

Football: Jordan Webb will start for CU Buffs against Stanford

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Colorado football coaches either can't find the right situation to give one of their young quarterbacks a chance to start or they don't believe in any of them enough to pull the plug on junior Jordan Webb.

Regardless of which scenario is closest to the truth, neither speaks well of the state of the most important position in football at CU.

After spending much of the past two weeks toying with the idea of replacing Webb as the starter with sophomore Nick Hirschman, coach Jon Embree announced through his sports information staff Friday that Webb will once again start Saturday against No. 15 Stanford.

Embree first began mulling a change at quarterback two weeks ago but he didn't want Hirschman to make his first start on the road against highly ranked opponents at USC or Oregon. Stanford is the third consecutive top-15 opponent for the Buffs, but giving Hirschman a chance to start at home seemed more palatable.

Perhaps Embree began to change his mind this week as he watched more and more film of Stanford's second-ranked rushing defense and realized he would need his passing game operating at its best to have a chance Saturday. Webb has been successful through the air at times this season as he has led the Buffs to a 1-7 record.

Stanford coach David Shaw plans to play two quarterbacks with starter Josh Nunes likely getting the majority of playing time but giving way at times to Kevin Hogan, who adds another element to the Cardinal offense with his running ability. Hogan has played in four of Stanford's past five games and could be making a push to take over the starting role.

It makes sense for Shaw to play Hogan more against the Buffs because Nunes is coming off a win at Washington State in which he only completed 47 percent of his passes. More importantly, Colorado has repeatedly shown it is clueless when trying to stop quarterbacks and the read-option style of play.

Regardless of who plays quarterback for the Buffs, the formula for winning or least keeping a game competitive into the fourth quarter for the first time in a month includes making more big plays on offense and drastically reducing big plays allowed on defense.

CU freshman running back Christian Powell produced his second 100-yard rushing game of the season last week at Oregon with much of the damage coming in the third quarter after the game had long been decided. It would be a significant accomplishment for Powell and CU's offensive line to produce similar success Saturday.

Stanford is allowing just 65 rushing yards per game and 2.2 yards per carry.

By now, much more ugly numbers are familiar to CU fans. The Buffs rank among the bottom 10 teams in the nation in nine different statistical categories and are last in four of them. They're also trending in the wrong direction in several other areas.

CU has the worst scoring defense and kickoff coverage team in the nation. It is also allowing more quarterback sacks than any other program and its passing efficiency defense is also dead last. The Buffs are giving up 505 yards of total offense a week -- 204 rushing yards, 301 passing.

Embree was asked this week if he should be focusing more of his attention on helping his defensive assistant coaches with game plans. He said he would like to do so, but he's already stretched too thin with his offensive responsibilities and recruiting.

"It is just not physically possible and then you get to the point now after practice today, I will go in and try and suggest some things I like and don't like, or why we are doing this," Embree said. "Again because of some of the things we are trying to do on the other side, it is a little bit of a tug-of-war."

The Buffs will be through the toughest portion of their schedule after Saturday's game, having played three weeks in a row against teams ranked in the top 15 in the nation on game day. The Buffs would love to keep the program's perfect record against Stanford at home in tact. CU has won all three previous matchups in Boulder against the Cardinal.

But it might be more realistic for fans to hope for a game that remains competitive from beginning to end and then look forward to possibly upsetting either Washington or Utah in the final home games of the season later this month.

Colorado earned two of its three victories in November in Embree's first season as coach, showing they were improving as the year went along. A similar show of improvement appears to be the only thing left for which to play once again this fall.

"All you can worry about is what you can control which again is your attitude, effort and preparation," Embree said. "It is about when your number is called when you are asked to do your job, you just do your job to the best of your ability, and seek to make it on coaches' effort tape that he is going to show on Monday. That is all I am asking them to do, just give me your best and we will worry about the other stuff later."