

## Football: Last year's QBs still battling for CU Buffs' starting job

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Three different quarterbacks played in at least seven games at Colorado last fall and none of them enjoyed much success. All three are back this spring trying to write a much different chapter in their college careers.

For senior Jordan Webb, it's the last chapter and his final chance to lead an offense and a team to a winning record. For a pair of fourth-year juniors -- Nick Hirschman and Connor Wood -- it might be the last chance to earn the starting job here, especially if they are passed over for younger teammate such as redshirt freshman Shane Dillon.

All three players still believe they can be the guy who leads the Colorado program out of the abyss it is in following a 1-11 season, the worst in the modern era of the program. There is a segment of the fan base rooting against any of the three earning the job because those fans believe what they saw from the three in 2012 was the best they had to offer.

But there is a new coaching staff in place, teaching all six quarterbacks on the roster a new offense and the players are all taking equal snaps in the first eight practices this spring. Coaches then intend to spend a week over spring break evaluating with plans to trim the list of players involved in the quarterback competition to three or four for the remaining seven sessions.

With those parameters, there is a sense of urgency among all the quarterbacks to make each snap count.

"This definitely isn't my first rodeo in that regard," Webb said. "I'm definitely used to competing. I think we've got a good group of guys at the quarterback position. We've got a lot to learn and we're all going to push each other. We're going to get there as far as the quarterback position goes."

The two biggest factors that have changed aside from the changes in coaches is the addition of more speed at wide receiver with Paul Richardson returning from his knee injury, Jeff Thomas joining the roster after greyshirting and D.D. Goodson moving from running back to slot receiver. More speed is on the way with three new receivers in the freshman class that will arrive this summer.

The other factor that could make these quarterbacks more effective is the scheme change on offense. The quarterbacks say the up-tempo Pistol offense coach Mike MacIntyre brought with him from San Jose State is more quarterback friendly than what they were operating in the past two seasons.

"Not knocking on the offense and the coaching staff we had, but I think the simplicity the offense helps quarterbacks play faster and our heads aren't as busy at the line of scrimmage," Wood said. "We have a couple things to think about and that's it. You can play faster. For me, I think I'm more consistent and accurate because I'm not thinking so much. It's just easier."

San Jose State threw for nearly 4,300 yards last season. Those are eye-opening totals to CU quarterbacks.

"I think we're all really excited," Webb said. "It's a quarterback friendly offense. They like to go vertical with some stuff and they like to get it out quick sometimes. I think we're also going to have a good running game."

Webb is coming off two surgeries on his throwing hand and isn't at full strength. He is unable to grip the ball with full strength just yet so his passes occasionally come out wobbly.

"It's my throwing hand, so nothing is too minor when it comes to that," he said.

Webb was the starter for the majority of the season in 2012 throwing for 1,434 yards in 10 games with eight touchdowns and eight interceptions. He led the Buffs to their only win, a come-from-behind victory at Washington State.

Hirschman missed spring ball last season recovering from foot surgery and finished second to Webb in the quarterback competition in fall camp. He played in eight games, including two starts, and threw for 589 yards with two touchdowns and seven interceptions.

Wood never found his comfort zone last season and his opportunities were limited when it came to playing with games still in doubt. He's the first to say he was thinking too much at times and putting too much pressure on himself to make plays. He threw for 265 yards in seven games with one touchdown pass and four interceptions.

All three quarterbacks are now playing for their third coaching staff in a third offensive system. Webb and Wood contributed to finding themselves in that situation by transferring from Kansas and Texas respectively.

Hirschman has been through three coaching staffs and two coaching changes in his CU career. It has been forced on him and it has taught him some lessons. One of them is not to put too much pressure on himself in this first segment of spring ball.

"I don't think it makes the first section any more important than the second," Hirschman said when asked about coaches trimming the list of competitors at the position midway through spring. "College football, you can lose your job really quick and you can get a job really quick. I've been on both spectrums of that. Honestly, you come out here every day and just worry about yourself, make sure your reads are right, make sure your progressions are right and make sure you're doing the right things. Hopefully it will all work out."

Hirschman said that while there is heated competition between all six quarterbacks in practice each day, the players involved have good relationships and don their best to help each other. He said he's thankful to have a meeting room with that dynamic.

"The camaraderie is great," Hirschman said. "We have a great room and we have the ability to separate football and off-the-field. Off the field, things are a little more candid and fun and on the field things are more serious and you're thinking about yourself a little more."

Notable

Defensive back Sherrard Harrington used his Twitter account to announce he is medically retiring from CU after too many injuries. MacIntyre confirmed the plan, saying Harrington has a chronic hip injury. Harrington joined the CU program in 2011 but did not play in a game in either of his two years on the roster. ...The Buffs practiced in pads for the first time this spring and MacIntyre said the Buffs weren't quite as sharp as they were Friday. ...When asked for his opinion on CU's practice bubble, MacIntyre said, "I like it. It's works good. It's better than slopping around in the snow out there right now or being in a gym."

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## NFL draft scouts in Colorado for Buffaloes, Rams pro days

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NFL scouts and other personnel executives will descend into Colorado on Wednesday for two of the state's major pro days.

Colorado will fill the morning with players also set to go during an afternoon session at Colorado State. As both programs continue to try to climb out of rough waters, the two stops aren't considered A-list events this year by the NFL's decision-makers.

And neither place has a player that will rise to the level 2011 when CU's Nate Solder packed them in in the weeks before he went to the Patriots with the 17th pick of the draft and Buffs cornerback Jimmy Smith went to the Ravens with the 27th pick. But there are still some players who can raise their stock with a little over a month to go before the draft.

A look at a few:

- TE Nick Kasa. The former Buffs defensive end definitely has the attention of offensive coordinators around the league in search of match-up problems for defenses. Teams love his size as a receiver - 6-6, 269 pounds — but have questions given he's so new to the position since a position switch in his junior year in Boulder.

Kasa caught the ball well at the Senior Bowl and has shown he can be a physical blocker. Among the prospects with local ties, he's the guy with a chance to be the biggest riser on draft day.

But there is a question as to how much Kasa will do Wednesday. Several scouts have said in recent days they believe Kasa suffered a hamstring injury at the scouting combine, so he may not be full speed in Boulder.

- DT Will Pericak. Pericak didn't get a combine invitation and he didn't get a Senior Bowl invitation so scouts haven't seen him up close since he turned some heads with his work at the East-West Game.

There are teams that see the high-effort Pericak as a potential fit in their defenses — some 3-4 teams even see a potential end. And given most scouts would say 75-80 percent of a player's evaluation is what he did during games, Pericak's quality play during the Buffs' on-field struggles has put him on the radar — he started 48 games at Colorado.

If he can show some athleticism Wednesday, it could be that little boost he needs for teams searching for things to break the ties on their draft boards.

- T David Bakhtiari. Most teams see Bakhtiari as a future NFL guard at this point, but the scouts will come to Boulder wanting to see a little more from him in position drills. Hard to believe, but at 299 pounds Bakhtiari was the lightest offensive lineman who weighed in at the combine.

Bakhtiari entered the draft as an underclassman so the combine was really the first chance scouts had to see him in a workout environment since he made the decision to turn pro. They want to see a little more Wednesday.

- T Ryan Jensen. The CSU-Pueblo offensive lineman was considered one of the most highly-graded players not invited to the scouting combine. Jensen will take part in CSU's pro day in Fort Collins — it's an option for players who play for smaller programs to attend pro days at larger schools near their campus or near their hometown.

Jensen is expected to have another open workout in Pueblo in early April. As it stands right now the Vikings, Bengals and Seahawks are among the interested.

Though he was a four-year starter for the Thunderwolves, Jensen likely projects as a guard in the NFL. He has also snapped in recent workouts, including when Kansas State quarterback Collin Klein was preparing for the combine in suburban Denver, and has said he believes he could play center as well if it was needed.

Wednesday's workout might be a chance for him to show scouts he could do just that.

- T Joe Caprioglio. The Highlands Ranch graduate has been working out with Steadman-Hawkins trainer Loren Landow, in a group that included Jensen, Pericak and former Buffs linebacker Jon Major.

Caprioglio, whose junior season ended because of a knee injury (ACL), started 10 games this past season for the Rams. He has the size teams like at offensive tackle and without the benefit of any post-season all-star game appearances a good day Wednesday, could get him noticed.

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