

Football: CU Buffs' Mike MacIntyre hesitates to name a starting quarterback

By Kyle Ringo Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

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Buffzone.com

Colorado coach Mike MacIntyre said he has not eliminated any of his four quarterbacks from the competition to be the starter against Colorado State on Sept. 1.

MacIntyre said that doesn't mean he believes all four are truly ready to handle the job, he's just not ready to name a starter or give CSU coaches any better idea of who they might face in the opener.

"I don't know if any one of the four could be, but we're getting them all a lot of reps," MacIntyre said. "The way we practice the starter would get just as many reps as the backup or the fourth team guy. They get a ton of reps, which helps them be ready to go."

MacIntyre said he will have to narrow the list and cut the reps for some starting Monday.

Junior Connor Wood is the only one of the four with experience playing at this level. Junior college transfer Jordan Gehrke, a sophomore, is the only other quarterback on the roster who has played at the college level.

Sophomore Stevie Joe Dorman and true freshman Sefo Liufau are also competing for the job.

"I would say all three of the other guys have shown a lot of things and we're experimenting with a few things here in the next couple days to see all of them in different situations and different pressures and that type of thing," MacIntyre said when asked if one or more players were pushing Wood for the job.

If MacIntyre seems unconcerned about naming a starter, he has reason to be. He pointed out that last season at San Jose State, he didn't name a starting quarterback until three days before the season opener and that player broke most of the school's passing records, despite having never played a down of football at Football Bowl Subdivision level.

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Football: Darragh O'Neill happy with his role for CU Buffs

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Three years ago, Darragh O'Neill was an All-Colorado basketball player at Fairview High School.

After averaging 23.4 points per game for the Knights, O'Neill had the opportunity to play basketball in college.

Instead, he quit basketball, spent a year as a student at Colorado and then joined the football team.

"It's worked out well," said O'Neill, now a junior for the Buffs.

Although he had never played football before the 2011 season, O'Neill is now considered one of the best punters in the country. O'Neill has been named to several preseason all-Pac-12 lists. He's also one of 25 punters around the nation to be included in the watch list for the Ray Guy Award, presented annually to the best punter in the country.

"I feel good. I'm definitely ready (for the season)," O'Neill said. "We've got a few more days to iron some things out along the front line, but I personally feel ready to go. I feel more confident than I have in my first two seasons here."

O'Neill has been CU's starting punter since he joined the team in 2011. The season opener at Hawaii that season was his first organized football game. That naturally led to some nerves for O'Neill, but he got over them quickly.

"Every time I've got onto the field and gotten back there, your mind goes blank and you don't really think like that," he said. "I think you can't really think too much or else you're going to have some bad thoughts go through your head. Every punt in my career essentially, I've gone back there and you kind of clear your head. You have to go into each punt like that."

He's certainly had plenty of practice to do that. In two years, O'Neill has racked up a whopping 150 punts. By comparison, CU's opponents have 95 punts in that time. A year ago, O'Neill tied a program record with 76 punts. His 74 punts in 2011 are third all-time in program history for a single season.

"Some guys wouldn't get that (many chances) in four years in their career," O'Neill said of his 150 kicks to this point.

O'Neill is hoping he has a lot fewer opportunities this year. If he's on the field less, that means the Buffs are hopefully scoring more points and enjoying more success as a team.

When he does get a chance to kick, O'Neill expects to be better than he's been in the past. His 42.6-yards per punt average in 2011 was CU's best since 2006. He increased his average to 43.5 last year -- ranking 18th nationally.

Those numbers were solid, but he's put in a lot of work on the field and in the weight room to make them better.

"I definitely want to add a few yards to the average from last year," he said. "I don't think it was exactly where I want. It's just really making better contact on every ball. Once you make good contact, I'm not worried about where it's going to go."

An improved O'Neill could be a good weapon for the Buffs. But, O'Neill is also looking forward to his new duties with the team. He will go into the year as CU's holder on field goals and extra points.

"I want to be out there as much as I possibly can, in whatever way that is," he said. "I think holding is going to be fun like that, in terms of it's a high-pressure situation. Lots of people don't really think about the holder; it's a lot of pressure on the kicker. But, at the end of the day you have to get the ball down for the kicker, too."

Between spring ball, summer practices and the early weeks of training camp, O'Neill has had plenty of time to get comfortable as the holder. He's grown familiar with how Ryan Iverson snaps the ball and how kicker Will Oliver likes it placed.

Had he made a different choice three years ago, O'Neill might be a star on a basketball court somewhere. Instead, he's perfectly happy playing a key -- albeit less glamorous -- role for the Buffaloes' football team.

"It's a lot of fun," he said. "There really haven't been too many times that I wish I was doing anything else, so I'm really happy with my decision."

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