

Football: CU Buffs' secondary set for new coaching style

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There haven't been many touchdown pass-to-interception ratios as bad as the one produced by the Colorado defense last year.

CU's young defense that often featured a secondary comprised mostly of true freshmen allowed 39 touchdown passes and made just three interceptions in 12 games. But if there is one area of the team that can realistically be expected to make a big improvement next fall, it's probably the secondary.

True freshmen such as Kenneth Crawley, Marques Mosley and Yuri Wright earned a lot of playing time and learned plenty of hard lessons they believe will help them improve as sophomores.

"Playing definitely helped me a lot," Wright said. "I learned a lot this year and going into my sophomore year I just know a lot more than maybe some other guys on the team. It was a good experience to play my first year."

But that alone isn't enough reason to expect improvement.

It's also reasonable to expect that the young defensive linemen who also earned a lot of playing time in 2012 will be bigger and better and will help take some of the pressure off those defensive backs.

But coaching is the biggest reason the Buffs should be picking off more passes from Pac-12 Conference quarterbacks in 2013.

That's not a shot at former secondary coach and defensive coordinator Greg Brown. He left CU when coach Jon Embree was fired with plenty of respect from the players who played for him. And Brown is no slouch. He landed rather softly on his feet as the new secondary coach of defending national champion Alabama after all.

But Crawley, Wright and Mosley all mentioned in separate interviews a common problem they believe affected their ability to learn the defense and understand game plans and execute them on game day as freshmen. It was not getting enough one-on-one attention from Brown.

All three players said they believe the new coaching staff led by head coach Mike MacIntyre will be more "hands on" when it comes to the secondary. They have already seen evidence of it. In secondary meetings last year, Brown did most of the talking. CU defensive backs also worked with graduate assistant Cha'pelle Brown.

This year they will have a completely different dynamic with MacIntyre, a former secondary coach, defensive coordinator Kent Baer, cornerbacks coach Andy LaRussa, safeties coach Charles Clark and Cha'pelle Brown contributing to coaching the secondary. Even new strength coach Dave Forman is a former defensive back.

"That's going to help a lot because we have coaches that know a lot," Wright said. "The more coaches, the more you can learn."

"Coach Brown is a heck of a coach, but he had a lot on his plate being a defensive coordinator and a position coach."

Crawley played in 11 games as a true freshman and finished the season fifth in tackles. Mosley was right behind him on the tackles chart in sixth, playing in 12 games. As the season wore on they all believe they began to make more plays than mistakes and they can build on that beginning next week when spring ball starts with an afternoon practice on Thursday, March 7.

"It's more hands on with the coaches," Mosley said. "Even coach Mac is in the meetings with us, too."

All three defensive backs came to CU with high expectations after standout prep careers and they delivered in different ways. Wright played most of the season with nagging injuries but still managed to play in eight games and make big improvements from his first game to his last.

Crawley returned punts, a role he hopes to continue in this year and Mosley did it all playing both cornerback and safety while returning kickoffs. Each said the game slowed down for them over the course of the season and they will carry a much greater level of confidence into the 2013 season.

"I was so scared," Mosley said of his first game as a Buff against Colorado State last fall. "Everybody was bigger than me. I just felt like I was going to mess up, but it was fine."

Crawley said he was more intimidated by the names he knew than anything. He said going to Los Angeles to play USC was maybe the biggest hurdle of the season for him because he looked up to the Trojans and respected the mystique of the program growing up.

"Yeah, I was intimidated at the USC game," Crawley said. "It was like shock. Just playing at the Coliseum and then playing against one of the best receivers in the country and just both of them and just seeing them was like a shock. I know I can go out there and play with those guys. I know what I can do and I know I upset a lot of people, but you got to just move on with it. Everybody makes mistakes. You just got to get better."

All three of CU's prominent sophomore defensive backs say they are committed to staying in Boulder and helping lead the program back to the postseason and respectability. Mosley and Wright said they never considered leaving when the coaching change happened, though they were disappointed to see the coaches who recruited them go.

Crawley said he considered leaving CU more than once last fall because of personal issues but Embree always talked him into staying. He said he initially felt uncertain about his future in Boulder when the coaching change was made, but he likes the new coaches and is eager to get back on the field and start learning everything he can from them. He even sees himself as a potential team leader this year and in the future.

"This year I have to prove myself," Crawley said. "I saw what (college receivers) can do and I know what I can do. I have to step up."

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