

Football: Brian Lindgren looks to turn around CU Buffs' offense

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New Colorado offensive coordinator Brian Lindgren has never been one to shy away from a challenge and that is certainly what he has on his hands with the Buffs.

It has been 12 seasons since the Colorado football team averaged more than 400 yards of offense a game over the course of a full season. It has been eight years since the Buffs scored more points over the course of a season than their opponents.

CU finished last season ranked 117th in scoring, 116th in total offense, 109th in rushing and 96th in passing. No surprise the Buffs were 1-11 in the standings.

Fans of the program have criticized and ridiculed each of the last four offensive coordinators, Shawn Watson, Mark Helfrich, Eric Kiesau and Eric Bieniemy during all or parts of their respective tenures. Needless to say, Lindgren has a tough road ahead.

The good news is Lindgren is coming off a banner year as offensive coordinator at San Jose State where he served under CU coach Mike MacIntyre. The Spartans won 11 games and set 27 offensive school records. They averaged nearly 450 total yards a game and threw for more than 330 yards a game. Lindgren is installing his offense at CU this spring. It is an attack that utilizes some Pistol formations, where the running back is aligned behind the quarterback in a short shotgun, but the Buffs will not run Pistol exclusively. Lindgren describes his system as multiple.

"I think the Pistol is a formation, and it's definitely not our offense, but we run some Pistol formation and I think we run it a lot more than a normal team does," Lindgren said. "That's it. If we had Colin Kaepernick, I think we'd do a lot more of it. But we do some of it and I think there is some good things hiding the back's location and then some of the run game with some of the stuff that the 49ers did puts defenses in some tough situations."

Lindgren hasn't been able to truly delve into the offense with the Buffs yet this spring. Most of the first six practices have been focused on basic elements of operation such as lining up in correct formations, handling the snap and getting the correct personnel on and off the field on time.

The Buffs probably won't be fluent in the entire play book until they begin practices next spring.

"We're pretty multiple in what we do and I think there was some carry over from what they've done," Lindgren said. "...I think there is some familiarity, but we're trying to take it slow and get good at stuff before we move on to the whole package."

Lindgren has seen a lot that he likes from the Buffs. He definitely isn't viewing the talent he inherited as a bare-cupboard situation. At the same time, it's safe to say a year or two from now all of CU's coaches expect to feel better about the roster top to bottom.

Lindgren is 32 and while that is young for an offensive coordinator at the Bowl Championship Series level, he isn't even the youngest offensive coordinator in the Pac-12 Conference. Utah's Brian Johnson became

offensive coordinator for the Utes as a 24-year-old last year. He is now 25 and he brought less overall coaching experience to the job when he was hired at Utah than Lindgren brings to the Buffs.

Lindgren already has eight years of college coaching under his belt at the University of Redlands, Northern Arizona and San Jose State. His first season with the Buffs will be his fifth calling plays and coaching quarterbacks.

It has been a big change and a beneficial one for Colorado's six quarterbacks to have a position coach just 10 years older than some of them and less than a decade removed from his playing days as a quarterback at the University of Idaho. CU's quarterbacks were coached the past two seasons by Rip Scherer, a man in his early 60s with more than 30 years of coaching experience.

"Not to take anything away from coach Scherer, he's a great coach and a high energy guy, but having someone that has just got out of the game and was kind of running the same offenses that are being run now in college, it kind of gives us more of a perspective maybe," CU senior quarterback Jordan Webb said.

Scherer was popular with the players he coached, but Connor Wood agrees Lindgren can more easily understand and have empathy for certain situations CU's quarterbacks experience, whether it's football related or not.

"I learned so much from coach Rip," Wood said. "My mind and my expansion of my knowledge of the game came so much from coach Rip, but having a younger guy, he's going to relate to you a little more. Both coaches are awesome. I'll play for anyone of them any day."

Perhaps the biggest priority for Lindgren this spring is identifying the best three quarterbacks on the roster to take into a competition for the starting job in August. Lindgren and MacIntyre plan to have the list whittled from six to three or four by the time players return from spring break.

The Buffs have two practice sessions remaining Thursday and Friday before those decisions are made and the competition becomes a little more intense in the second half of spring.

"Right now the reps are diluted," Lindgren said. "We've got to get a guy ready to be the starter. I think we're going to have to reduce it and reduce it and the guys that aren't involved, they're just not going to get reps anymore."

"They will still play quarterback. I think sometimes they're just servicing the defense, scout team quarterback and helping us any way that they can."

Lindgren said if the quarterbacks who don't make the cut are interested in changing positions or even transferring to a program where they might be able to play sooner, he will help them in any way he can.

"I think you have that conversation and it's a case-by-case basis with guys," Lindgren said. "Guys are at different points in their careers. Some guys will want the opportunity to go play and if that is somewhere else, they go that way. Obviously, we'd love to keep everybody here and have as much depth as we can, but coach MacIntyre and myself believe in being upfront with them and letting them know exactly where they are in the situation."

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