

Football: Quarterback Wood ready to lead Buffs on and off field

By Kyle Ringo Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

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There may not have been anyone in the Colorado football program more surprised by Nick Hirschman's decision to transfer than the man who finished spring drills tied with him atop the depth chart at quarterback.

Connor Wood says he was stunned to hear Hirschman was leaving the program and now finds himself wondering who will fill the hole Hirschman left on the team.

"It's a shame that he would leave," Wood said. "He always pushed me. Those other guys, John (Schrock) and Shane (Dillon) and Stevie (Dorman) now have to step up and push each other. We all have to push each other more instead of just me and Nick going at it every day. They have to raise their level."

Wood is finally where he has always wanted to be since leaving high school in Houston as a ballyhooed recruit. He's unquestionably the starter for CU heading into the summer and fall camp in August and it seems plenty would have to go wrong for him to lose the job before Sept. 1 when the Buffs begin the 2013 season against Colorado State.

Wood seems to be maturing both on and off the field. While he is trimming the mistakes from his game, he's leading an effort to restart the CU chapter of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. He plans to spend a big chunk of the next few weeks back home on the family ranch near Houston fishing, a growing passion for him. But he also will workout and throw with old high school teammates and has planned to connect with CU wide receiver D.D. Goodson, who attended high school nearby.

In a 10-minute interview this week, Wood quoted both New England Patriots quarterback Tom Brady and NBA legend Michael Jordan. He's clearly studying the best in his efforts to follow in their footsteps.

"Leadership is earned every day," Wood said, quoting Jordan. "Between now and Sept. 1 is when I earn my leadership with the guys. They need to see me through each summer practice and into the fall me proving myself on the field. That's when they will see me as their leader, as their quarterback. It's an every-day deal."

In the past, Wood admits he has had trouble handling the pressure of trying to win the starting job and perform well in games. He feels like he has started to learn to control his emotions better in the past year.

It began with playing in spot duty in blowout losses throughout last season and making one start late in the season, but it really took off in the spring in a new offensive system with a different coaching staff and coaching style.

"I really have to credit the experience I got in the fall, even though it wasn't that positive," Wood said. "There was still a quarterback circus going on and I didn't prove myself in the fall, but I would say the experience that I got, the good and the bad stuff, I understand what I'm going into now."

"I played Oregon, played USC. I've played here. That will give me some confidence to say, 'OK, now I know what to expect.' It showed during spring ball. I was much more comfortable. The offense and the coaches have something to do with it, but also I think the experience that I got in the fall helps with me just going and playing."

Wood completed 36 of 56 passes in four main spring scrimmages for 601 yards and five touchdowns. He also ran for a 33-yard touchdown in the third scrimmage and didn't throw an interception all spring.

It didn't hurt having a more diverse group of receivers to throw to this spring, including junior Paul Richardson. Wood to Richardson could become a prolific combination in the fall if both players continue on the trajectory they were on this spring.

He's determined not to put too much pressure on himself this time. Coach Mike MacIntyre said if he and his coaches, such as offensive coordinator Brian Lindgren, are doing their jobs, Wood shouldn't be in that position.

"I think coach Lindgren is a very calming guy," MacIntyre said. "He understands quarterback. He played it himself. And I think also the way that we practice and try to put pressure on him in practice, the noise, the tempo, the pace, the hurriedness and the concepts that we teach. Knowledge equals confidence equals playing fast. Once he has knowledge and he has confidence that helps you handle pressure situations because you've just done it so much."

Wood said he has always prided himself on hard work and giving more effort and time than those with whom he is competing. He's going to have to rely on those traits now more than ever with Hirschman headed to Akron and the other healthy quarterbacks on the roster significantly behind him in performance and experience.

"It's a great feeling," Wood said of finally having some success. "I feel like this is going to be a breakthrough year for me, not just with the football team but off the field as well. My confidence has really gone to another level. The coaches have a lot to do with it and I spoke about that at the spring game when I was praising those guys. ... I think we have a really good thing going."

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Kyle Ringo Blog: Gerald Thomas, Vincent Hobbs on new depth chart

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Coach Mike MacIntyre released a post-spring depth chart this week with a few tweaks from the one the program issued prior to the spring game in mid-April.

Here are some of the notable changes or differences.

Wide receiver Gerald Thomas and tight end Vincent Hobbs missed most of spring drills dealing with personal issues and both were thought to be on their way out of the program. But MacIntyre is hopeful both players are able to return to Boulder this summer after some time off at home this month and compete for playing time in the August.

Thomas and Hobbs were listed as inactive for the spring game. Hobbs has been dealing with the health problems of his father, who was paralyzed last year. But on the post-spring depth chart Thomas is listed fourth at Z wide receiver position behind Paul Richardson, D.D. Goodson and Keenan Canty. Hobbs is listed tied with senior Alex Wood for the third tight end spot behind Scott Fernandez and Kyle Slavin.

Let's switch to defense for a minute where, perhaps, the biggest surprise is found.

Junior Jered Bell is now listed ahead of sophomore Marques Mosley as the starter at one safety spot. In a less surprising development, senior Parker Orms is the starter at the other safety spot ahead of fellow senior Terrel Smith. Mosley and Smith were listed as the starters going into the spring game.

At quarterback, walk-on John Schrock is listed third behind Connor Wood and Shane Dillon but ahead of fellow Stevie Joe Dorman, a scholarship player. I thought Dorman improved this spring quite a bit from what I had seen from him previously, but I'm still wondering if he ever will be able to work himself into contention for playing time here.

Before the spring game, running backs Christian Powell and Tony Jones were listed as co-starters and Josh Ford and Donta Abron were tied for the third spot. Powell is now the starter going into fall camp with Jones as his backup. Ford and Abron remained tied.

Defensive lineman De'Jon Wilson is another guy who was out of practice this spring because of personal issues. Going into spring, coaches listed him as a defensive tackle, but he's now third at left defensive end behind Samson Kafaolu and Kirk Poston. Juda Parker, who missed the spring with an injury is also listed at the position.

Senior Nate Bonsu and sophomore Justin Tupou were the starters at defensive tackle going into the spring game. Now Bonsu is listed as Tupou's backup with sophomore Tyler Hennington listed as the other starting defensive tackle.

The only change at linebacker was caused by an injury. Tommy Papilion suffered a torn knee ligament in the spring game and will miss the season. He went into the game listed fourth at outside linebacker.

Left cornerback looks like a potential battle royal in fall camp with Kenneth Crawley listed as the starter

followed by John Walker and Yuri Wright.

Greg Henderson is still the starter on the right side and his backup is Josh Moten, who has been listed at three different spots in the last three depth charts issued by the program.

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