

Football: CU Buffs' Mike MacIntyre outlines chief concerns

By Brian Howell Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

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With about a week of practice left before the Buffs open the season Sept. 1 against Colorado State, Colorado coach Mike MacIntyre said that shoring up special teams is one of his main concerns. That's not all the Buffs need to work on, however.

"Second of all, you've just got to keep getting the timing better on offense," he said. "You've got to keep that going. Sometimes when you're practicing all the time you've got to speed up the tempo, change it up, so we're working on that to try to get the timing better and the flow on offense.

"Defensively, we've got to keep working on our tackling and right gap fits, over and over and over."

On the flip side, there is plenty about the Buffs that MacIntyre is happy about as the opener approaches.

"I'm very pleased with the effort. I'm very pleased with what they're doing," he said. "We've gone in pads every day and they've really pushed through it hard. They've really been physical and have a great attitude. I've seen a lot of play-making on both sides of the ball and I feel like we're progressing each day."

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Football: CU Buffs searching for a kickoff returner

By Brian Howell Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

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CU has also struggled with kickoff returns. The Buffs ranked 71st nationally in 2012 (21.0 yards per return) and averaged just 18.6 yards in 2011.

Head coach Mike MacIntyre said on Thursday that he and his staff are still trying to determine who will return kickoffs this season.

"That kind of goes by committee sometimes depending on what happens with the flow of the game and that type of thing," he said.

A year ago, the Buffs turned to three true freshmen -- Marques Mosley, Donta Abron and Jeffrey Hall to return kicks. Mosley had the most success, averaging 26.1 yards on 21 returns, including a 100-yard touchdown in the season finale against Utah.

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Football: Nelson Spruce is CU Buffs' new return man

By Brian Howell Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

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During high school, Nelson Spruce proved to be an exceptional play-maker as a receiver and as a punt returner.

Colorado is hoping he can repeat that success as a Buffalo.

CU's leading receiver in 2012, Spruce has been tabbed as the Buffs' main punt returner going into the season.

"I feel like it's a big job," said Spruce, a 6-foot-2, 200-pound sophomore. "You need someone safe back there."

At Westlake (Calif.) High School, Spruce returned 23 punts for 462 yards (20.1 yards per return) and two touchdowns.

"I punt returned all through high school," he said. "I feel pretty comfortable. There's a lot of plays to be made on special teams, especially as a returner. I'm excited for the opportunity."

CU has struggled in the return game in recent seasons. The Buffs ranked 11th in the Pac-12 and 96th nationally with just 5.6 yards per punt return last year. That was actually a big jump from the 4.3 yards per return they averaged in 2011. That season, CU had just 56 yards on punt returns the entire season.

Spruce led the team with 44 catches for 446 yards a year ago. He also had one punt return for minus-2 yards. Kenneth Crawley handled most of the punt return duties in 2012.

For now, that job belongs to Spruce.

"First thing first is to make sure you get the ball into the offense's hands," he said. "I feel like I can do that well. After that, it's up to the whole scheme of the thing to make a play. But, I'm glad to be back there."

"Starting out, I want to definitely make sure I'm the catch-the-ball type, but as the season progresses and I feel more comfortable back there, we'll see what happens. Obviously you always want to be able to break one off."

The Buffs' longest punt return in the last two years was a 24-yarder by Crawley last season. CU has not had a punt return for touchdown since Oct. 22, 2005, when Stephone Robinson took one back 81 yards for a score against Kansas.

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Football: Shotgun becoming a snap for CU Buffs' centers

By Brian Howell Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

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Heading into his third year as a starting center, Colorado senior Gus Handler is comfortable on the field.

It took him a little while to find his comfort zone this offseason, though.

New CU head coach Mike MacIntyre has introduced the pistol offense to the Buffs. It's an offense that should be more up-tempo and, ideally, produce more yards and more points.

It's also an offense that presents a new challenge for Handler and his fellow centers. CU quarterbacks will line up in a shotgun formation more than they have in the past.

"The offense is a little different, where we're a lot in the shotgun and we have to move and snap at the same time, so it's a little tougher than usual," said Handler, who has started 15 games at center the past two seasons.

CU coaches came out of spring practices a little concerned with how the centers were handling the new approach. Shotgun snaps were not consistently crisp at that time.

However, with training camp wrapping up on Saturday and the season opener coming up on Sept. 1, CU appears to have fixed any issues it had in that area.

"I don't really consider it a problem right now at all," offensive line coach Gary Bernardi said.

"We have a CQ (center-to-quarterback) exchange every day and they've gotten better at that. We try to make the centers strain pretty good in that period to focus and concentrate on the snaps."

Handler and his fellow linemen got the message at the end of spring that they needed to work on their snaps. In the pistol offense, a center has to be prepared for three different types of snaps -- a basic snap when the quarterback places his hands under center, a medium-range shotgun snap and a longer-range shotgun snap.

"In the spring it was an adjustment because we had to get more lateral and more up field," Handler said. "It was just getting used to the steps and snapping at the same time. That was the biggest difference.

"I feel like I really went home in May and in the summer and worked on that (shotgun) snap."

Handler, who was a tackle in high school, said the basic snap is the easiest for him.

"I'd much rather just have the guy under me, snap and go," he said. "But, I've got the adjustment down."

He's not the only one. While Handler is likely to be the starter, the Buffs have used several different players at center throughout camp and all are getting the hang of it. Junior Kaiwi Crabb,

sophomore Brad Cotner, redshirt freshmen Alex Kelley and Vincent Arvia and true freshman Jonathan Huckins have all snapped the ball this month.

In addition, junior Daniel Munyer started six games at center last season, including the last four after Handler was injured. He also started the first three games at center in 2011 before an injury. Munyer has not participated in live drills during camp as he recovers from a leg injury.

So, in all, the Buffs have given seven of their 16 linemen work at center. Bernardi said the Buffs can't have too many guys knowing how to snap.

"I'm not so concerned about the continuity," he said. "I'm concerned about all those guys being able to react and play the position.

"I think it's vital (to have multiple centers). I don't want to ever, ever be in a situation where we don't have a guy who can snap in the game."

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Paul Richardson playing this CU Buffs season in memory of grandmother

By Benjamin Hochman *The Denver Post* *The Denver Post*

Posted:

DenverPost.com

BOULDER — As this pack of Buffaloes roamed off the practice field, the standout didn't stand out. I was worried that CU's sneaky receiver had somehow slipped past me, and that I drove all the way here to be treated like some Cal cornerback.

I then realized why it took me a minute Thursday to find No. 6 among the big boys. He's a sinewy twig who looks more Alpha Chi Omega than all-conference.

Soon after meeting Paul Richardson, I, all 5-foot-7, 190 pounds, asked him (6-1, 170!) why he wears No. 6.

"Touchdowns are worth six points, man," Richardson said. "This is the first number I ever wore playing Pop Warner, so I went back to my roots. I always tell the coaches — every time I catch the ball, I want to score. And that's what the No. 6 symbolizes."

(Quick aside, my favorites 6's: Blossom's best friend, Stan Musial and the lesser-known prequel to "Se7en.")

Let's face it, it's hard to get excited about CU football right now. They're used to mountains in Boulder, and they're sure climbing them in the Pac-12. But, it's easy to get excited about No. 6.

One might recall, back in 2011, when he set a school record against Cal with 284 receiving yards, while tying a school record with 11 receptions. He only played nine games that season, but the then-sophomore finished third on the team in both receptions (39) and yards (555), while finishing second in touchdown catches (five).

But, he sustained a knee injury in the spring and missed all of 2012. Now, he'll finally play his junior year.

"My confidence level is out of this world," Richardson told me. "I don't think about my knee. It doesn't bother me. ... I love seeing the ball in the air. It's just a rush — you want to outdo that person that's guarding you. All the time. You want to have an unbreakable will to get to the ball first and make a play."

When coach Mike MacIntyre and his staff took over, there wasn't much in the cupboard (there was a Lowell Williams but no Alfred Williams, Gunnar Graham but no Daniel Graham). But, the new coaches knew there was something in Richardson, and MacIntyre caught his receiver's ear by calling him a "game-changer."

"That's a lot to live up to," Richardson said. "So me knowing my role, learning from the coaches and being able to execute those things is what makes me who I am."

Of course, there are unknowns. Will Richardson be fully back to being Richardson? Will he fit well

in Mac's offense? And can Twiggy stay healthy?

But right now, when the team is 0-0, it's fun to get excited about what might happen. It's fun to daydream, like Richardson would during his lost season.

After practice, Richardson told me what he does before practice. That's when he walks onto the practice field, looks to the sky, wanders around and talks to his grandma.

It was right at kickoff during the Super Bowl when he got the call.

"I just got up and left. I couldn't even talk, for a long time," he said.

Arthemise Hunt, Richardson explained, "was the rock of our family. She had an uplifting smile. She taught until she was 80-something years old. She just loved people. Every summer, I would go visit her for three months; she lived in Oakland. She was everything to everybody. Her door was open for everybody. She had numerous families live in-and-out of her house, because that's just the type of person she was. That was a big loss for the family. But we have to overcome it and glorify her in everything we do."

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