



The 'star' system aside, Mike MacIntyre has high hopes for his first CU recruiting class.

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Brooks: Stars Aside, MacIntyre Likes First CU Class

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BOULDER - I'm guessing that Mike MacIntyre wasn't thinking about the recruiting "star" system as he watched Super Bowl XLVII on Sunday night. But he was taking a great deal of interest in San Francisco linebacker Patrick Willis.

In MacIntyre's final season (2002) as an assistant football coach at Ole Miss, he recruited and signed Willis. That Willis was a two-, at best, three-star prospect from Bruceton, Tenn., didn't mean a hoot to MacIntyre. What he saw in Willis wasn't measured by stars.

A brief backgrounder: Willis overcame a nightmare of a childhood, picking cotton by the time he was 10 years old and seven years later moving out of the family's trailer with his two brothers and sister when fear of their alcoholic father became too much for any of them to bear.

In the spring of 2002, the Willis siblings were adopted by his high school basketball coach and his wife, Chris and Julie Finley, when the Finleys were only in their mid-20s. Patrick Willis - a Butkus Award winner, All-American and now All-Pro - never forgot the Finleys and the impact they had on his life; they were in New Orleans on Sunday as his guests.

There might or might not be a Patrick Willis in MacIntyre's first recruiting class at the University of Colorado,

which hired MacIntyre in early December to right its listing football program. But there will be plenty of two- and three-star signees. That won't wow the cyberworld's recruiting analysts but it means little or even less to MacIntyre.

His initial CU class will be announced on Wednesday - National Letter of Intent Day - at a news conference on campus, with a follow-up recruiting luncheon scheduled for Thursday at the Sheraton Denver Downtown. *(More information on the luncheon is available on CUBuffs.com.)*

MacIntyre has a strong belief in his and his staff's ability to evaluate and develop talent. The process begins, he said, with the identification of ability and the evaluation of a prospect's "want to," followed by the development of skills during their college careers.

For obvious reasons, Patrick Willis didn't arrive in Oxford, Miss., believing he was "entitled, thinking he was above everybody else," MacIntyre said. "That's huge in today's football . . . if we evaluate them right and they're athletic, they have the right mindset and the right attitude, they're going to develop. I don't think it's an exact science, but I think you have to look for it. A lot of times people don't look for it; they just say, 'Wow, that guy can play.'

"There's a lot of other things that go into it besides that - a lot of other things. Our staff knows what they're looking for; we talk about it all the time and definitely try to evaluate that. It's a big, big part of what we do."

MACINTYRE EXPECTS TO SIGN 16 to 19 prospects, with the final number solidified either late Monday or Tuesday. Five prospects - including three "grayshirts" from the former staff's final class - enrolled in January for the spring semester. The two new signees are outside linebackers Markeis Reed, of Napa, Calif., and Addison Gilliam, of Palo Cedro, Calif. The trio of grayshirts is comprised of receiver Jeff Thomas, offensive lineman Gerrad Kough and defensive end Derek McCartney.

Some attrition from the 2012 Buffs roster is expected. Starting junior left tackle David Bakhtiari is declaring his eligibility for the 2013 NFL Draft, and kicker Zach Grossnickle and tight end DaVaughn Thornton are both graduating and have decided not to return for a fifth year of football. Plus, several other players are awaiting medical clearance.

Coaching changes always put early- and mid-December hires and their staffs in a rush to salvage recruiting. MacIntyre believes he and his guys were able to accomplish that: "It's gone as well as could be expected with the late start. We held onto basically everybody that was committed when we got here. A couple of kids had already de-committed and made some decisions on other places. But holding onto all those commitments was huge.

"I called them the day after I got the job, talked to them (and) the first days we could get out - a Friday-Saturday - I sent all the guys out. We got after it; it was important to us. They (CU commits) were getting bombarded. Quite a few commits had been contacted by other Pac-12 schools - all the way to the last second. Those young men liked what we're going to do here and were excited about Colorado and our future. That was very positive. Then we've gone out and found some other young men who were looking at other schools and got some of those guys that I felt round out our class really well . . . we found some good players, too."

Validation of how good, he added, is TBD - which most coaches also will tell you. Take a look at San Jose State, where his three teams finished 1-12 (2010), 5-7 (2011) and 11-2 (2012). In those three years, MacIntyre didn't have a recruiting class ranked higher than No. 99 nationally by Rivals.com.

In order, his three classes were ranked No. 100 (tied with four other schools), No. 99 (tied with Ohio) and No. 99 (tied with seven other schools). The average "star" ratings, respectively, were 2.23, 2.25, and 2.25.

"Rankings in signing classes don't mean a lot to me," MacIntyre said. "I'll tell you in two to three years - how many stay, how many work, how many get better, the tenacity of them - all of those things. I feel like we got some kids who have a little bit of a chip on their shoulders to prove stuff. You always want that; I look for that."

Kind of like what he saw in Patrick Willis 10 years ago: "He's one of the best linebackers to ever play . . . I think that answers your question (about the star system)."

Using ballpark numbers, MacIntyre's annual goal at CU will be to get "the right 22 . . . it varies, but it usually averages about 22 guys. You want the right 22 guys every year for Colorado. That's what you want. It doesn't matter what anybody else says. You want the right 22, and then in two to three years they're standing there looking you in the eyes as men and they're doing what they're supposed to be doing. Now, you're successful."

A FEW OF THE PROSPECTS MacIntyre will introduce on Wednesday previously were committed to his former school. When I asked him to explain his philosophy on that, he answered: "I was not going to recruit anybody who was committed to San Jose State unless they de-committed and were looking at other schools. Two or three kids did. I had a bunch of other kids that inquired . . . guys that we felt fit our needs at Colorado. We had a few kids that worked out that way."

Asked if the ex-SJS commits had to make the first call, MacIntyre said, "They had to de-commit and I had to know it - and, yes, they had to call me. I was not going to go in and (poach). That's not the type of person I am. I honor commitments, I honor what I do. But those kids were looking at other schools in the Pac-12 also. I said I'd rather have them on my team than play against them."

In stocking future CU classes, MacIntyre most likely will keep his recruiters west of the Mississippi. In random instances, the Buffs could look east - but only if a prospect shows an interest in CU, makes a call, and MacIntyre and his staff believe the prospect is worth pursuing.

"Basically that's it; if we get a phone call from here or there, we'll listen," he said. "But we're not going to spread ourselves thin. If you spread yourself too thin, you can't evaluate correctly. That's still the most important thing. Anybody can turn on the film and see a great one. My daughter can pick those out. But you've got to evaluate every part of it."

"We're a Pac-12 school . . . now if a kid calls us from (the East Coast) and has an interest in Colorado, yeah. But we're not going to spend five days in May (going there). Why would you? There's enough players (in the West). The history of Colorado, if you look when they've been successful, they've done well in California, Texas and at home. I'm going to follow that plan."

His plan's fine print: In May, MacIntyre will dispatch four coaches to "hit every high school" in Colorado. Six coaches will be assigned to California, with some of them also working Colorado if necessary. Three coaches will work Texas, specifically the Dallas-Austin-San Antonio-Houston "triangle," said MacIntyre. "Texas is a gigantic state . . . we're really going to work that 'triangle' area hard."

Also, one coach will work the Seattle/Pacific Northwest region, one will recruit in Arizona, primarily targeting Phoenix. San Jose State successfully combed that metropolitan area, said MacIntyre, adding, "We want to win Colorado first and foremost, get the BCS players here. That's our goal . . . we had a great response from high school coaches and families (and) we've already got our eyes on juniors for 2014. It's been a good reception. We've done a good job for this class."

Selling CU, MacIntyre said, shouldn't be difficult: "Colorado has a great history and is well-respected academically. When the kids came on their visits here they loved it. I thought that went real well. And as we get into it in a full (recruiting) cycle, it'll even be better."

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