the defensive huddle. Freshmen such as Kenneth Crawley, Yuri Wright, John Walker, Jeffrey Hall and Marques Mosley will look to him for on-field guidance.

There probably isn't a better role model for those young defenders and other young players on the team. Polk never has been one to put himself in bad situations off the field and no other defensive back knows the defense and what coordinator Greg Brown wants out of it more than him.

Polk also has proven he's willing to leave it all on the field for his teammates. He only recently fully recovered after playing most of last season with a damaged wrist and fractured sternum.

"It wasn't fun," Polk said. "I mean, it was still fun being out there with your team, but it was hard. I definitely don't want to do it again, but you just push through it for your team and you know your team is pushing through injuries, too."

Polk underwent surgery shortly after the season ended to repair his wrist. Doctors inserted three pins to help ligaments re-attach. They later removed the pins and Polk only recently gave the wrist his seal of approval after testing it at the bowling alley the night before Pac-12 media day in Los Angeles.

Training camp opened for the Buffs Monday and Polk spent his first day in his new No. 7 jersey after spending four seasons in No. 26. He said he made the switch because seven is a lucky number and it comes up frequently in the Bible.

The process of deciding which defensive backs will be on the field with Polk this season also began Monday as the Buffs try to improve on a pass defense that gave up 255 yards a game and 34 touchdowns.

Polk has been active in the offseason, organizing meetings with his younger teammates trying to teach them some of the nuts and bolts of the defense and how to be successful as a student. He said being a senior has given him a sense of urgency to take on such responsibilities without being asked by coaches.

"I remember when I was a freshman and I didn't know half as much stuff," Polk said. "If somebody would walk me through it, other than a coach, or take me aside and meet with me, it helped me out a ton."

"There is a sense of urgency and you feel this when you get into your last year. We've got to go. We've got to make a bowl game. Anything I can do to help out and get these freshmen coming along and ready to play, then I'm there for them."

Coach Jon Embree said Polk already seems like a big brother to Mosley, whom Embree believes is more likely to play this season after having spent so much time with Polk before camp.

It's possible Polk could be flanked in the secondary by other veteran players, but it's also likely that some of the freshmen will at least see opportunities if they don't win starting jobs outright.

Parker Orms has been unable to stay healthy to play much football in his three seasons in Boulder. Entering his junior season, coaches hope he can claim the strong safety position. Orms is a heady player who, combined with Polk, would give the CU defense its best chance of getting in the right calls on each play.

Sophomore Greg Henderson set a freshman record for playing time at cornerback last season and if Jered Bell is able to regain his old form after missing last season with injury, it might be tougher than expected for some of the freshmen to get on the field.

THORBURN: CU, CSU must elevate success to make rivalry relevant

By Ryan Thorburn Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

FORT COLLINS -- The Rocky Mountain Showdown could use another memorable villain to spice up the plot.

Sadly, there won't be another Bradlee Van Pelt anytime soon.

Love him or hate him, BVP made the Colorado-Colorado State rivalry great during the Sonny Lubick glory days here. Back when the Rams were winning Mountain West championships and trading haymakers with their big brothers in front of 70,000-plus fans in Denver.

These days CU vs. CSU draws about as well as a Peyton Manning practice at Sports Authority Field.

"I think it's good for the State of Colorado when both programs are good," first-year head coach Jim McElwain said on Monday at CSU football media day. "I know Jon (Embree) will get those guys going. They do a great job up there."

Garrett Grayson won't be spiking the ball off the face mask of a CU defensive back or calling the Buffs overrated in a postgame interview. But there is a feeling inside the McGraw Center that the sophomore signal caller has the right stuff to revitalize the Rams.

That confidence, which wasn't there when Grayson was learning some violent growing pains against TCU's defense late last season, begins in the mirror.

"I've never felt someone instill confidence in me like Coach Mac does," Grayson said of McElwain's influence. "When you have that, you go out every practice and you want to practice. You don't look at it as a practice, you look at it as how you can get better today."

That's the kind of positive coach speak the new sheriff likes to hear. There simply isn't room for a BVP-sized personality in McElwain's program.

These Rams don't have the kind of talent McElwain enjoyed as the offensive coordinator at Alabama the last four seasons. However, they did survive the same offseason strength and conditioning program the defending national champions use.

All players understood they had to show up on time for intense workout sessions wearing the same shirts, shorts and socks.

"There is no individuality in that program," CSU offensive coordinator Dave Baldwin noted.

During the spring CSU sent a message that the football team isn't going to win with selfish young men who make headlines for the wrong reasons. Three of the best players McElwain inherited from Steve Fairchild -- Nordly Capi, Mike Orakpo and Colton Paulhus -- were expelled from the university in May after being charged with misdemeanor disorderly conduct.

There was obviously an entitled faction inside the locker room that didn't buy into the discipline and all-for-one concept McElwain was selling.

Players said the dynamic changed dramatically during the summer when 100 individuals finally decided they were tired of 3-9 seasons and ready to perform as a team.

"We have confidence in each other, which is the biggest thing," running back Chris Nwoke said of the change in attitude. "We're playing like family."

Embree, who opened his second camp as CU's head coach on Monday night, had to "change the culture" in his program last year. This year he can focus more on football as preparations for the 2012 season begin.

That's a good thing considering the Buffs don't know who will be breaking the huddle, if Paul Richardson will be available, or how the promising true freshmen the team is counting on will perform against CSU on Sept. 1.

The Rams don't care.

"We have to worry about how prepared we are with our kids. I guess it would be hard to know any of that stuff," CSU co-defensive coordinator Marty English said on scouting the mysterious CU squad. "It probably doesn't matter to us right now who they are. It's just 11 guys over there."

CU's guys are supposed to beat CSU's guys. That's what has happened in seven of the last nine games since 2003 and 61 times in 83 meetings since 1893.

The realignment-ravaged Mountain West desperately needs McElwain, whose base salary is \$1.3 million, to transform the Rams into a top-25 program.

The Pac-12 will be even better if Embree, who was paid roughly \$725,000 in guaranteed compensation during his first year, can return the Buffs to dominance beyond the CSU game.

If the Rams and Buffs are relevant at the same time, perhaps playing in Denver will make some sense (and cents) for both programs.

"It's going to be a good game. It will be a landscape for us to get that rivalry W," Nwoke said. "That will amp us up and give us a lot of confidence going into those next games."

And if CSU does successfully rebuild and then constructs an on-campus stadium, should the series be contested in Boulder and Fort Collins?

"Where we play it ... that's not for me to determine," McElwain said. "I think it's a great venue to bring everybody into Denver in a beautiful facility. Yet I think there are some bonuses for both sides playing on campus."

"But that's for someone else to answer, not the head ball coach."

The Buffs are early 51/2-point favorites to make it three consecutive wins over CSU, despite uncertainty at quarterback. Embree is busy evaluating Connor Wood, Jordan Webb, Nick Hirschman and Shane Dillon for the lead role.

Without Nick Saban's defensive personnel or Mark Ingram and Trent Richardson in the backfield, McElwain must also choose wisely at quarterback.

"The most exciting thing we've seen is (Grayson's) development this summer," Baldwin said. "And the progress that the team made with his leadership."

It appears Rams fans may already have their new hero.

CU Buffaloes' quarterback derby down to three candidates

By Tom Kensler *The Denver Post* *The Denver Post*

Posted:

DenverPost.com

BOULDER — And then there were three.

The battle for Colorado's starting job was reduced to three candidates Monday when Buffaloes coach Jon Embree announced after the first practice of August camp that touted freshman Shane Dillon likely will redshirt.

Dillon, a 6-foot-6, 190-pounder from the San Diego area, underwent surgery on his right (throwing) shoulder in February. His participation in throwing drills will be limited during August camp, Embree said.

Dillon qualified for the prestigious "Elite 11" national quarterback camp prior to his senior year at El Cajon (Calif.) Christian. As a high school senior, he passed for 3,301 yards and 22 touchdowns against just nine interceptions.

"Shane is still working his way back," Embree said Monday. "He's cleared to practice. But being cleared to practice and throwing bombs downfield is something else."

Embree said, if healthy, Dillon had the talent to be "in the mix" for the starting job as a first-year player. The battle, the coach said, is now between untested sophomore Nick Hirschman and two transfers: sophomore Connor Wood from Texas and junior Jordan Webb from Kansas.

"The three guys all had their moments," Embree said of Monday's practice. "I'm looking at their command of the huddle and the offense, getting the plays in and out. They're not in shoulder pads; we pull away from getting a pass rush on them. So it's not a realistic chance to evaluate them when they're in shorts."

"There's no doubt it's going to be a good battle (among the trio). They all flashed their moments, good and bad. It's going to be a competitive battle. I'm excited to see it."

Hirschman said he is fully recovered from two foot fractures that required three surgeries during the past 13 months. He is wearing orthotic inserts in his shoes in an effort to prevent further problems.

"It felt good to be back out here," said Hirschman, who was held out of spring drills. "I thought the offense looked good. We're trying to win a job, but you shouldn't be preparing any different. That's the way you should prepare all the time."

Webb, a two-year starter at Kansas, arrived this summer and is immediately eligible because he has earned a degree from KU. Webb has two years of eligibility remaining and said already he feels like he fits in. "The offense is a different language, a different verbiage. But I'm learning it," Webb said Monday. "They said they'd give me a chance (to win the starting job). That's all I can ask for."

Wood practiced with Colorado last fall while sitting out the required transfer year. He took most of the snaps with the starters during spring work.

Wood said he was all for the team bringing in Webb.

"Competition brings out the best in everybody," Wood said. "It's a good deal for the quarterbacks. It's a good deal for the team."

Embree said the first practice "went well" overall and was not slowed by many mental mistakes.

"That shows they've been working all summer on their playbooks," the coach said. "That was good to see. It moved faster. I was pleased with the effort and intensity."

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The Field House — Blogs — The Denver Post

AUGUST 7, 2012, 7:34 AM

Colorado football's Fernandez, Ford and Wood placed on scholarship

By **TOM KENSLER** |  No Comments

BOULDER — Following the first practice of August camp, Colorado football coach Jon Embree announced that three walk-ons have been placed on scholarship: junior tight end Scott Fernandez, junior tailback Josh Ford and junior fullback Alex Wood.

Each is a Coloradan.

Fernandez (6-foot-3, 250 pounds) played high school football at Legacy. For CU, he played in 11 games in 2010 (including a start against Missouri) and participated in three games last season.

Ford (5-9, 205) is a graduate of Mullen. He attended Barton County (Kan.) Community College — but did not compete in athletics — prior to walking on at Colorado. Ford played in 12 of the 13 games in 2011 and rushed for 128 yards and one touchdown.

Wood (6-2, 245) is a product of Steamboat Springs High School. He saw his first college action in 2011, playing in the Oregon game. A converted tight end, he entered August camp atop the depth chart at fullback.

ARTICLE PRINTED FROM THE FIELD HOUSE

<http://blogs.denverpost.com/colleges/2012/08/07/colorado-footballs-fernandez-ford-wood-scholarship/24057/>

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AUGUST 6, 2012, 11:56 AM

Colorado's team strengths? Start with linebacker corps

By **TOM KENSLE** |  No Comments

Much of the space in my Sunday outlook for Colorado's August camp centered around position battles and areas of concern.

What about the strengths of the team?

Here are three:

LINEBACKERS: In seniors Jon Major and Doug Rippy and junior Derrick Webb, Colorado has experience and savvy in that unit. And perhaps even more important, as a group these guys are more athletic and are quicker afoot than some other CU linebacker corps of recent years. I'm also impressed with the young talent behind the starters, including Brady Daigh, Woodson Greer III, converted safety Kyle Washington and K.T. Tu'umalo. That's a promising set of sophomores.

OFFENSIVE LINE: Coaches say that it doesn't much matter how talented the quarterback and tailback are if the offensive line caves in. Although nobody seems to be talking about the group, I think CU's O-line can become one of the better units in the Pac-12. Junior left tackle David Bakhtiari (6-4, 295) and junior center Gus Handler (6-3, 295) are on the "watch lists" for national awards. There might be a good battle at right tackle between oft-injured Jack Harris (6-5, 305) and senior Ryan Dannewitz (6-6 300), who drew substantial playing time last season and also can swing to guard. The keys will be sophomore guards Daniel Munyer (6-2, 295) and Alexander Lewis (6-6, 285), who replace departed seniors Ryan Miller and Ethan Adkins. Munyer, a converted center, has adapted well to guard. Lewis, with quick enough feet to play left tackle and even tight end, may be a star in the making.

KICKING GAME: One of the of Colorado's few bright spots in 2011 was the debuts of then-freshmen Darragh O'Neill (punter) and Will Oliver (place-kicker). O'Neill, a former high school basketball player, averaged 42.59 and already is on the Ray Guy Award watch list. He stuck 21 of his 74 punts inside the opponents' 20-yard line. Oliver made the first five field-goal attempts he attempted as a college player and, even with some late-season struggles, he still finished 11-for-16, including 5-for-6 from 40 yards or longer. Colorado appears set at these two key spots for years.

ARTICLE PRINTED FROM THE FIELD HOUSE

<http://blogs.denverpost.com/colleges/2012/08/06/colorados-team-strengths-start-linebacker-corps/24039/>

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