

Football: Mike MacIntyre looking for leaders on CU Buffs

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Former Colorado football coach Jon Embree insisted his team had good leadership last season despite having only eight seniors on the roster and most of them missing significant chunks of time with injuries.

But the results the team produced on the field told a much different story and led fans and media to wonder if the Buffs quit in the fourth quarter of several blowout losses in the Pac-12 Conference.

It won't surprise many to hear that some members of last season's team thought leadership was lacking at times and that the program didn't necessarily have one or two vocal go-to guys capable of rallying an entire locker room when needed. It also didn't help that the 2012 Buffs were a divided bunch at times, generally split along the lines of those who were recruited by Dan Hawkins and those who were brought to Boulder by Embree.

The Buffs are immersed in their first spring under new coach Mike MacIntyre and his coaching staff and they're doing a lot of learning. Leaders aren't necessarily written in stone at this time of year, but with the first scrimmage of spring ball scheduled for Friday, it will be an opportunity for those Buffs who see themselves as potential leaders to take hold of that role.

MacIntyre said he looks for a few qualities in players on the practice field when trying to spot the likely candidates to be captains and leaders in the 2013 season and beyond.

"No. 1, I'm looking for effort," MacIntyre said. "No. 2, I'm looking for young men that listen, and No. 3, I'm looking for tough guys. So I think that kind of sums it up.

"They will start appearing more and more. I'm excited with the way the guys are listening and participating and doing now."

Center Gus Handler is a likely candidate because of his experience and the position he plays.

Handler said he has tried to be a leader since his sophomore season when he first began earning significant playing time. As a center, he was forced into leadership role because he must make calls for the offensive line. But Handler considers himself more of a lead-by-example type.

"I think every senior has a different way of leading," Handler said. "I don't really think we've had a vocal leader at least since I've been here. ... I think we need to have more vocal leaders and leaders who lead by example at the same time."

Handler said he doesn't mind becoming a more vocal leader if the team needs him to fill that role.

Linebacker Derrick Webb also is going into his senior year. He began to emerge as a team leader last season. He also didn't mind standing up and saying what needed to be said at times in the locker room. Webb said he intends to be a leader in his fifth and final season in Boulder

"It means everything just because it's my last year," he said. "Pretty much, there is no second chances after this. So you want to leave feeling like you've done everything you can do, make your teammates better as best as you could and give yourself the best opportunity to say, 'I left it all out there my senior year.'"

"As a senior that's pretty much my goal is to say I left an impact on my teammates and my program."

Webb said a good leader and one who is vocal, needs to pick his spots. He said he doesn't necessarily believe the team needs vocal leadership as much right now in spring as it needs guys doing all the right things and leading by example. He said the time will come for him to be a more vocal leader when fall camp comes and the season arrives.

Senior tackle Jack Harris said he also tends to be a lead-by-example guy who often concentrates his leadership efforts with his fellow offensive linemen first. However, he recognizes the importance of the team needing a vocal leader or two to rally or focus everyone at certain times.

"A lot of guys need that I think," Harris said. "I think they need someone to kind of look up to and kind of follow. I think it's good to get people going and keep people focused so it's not the coaches out there yelling. It's someone in your shoes who is encouraging you and pushing you."

Linebacker Paul Vigo describes his leadership style as bring people together. He might make a good negotiator, perhaps a Secretary of State later in life.

"My role that I take on is embracing all the guys, younger and older guys and keeping them together and then on top of that being an example," Vigo said. "I try to stay out of trouble and get them to be disciplined. Some of the guys have trouble with that, but at the end of the day, I still show them support because I know they will grow and mature and be a better player."

Vigo said if there has been anything lacking in leadership at CU in recent years it has been playing together and staying together.

"It's that family quality," he said. "We've got to get better at that, just embracing each other, which has been a tremendous improvement."

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CU will practice on the lower fields for about 60 minutes Friday before moving into the stadium for the first scrimmage of spring ball. ... CU coaches are conducting a football clinic for high school coaches and will have about 75 coaches attending. ... MacIntyre said the scrimmage will be very basic and straightforward. Quarterbacks will be off limits to tackling. ... MacIntyre said Yuri Wright and Jeff Thomas have been held out of practices to this point because of nagging leg injuries. Neither is expected to participate in the scrimmage but both are expected to begin practicing soon. He said he might consider holding them out until after spring break to make sure they are fully recovered.

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