



*Nick Hirschman could be CU's starting QB Saturday against Stanford.  
Photo Courtesy: Associated Press*



## Brooks: For Buffs, It's Never Too Late For A QB Duel

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**BOULDER** - The calendar says November's arrival is imminent, but in Colorado football it's August all over again - at least at one position.

CU began preparation on Monday for the first of its final four games with a full-blown quarterback competition involving junior Jordan Webb and sophomore Nick Hirschman, although Webb's role in the duel was put on hold while he attended a late-afternoon class.

Either Webb, the starter in CU's first eight games, or Hirschman, who guided the Buffaloes to their only points in last weekend's 70-14 loss at No. 2 Oregon, will open Saturday against No. 15 Stanford at Folsom Field (noon, FX).

"We'll let them battle it out and see," coach Jon Embree said.

"I'm just excited that I have a chance to play again," Hirschman said. "Whether I start or not, I don't know. I just

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know it's going to be evaluated this week. I'm just going to play my best and hope it comes out my way. If not, Jordan starts and he'll do a good job, too."

Quarterbacks coach Rip Scherer was reluctant to dismiss sophomore Connor Wood from the competition, saying, "As far as I'm concerned all three of the guys are in the mix, although Nick is a little bit ahead of Connor at this point."

All three QBs played at Oregon, with Hirschman starting the second half - CU trailed 56-0 - and guiding the Buffs on a 72-yard scoring drive and a shorter march following a fumble recovery. In the first half, Webb completed seven of his 11 pass attempts for 31 yards, while Hirschman was 7-of-16 for 64 yards. Wood entered the game in the fourth quarter and did not attempt a pass.

Of his performance in Eugene, Hirschman said, "I think I showed I can play at this level. I had some throws that I wish I had back . . . but overall I was pleased with my performance. I think I gave the coaches a little bit of confidence in me that I can run this offense and move the ball effectively."

Webb entered the Oregon game having completed 55.7 percent of his passes (127-of-228) with seven interceptions and eight touchdown passes. Some of the offense's lack of recent productivity has been due to his missing throws that Embree and Scherer expect him to hit. Embree said this week's decision on a starter would be based on "comfort level with the game plan, decision making . . . those things."

Webb occasionally is "not getting the ball out as quick as he needs to," said Scherer, although the Kansas transfer appeared better in that regard last week. The Buffs have given up 33 QB sacks - Washington State and Cal have allowed 34 each - and Scherer pinned many of those on his QB "holding onto the ball too long, not seeing things, not evaluating quickly, not moving through progressions - that results in sacks."

He wasn't certain whether Webb was "pressing," but added, "the bottom line is we're missing opportunities. When you're a young team and a struggling team, you can't squander those opportunities. We've got to find somebody who's going to take advantage of them."

What Scherer wants to see this week from Webb and Hirschman is "consistency in making throws, reads and calls . . . but the bottom line is productivity, who can move the ball. Some guys are prettier and do everything right and the ball doesn't move; some guys are uglier about it and put the ball in the end zone. That's the bottom line at that position."

In four consecutive Pac-12 Conference losses, the Buffs (1-7 overall, 1-4 Pac-12) have averaged only 12.3 points. They rank last in the league in scoring offense at 18.1 points a game, thus the late review of the QB position and November competition.

"You do this long enough, everything comes around," Scherer said. "Sometimes you've got to shake things up. Just like I told Jordan, you see it happen in the NFL. It's just the nature of that position. If you have to shake your team up and your offense up, that's the focal point - and fairly or unfairly, that's the position that sometimes gets adjusted first just to make a statement to your team that, hey, we're not going to just keep going down the same road."

If Webb reemerges in this week's practices and retains his starting job, Scherer said he wouldn't have Webb on a figurative short leash for Saturday: "If he's the guy, then he's starter . . . obviously, if a guy goes in there and just steps on his toe over a period of time, then we've got to evaluate it. But I don't want to go into it with that negative perspective; I'm assuming that the one we put out there is going to perform."

If throws once again are missed, would a change occur?

"I couldn't say that right now," Scherer answered. "I'd rather not even try to go there with that thought process and I'm sure coach Embree feels the same way. Now that guy is looking over his shoulder and you don't want him playing tentatively."

Hirschman's perseverance hasn't gone unnoticed by his coaches or his teammates. He has battled back from injuries to both feet - he missed spring drills because of the most recent break - as well as a less-than-glamorous first start last season at Arizona State. The then-and-now difference in Hirschman, said Embree, is "he's really matured. Sometimes, especially at that position, when you have a chance to sit back and watch - whether it's other people making mistakes or doing things correctly - you can learn a lot. You can get a sense of things. For him, he did a good job while he wasn't in of paying attention and learning from other guys' mistakes as well as when other guys did it correctly. He really didn't have that luxury last year."

Embree also said Hirschman is up to speed with the offense: "Yeah, I think you always want a little bit better on some nuances, but for the most part he is . . . he's light years ahead of where he was last year."

Scherer wasn't surprised that Hirschman has persevered and has earned another opportunity to advance. "I think that's the way you've got to be," Scherer said. "If you're going to play at this level, you've got to compete every day, whether you're one or three, getting a lot of reps or no reps. It ebbs and flows. There have been weeks that he's been two, weeks that Connor has been two. That's been going back and forth almost every week. And that's a good news/bad news thing; it shows you guys are competing, but you'd like a guy to be more consistent and take it and run with it."

Other Hirschman pluses are toughness, as well as a calmness that Scherer said teammates respond to: "He doesn't get rattled. That's the thing I was most pleased about, watching over an extended period of time - 30-something plays (against Oregon). He handled the pressure, moved around in the pocket, got the ball out - not always perfect and missed a couple of opportunities. But he was cognizant of getting the ball out of his hands and making quick, efficient decisions and for the most part good decisions."

Hirschman also said he was "light years ahead" of where he was last season when he opened at ASU but played only two series. He called that game - a 48-14 loss - his "first big opportunity" and said he believed he was mentally prepared, "but the speed of game got to me. It's not like high school and you're bigger than everybody . . . you're going to get hit; you've got to pick yourself up and move on."

He obviously did, and at 6-4, 230 pounds he is plenty capable. He and teammates joke that "there's a difference between being a football player and a quarterback," Hirschman said. "I try to come out and be a football player" - which means taking jolting hits rather than sliding or heading for the sideline. "That's never really been my style . . . it's probably stupid of me sometimes, but it's just the way I'm wired and I think other guys get pretty hyped up when they see a quarterback trying to run through people and not run out of bounds."

He has a week of competition to see whether that rugged style and his improved grasp of the offense push him past Webb and into Saturday's starting role.

**BUFF BITS:** When Embree reviewed the Oregon tape and showed the Buffs his idea of effort, his Exhibit A was senior defensive end Will Pericak. Embree said Pericak nearly blocked the extra point that gave the Ducks their 70 points. "He just kept coming; he was very impressive," Embree noted, adding his goal was to "get everyone else playing at that same level." That isn't happening because some of the younger players still aren't familiar with assignments and occasionally don't "play fast" because of it. Other times, players' effort is inconsistent. Pericak, on the other hand, is consistently intense. "Some of it is a mindset," Embree said. "It's who you are as a player - and that's who he is." . . . Freshman cornerback Yuri Wright opened in place of fellow frosh Kenneth Crawley at Oregon, but Embree called both young players "valuable for the future" and can help comprise a "dynamic secondary" in time. He cited Crawley's contributions as a punt returner as well as a developing corner and said Crawley and Wright likely would split playing time for the final four games . . . CU has bottomed out - or close to it - in the NCAA defensive stats. Of 120 Division I teams, the Buffs rank No. 120 in points allowed (46 a game), No. 117 in total defense (505 yards a game), No. 115 in pass defense (301 yards) and No. 100 in rush defense (204 yards) . . . CU's game at Arizona on Nov. 10 will kickoff at 11:30 a.m. MST and be televised on FX.

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## CU must try to regroup after thrashing by Ducks

By Ryan Thorburn Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

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Mark Helfrich didn't do his former team any favors.

The Oregon offensive coordinator, who held the same position under Dan Hawkins before leaving Colorado for greener pastures in Eugene, made sure the Ducks didn't duck their responsibilities in preparing for Buffs' defensive coordinator Greg Brown's young and unresistant unit.

No. 2 Oregon set a program record for points in a conference game during Saturday's 70-14 victory over CU at Autzen Stadium.

"This was our best week of practice all year by far," Helfrich told the Portland Oregonian. "A couple guys asked earlier in the week, 'Hey, is your 'Win the day' deal tested this week based on Colorado struggling a little bit?"

"And maybe that would've been fair of a lot of teams, but our guys, we had an unbelievable Monday, a great Tuesday, a great Wednesday ... and that kind of manifested itself at the beginning of the game. And that's a credit to our guys believing in that deal."

This week the Buffs (1-7, 1-4) need No. 15 Stanford to overlook them.

The Cardinal, which seemed to be going through the motions at times during a 24-17 home win over Washington State, pays a visit this Saturday to Folsom Field (noon, FX).

"I wouldn't say we were flat," quarterback Josh Nunes told the San Jose Mercury News. "We had a good week of practice; it just didn't show up in the game. And that's on me."

Nunes only completed 7 of 15 passes for 136 yards and one touchdown against Washington State. He is eighth in the Pac-12 in passing, averaging 202.5 yards a game in a balanced offense.

Last season Andrew Luck was 26 of 33 passing for 370 yards and three touchdowns during a 48-7 win over the Buffs in Palo Alto, Calif.

Stanford running back Stepfan Taylor is fourth in the conference averaging 113.0 yards per game with six touchdowns.

CU head coach Jon Embree is considering starting Nick Hirschman instead of Jordan Webb at quarterback.

After Webb completed 7 of 11 passes for 31 yards mostly against Oregon's first-team defense, Hirschman entered the game and completed 7 of 16 passes for 64 yards mostly against Ducks backups.

Neither CU quarterback had a touchdown pass or an interception.

The lone bright spot for the Buffs was freshman running back Christian Powell, who had 121 yards rushing and two touchdowns.

"We wanted to come and compete and see where we stood, see how we stacked up against them," Embree said after the game in which CU trailed 56-0 at halftime. "That's what I told the guys a championship game would look

like. Starting Monday, we're going to see who wants to work and how we want to continue toward that goal."

Winning a home game should be the No. 1 short-term goal.

Three of the Buffs' final four games are at Folsom Field, where they are 0-3 this season and 1-7 under Embree.

The Cardinal (6-2, 4-1), despite getting upset 17-13 at Washington on Sept. 27, can still win the Pac-12 North Division with games against Oregon State (Nov. 10) and Oregon (Nov. 17) looming.

Stanford, which may have been experiencing an emotional letdown after back-to-back games against Notre Dame and rival Cal, allowed Mike Leach's struggling Cougars 401 yards passing.

However, the Cardinal held Washington State to minus-16 rushing yards after holding Cal to 3 rushing yards.

Stanford ranks 20th in scoring defense (18.6 ppg) while CU is 124th (46.0 ppg).

"It's just disappointing that we're not getting stops on that side and giving ourselves a chance," Embree said. "It just hasn't been what you expect from a Colorado defense. Trust me, I'm trying to figure that out."

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## CU Buffs coach Jon Embree demanding improvement from his 1-7 team

By John Henderson The Denver Post The Denver Post

Posted:

DenverPost.com

EUGENE, ore. — A bowl game is officially out. Again. Respectability is well out the door. A second win seems more implausible by the week.

With four games left in what is heading toward a historically awful season, Colorado's bedraggled Buffaloes still have something for which to play. Besides another win or two, second-year coach Jon Embree has a checklist of what he wants to see before closing the book on this disastrous chapter of CU football.

"I want to see our young guys start playing like sophomores and some of them are," Embree said after Oregon waxed Colorado 70-14 on Saturday. "We've got to get them to take that next step. I want to see more consistent play out of our quarterback and I want to see a defense stop some people. That's what I want to see."

He didn't list those in any particular order. We will. Let's start with defense. It's now official, folks: CU (1-7, 1-4 Pac-12) has the worst defense in major-college football.

After giving up an average of 56 points in their last five losses, the Buffs' 46.0 points allowed per game ranks 120th (last) in FBS. Counting the four provisional FBS schools, CU is 124th. It's also last in pass defense, with a rating of 177.9.

While three other teams have given up more than CU's average of 505 total yards per game, no other school is last in two defensive categories. Few teams have less speed than the Buffs, but how many miss more assignments?

"You have to play your gaps," Embree said. "I'm sure you're tired of hearing me say that. But when you play spread offenses, if you have the quarterback, be on the quarterback. If you have the running back, be on the running back. If you have the A gap, be in the A gap.

"If you don't do what you're supposed to do with your eyes, if you have the quarterback and don't stay on him because you're looking at the running back, you're going to have some problems."

Quarterback remains a hot topic. CU junior Jordan Webb continues to struggle and after getting benched in the second quarter Saturday, he has dropped to last in the Pac-12 in pass efficiency.

Sophomore Nick Hirschman replaced him against the Ducks and led the Buffs to their two touchdowns, though Oregon had backups playing most of the second half.

After the game, Embree sounded as if he's tiring of Webb, who hasn't been helped by drops, a lack of speed at wide receiver and little imagination in the play calling.

"We had some guys open and for whatever reason we weren't able to hit them or couldn't make the throw," Embree said. "We had some opportunities, so we went with Nick to get some things jump-started."

Finally, Embree must look toward the future. His first two recruiting classes need to start showing more improvement. True freshman Christian Powell showed he may be more than just a converted fullback, gaining 121 yards against the nation's No. 2 team.

"Now he's got to get a couple of his classmates to take that next step too," Embree said.

That means cornerbacks Kenneth Crawley and Yuri Wright; wide receiver Nelson Spruce, who caught only one pass against the Ducks for minus-1 yard; and defensive tackle Samson Kafovalu, who started and had only two assists.

Three of CU's next four games are at home, starting with Stanford (6-2, 4-1) this weekend. Expect to see changes on the field. If not, changes may come off it.

And it won't be Embree.

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## Colorado Buffaloes eye on... Stanford Cardinal

By John Henderson *The Denver Post* *The Denver Post*

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Stanford at Colorado, noon Saturday, FX

For the record: Stanford is 6-2 overall, 4-1 in the Pac-12; Colorado is 1-7 and 1-4.

Streaking: Junior safety Ed Reynolds returned an interception 25 yards for a touchdown in the fourth quarter. It was his fourth interception this season and second returned for a TD. Stanford's defense has four touchdowns this season.

Who's hot: Stanford's run defense. The Cardinal ranks second behind Alabama nationally, allowing only 65.4 yards rushing per game. Stanford held USC to 26 yards rushing, Notre Dame to 150 (46 under its season average) and Washington State to minus-16, thanks to 10 sacks.

Who's not: Quarterback Josh Nunes. Since torching Arizona for 360 yards, in the last three weeks Nunes is only 35-of-71 passing for 485 yards, three interceptions and two touchdowns. He's ninth in the Pac-12 in QB rating, and Stanford's offense is 10th in total yards.

Key stat: 9½. Average tackles for loss by the Stanford defense. That leads the nation behind a tremendous linebacker corps led by Trent Murphy and Shayne Skov, both of whom decided not to play in the NFL early to compete in their senior seasons.

FYI: Willie Shaw, the father of Stanford coach David Shaw, was a Stanford assistant from 1974-76 and 1989-91.

John Henderson, *The Denver Post*