



By: CUBuffs.com

Punter Darragh O'Neill expects a big season on special teams.

## Brooks: Special Teams Benefit From New Approach

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By: B.G. Brooks, Contributing Editor

*(Eighth in a series of position-by-position previews of the 2013 Buffs to be posted on CUBuffs.com during preseason camp. Today: Special teams)*

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**BOULDER** – For far too long during football practices at Colorado and elsewhere, punters and placekickers were innocent by-standers – innocent from the standpoint that their long periods of inactivity had received indirect approval from the head coach.

In short, they worked some then mostly watched. It was just the way it was. The emphasis at CU is now on *was*. Entering a season that the university hopes leads to dramatic change in the football program, change already is evident in Mike MacIntyre's approach to special teams.

After he was named CU's head coach last December, MacIntyre's final hire nearly two months later was Toby Neinas as special teams coordinator. That's how Neinas' job description reads – not special teams/tight ends coach, special teams/safeties coach, etc.

It's a rarity for CU. It's also very, very early, but it's working.

"It's been hugely beneficial to us . . . you get way more efficient work done," junior placekicker Will Oliver said. "There's less of the typical 'specialists hanging around doing nothing and watching the team practice.'"

"There's more of a direction and more structure for us now," junior punter Darragh O'Neill added. Last camp there were no punter- or kicker-specific drills, said O'Neill, "because we really didn't know what to do. Now we do those for half an hour or 45 minutes every single day."

The other half of the special teams work – coverage and return – receives equal attention, with Neinas receiving help from director of quality control Omar Young. And MacIntyre often assists in coverage/return work and special teams as a whole. He has a keen interest in it, and Neinas says his hiring offers proof of that.

"I think it's a credit to the leadership of the program that he's willing to invest one of his nine guys (full-time assistants) to do that," Neinas said.

MacIntyre's approach with Neinas when Neinas was interviewing was that he didn't want the special teamers to feel neglected. "So we're trying to train them as football players as well as specialists," Neinas said. Thus, football fundamentals are stressed as well as those specific to special teams.

Said Neinas: "I hope it's helped; we'll soon see."

For O'Neill, the benefits were immediate. Neinas has reduced O'Neill's number of punts per practice. "In the last couple of years in fall camp I would kick until my leg was almost falling off in some practices," O'Neill said.

"It's good to have a coach there to say, 'Hey, you're only kicking 20 balls today. I'm not allowing you to kick another one.' He's making sure each rep is good; you definitely take each rep more seriously because you know you're not going to get as many that day. It's helped out a lot in terms of me being able to keep the leg fresh."

When the 2012 season started he was OK, but O'Neill believed that fall camp wasn't as productive because of early fatigue. This August, he has been to work on details to fine tune his punting. "In this fall camp, instead of kicking away as much as possible, I've been able to work on some small things each day, which helps a lot," he said.

Last camp there were no punter- or kicker-specific drills, said O'Neill, "because we really didn't know what to do. Now we do those for half an hour or 45 minutes every single day."

During the Buffs' five two-a-day practices – the final two-a-day was Wednesday – the second practice was almost exclusively devoted to special teams work. "We're literally doing something the entire 21/2-3 hours we're out here," Oliver said. "It's gotten us a lot more work, and the new kids who haven't had much (special teams) coaching are getting it too."

Both O'Neill and Oliver had solid 2012 seasons but the objective always is improvement. O'Neill's net punting average last season was 39.2 yards, with 60.5 percent of his kicks not returned. Oliver was good on all 28 of his extra point attempts as well as six of his eight field goal tries.

Oliver's goal is to be "guaranteed points -- that's the best thing I can do for the team," he said. "When we get in a certain range – and I'm trying to increase that as much as I can – I want them to be able to know that we're not out there on a crap shoot, saying a prayer that it's going to end up between the 'Big H,' as they say.

"I want to put consistency in everything and focus on providing some stability. Going into the season there are a lot of unknowns and ideally my personal goal is to not be one of those unknowns."

Oliver said the range of his field goals has increased, and "anywhere inside 55 (yards) I'm feeling comfortable." His long kick last season was 37 yards, and he was four-of-five from 30 to 39 yards. But Neinas isn't ready to promise that when the Buffs cross mid-field, they begin thinking of Oliver.

"We are going back further, but I don't know how many 55-yard field goal attempts you'll see us take a shot at," he said. "We may, if conditions are right or situation dictates. But in that situation you sometimes have the opportunity to pin (with a punt) and put your defense on the field and hope they can get the ball back . . . point, serve so to speak. But if needed, it's always nice to have that. I certainly think we're in the high 40s (in range). I can see that."

With Oliver, O'Neill, who was included on the Ray Guy preseason watch list for punters; kicker Justin Castor and snapper Ryan Iverson on the roster, Neinas conceded he inherited a talented group and called himself "fortunate . . . Castor and Iverson embrace their roles and do it at a high level of efficiency, which is what you look for in the operation of a kick or a punt."

Iverson snaps on punts and placement attempts. In addition to fielding his laser-like punt snaps, O'Neill is Oliver's holder – catching and pinning Iverson's short snaps. "I honestly think he's one of the best in the country; I have a lot of trust in him," O'Neill said. "He'll definitely get a shot in the NFL next year. With that speed and strength (on his snaps) it's pretty rare. He gets the ball back so quick every time. It gives you peace of mind having him up there."

Neinas' critique of Iverson didn't drift from that: "He's really good and extremely consistent. His accuracy is well above average in my opinion. And I really like him in coverage; that's a bonus. You don't have to have that. You want him to snap and do a good job. But the fact that he's not a wash in coverage is a big, big plus."

The refinement that O'Neill has been working on has included the angle of his drop and how his toe points in coming through the ball on his punts. Taped practice work is reviewed daily for an hour, "And that's pretty huge right there," he said. "You have your coach's input and guys critiquing you peer-to-peer."

No major overhaul from Neinas was necessary for O'Neill, who might be among the best overall athletes in the country at his position. In the off-season, O'Neill worked on strength and flexibility and punted three or four times a week.

Oliver said the main tweak in his style has been adjusting how far his right leg swung across his body when he kicks: "I used to come really far across my body, like a soccer style, and swing completely across." The result was less of his momentum sending the ball straight toward the goalposts, resulting in greater possibility for a drift in either direction.

Neinas, said Oliver, "pretty much pushed me out of my comfort zone, but now I'm back into my comfort zone – a new comfort zone – going much more forward to my target. It's added a lot of power to my field goals, a lot of height. It's really improved my kickoffs, too."

Spending a spring with Neinas was critical, Oliver said, because "you've got to buy in obviously before you make the changes and it takes time. I'm glad we had spring ball and the summer to get it going. Otherwise, with too little time before the season you kind of would run into, 'Uh oh, I need a ball to go between the uprights and I don't care how it goes.'"

A majority of FBS teams try to punt directionally and Neinas said the Buffs will be among that number: "It's very much the norm because specialists now are so gifted it's not a big deal for them to do it. But you have to avoid tendencies. There will be times when we directional punt in a way that people might scratch their heads about. If (opponents) are loading up on one side of the field on us, we have to do something to address that. Occasionally we'll punt away from returns, but always trying to push our coverage to the ball."

Neinas hasn't settled on a kickoff specialist and will eventually choose between Oliver and Castor before the Buffs open on Sept. 1 vs. Colorado State. Also to be settled on before then are a backup punter – Oliver and almost everyone else is in the mix – and a kickoff return specialist.

Sophomore receiver Nelson Spruce is the choice to open as punt returner. A decision on KOR duties likely will be made "by committee" during the game, according to MacIntyre. Last season's top returners – Kenneth Crawley on punts, Marques Mosley on kickoffs – are back, and others are in the running.

Settling on coverage/protection personnel and tweaking schemes also remains a work in progress, mainly because of the game speed of those units. Said Neinas: "It's hard to open the season as a KOR team because it's difficult to simulate the speed at which those 10 dudes are running for their lives when they're coming down on you. That's hard to simulate in practice."

## THE INSIDE LOOK AT . . .

### Special teams

**Coach:** Toby Neinas, first season on CU staff

**Returning starters:** P Darragh O'Neill, Jr.; PK Will Oliver, Jr.; LS/SS Ryan Iverson, Sr.; PR Kenneth Crawley, So.; KOR Marques Mosley, So.

**Returnees:** PK Justin Castor, Sr.; LS/SS Keegan Lamar, So.; KOR Donta Abron, So.; KOR Jeffery Hall, So.

**Newcomers:** LS/SS Blake Allen, Fr.; LS/SS Trevor Carter, Fr-RS; PK Chris Graham, Fr.; PK/P Diego Gonzalez, Fr.

**Key losses:** None

**Stat line:** Oliver led the team in scoring last season with 46 points (6-of-8 FGs, 28-of-28 PATs); O'Neill averaged 39.3 yards a punt.

**Bottom line:** Returning veterans in punting, placekicking and snapping, the Buffs should be strong in the kicking game. That said, the general hope will be that no player among that threesome is overworked this season – with the exception of Oliver kicking PATs and Iverson snapping for them. With the August camp emphasis MacIntyre has put on special teams, Neinas expects improvement from punt/kick coverage and both return teams. The Buffs were 11th in the Pac-12 (96th nationally) last season in punt returns, eighth (71st nationally) in kickoff returns. That leaves plenty of room for improvement in both categories.

*Next: Quarterbacks*

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By: CUBuffs.com

For someone who only started playing football as a junior in high school, defensive end Chidera Uzo-Diribe has come a long way.



## Buffs' Uzo-Diribe Has Come Far, Wants To Go Further

Release: August 25, 2013

By: Lauren Lanier, Student SID

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BOULDER – For someone who only started playing football as a junior in high school, defensive end Chidera Uzo-Diribe has come a long way. And he believes his journey is far from finished.

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One of six team-selected captains for Colorado's 2013 season, Uzo-Diribe enters his senior year as the Buffs' starting right defensive end. The 6-3, 250-pound Corona, Calif., native has 72 career tackles, 63 of those unassisted. During his CU career he has played in 37 games, starting 17 of those.

His football journey is testimony to the dedicated, persistent and energetic leader that his teammates look up to, on and off the football field.

"I was a basketball player at first, and I just didn't grow in high school," Uzo-Diribe said. "I was six-foot-two or six-foot-three and so my junior year, the health coach who was also the football coach, suggested that I start playing football. That's where all of this started."

With his basketball career behind him, Uzo-Diribe dedicated himself to his new sport. By the end of his high-school career, he had earned All-Region honors from PrepStar and was ranked the No. 37 weak side defensive end by Rivals.com. Earning second-team All-Big VIII league recognition, he was named his team's most valuable linebacker for his senior season. His hard work during two seasons paid off, with college offers from UCLA, San Jose State, Nebraska, Oregon State, Arizona and Colorado.

For Uzo-Diribe, making the decision to come to Colorado wasn't difficult. "I came out to Colorado for a full-contact camp because it was my first offer," Uzo-Diribe said. "I really liked the coaching staff that was here at the time and built a good relationship with them. It came down to me really liking everything about CU."

During his four years at Colorado, Uzo-Diribe has played under three different coaching staffs. Despite constant change, Uzo-Diribe believes that positives can come out of every situation. His perseverance and willingness to accept change are two of the qualities that his teammates wholeheartedly admire.

"Perseverance is something that I really believe in," Uzo-Diribe said. "My parents have always stressed that you have to persevere. Through talks with them, I've learned that you just have to keep pushing and that there's always going to be a good side to things at the end of the day. I've always believed in pushing through during hard times. It's something that you have to do, whether it's on the field or in life."

His teammates aren't the only ones that have noticed Uzo-Diribe's willingness to lead the team. When first-year CU head coach Mike MacIntyre and staff arrived in early 2013, it didn't take long for them to

notice the dynamic defensive end.

"He's very energetic and he's a self-starter," MacIntyre said. "It's been great working with him. He's extremely easy to communicate with and is a very well-respected leader for this football team."

Uzo-Diribe's position coach, former NFL defensive end standout Jim Jeffcoat, says he was immediately impressed with Uzo-Diribe's work ethic during spring workouts.

"He's very conscientious and works very hard at his trade," Jeffcoat said. "He really understands the things that we, as coaches, are trying to accomplish, which is always good."

As witnessed by his teammates and coaching staff, Uzo-Diribe's passion for the game of football is undeniable. Graduating in May, 2013 with a degree in communications, Uzo-Diribe hopes to pursue his love of football and his dream to play the game at the next level. "If everything works out and that's an option, I would really like to play in the NFL," Uzo-Diribe said.

His dream certainly isn't out of reach. Entering the 2013 season, he is a candidate for All-American and All-Pac 12 honors, while also being named one of 76 players on the official preseason watch list for the Bednarik Award.

For now, however, Uzo-Diribe is focused on finishing his career at Colorado as a leader and making the Buffs proud as a team captain. "It means a lot that my teammates voted me as a captain," he said. "It's great to know that they've seen the hard work I've put in. It's an honor to know that they believe that I can help lead this team. That's what I'm focused on for now, helping my team anyway I can."

Colorado Buffaloes Football

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## Several young players could see playing time this season

By Brian Howell Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

During the past two seasons, the Colorado football team has devoted a bunch of minutes on game days to true freshmen.

A year ago, CU was ninth nationally in playing 13 different true freshmen. The Buffs led the country with 57 starts by true freshmen. That was a remarkable 21.6 percent of the team's starts going to true freshmen.

This year, the Buffs may not need to use so many starts by their youngsters, but several true freshmen could wind up playing significant roles.

Here's a look at the true freshmen expected to make the biggest impact this fall:

**Michael Adkins, running back:** Although the Buffs are set at running back, with Christian Powell leading the way and Tony Jones a top backup, Adkins was impressive at times during training camp. He's got the talent to help the Buffs in the backfield, so it wouldn't be a surprise if he got a few carries or an opportunity to return kicks.

**Chidobe Awuzie, corner back:** Regardless of classification, Awuzie had as good of a training camp as anyone on the roster. By the end of camp, he was probably one of the Buffs' top three cornerbacks. That's a good place to be for someone who wants to play, because in the pass-happy era of college football, multiple cornerbacks are essential. Awuzie could be in line for a great debut season if he continues to perform as he did in camp.

**Jimmie Gilbert, defensive end:** The 6-foot-5, 230-pounder from College Station, Texas, was impressive at times during camp. Defensive line coach Jim Jeffcoat -- a former college All-American and two-time Super Bowl champion defensive end -- said Gilbert reminded him of himself at that age. The Buffs need skilled pass rushers, so Gilbert could find himself on the field a lot in passing situations.

**Addison Gillam, linebacker:** After spending the majority of training camp with the first-team defense at middle linebacker, Gillam is probably the most likely player on this list to be in the starting lineup Sunday against Colorado State. He would become just the second inside linebacker ever at CU to start the opener as a true freshman (Jordon Dizon was the other). CU coaches love Gillam's size (6-foot-3, 225 pounds) and knack for finding the football.

**Phillip Lindsay, running back:** He's in the same boat as Adkins. Both are in a crowded backfield, which could prevent them from seeing the field much. But, like Adkins, Lindsay stood out in training camp and made a good impression on his coaches. Less than a year removed from a bad knee injury, Lindsay displayed some explosiveness with the ball in his hands.

**Sefo Liufau, quarterback:** Head coach Mike MacIntyre has been tight-lipped about who will start at quarterback this season. Junior Connor Wood may wind up with the job and if Wood plays well and stays healthy, it's very possible that Liufau redshirts and looks to the future. His

athleticism was tough to ignore during camp, however, so it's believed that if anyone is pushing Wood for the starting job, it's Liufau. CU has never had a true freshman start the opener at quarterback, so it would be historic if he got the nod. Even if he doesn't start, Liufau could be next in line if Wood falters or gets hurt.

**Derek McCartney, defensive end:** Although he came from a smaller school (Faith Christian in Arvada), the grandson of legendary Buffs coach Bill McCartney has displayed big-time talent. At 6-3, 230, McCartney more than held his own against his fellow linemates during camp. He's got the tools to make an impact, and that could come this year.

**Markeis Reed, defensive end:** Between Gillam, McCartney and Reed, the Buffs could be quite young in their defensive line rotation. Reed enrolled during the spring and played at linebacker until about a week ago, when he was moved to end. At 6-4, 230, his skills could be a major asset to the Buffs this season.

**Devin Ross, wide receiver:** The Buffs lacked speed and play-making ability at receiver last year. That doesn't appear to be an issue this fall, with upperclassmen Paul Richardson and D.D. Goodson expected to have key roles. Ross gives CU another speedy play-maker at the position. Just 5-10, 180 pounds, Ross routinely found ways to get open and catch the ball during camp, and he's fun to watch when he gets his hands on the ball.

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## Economics of football: Boulder businesses cheer for winning CU season

By Brittany Anas Camera Staff Writer Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

Framed newspaper front pages reflecting the Buffs' glory days and winning seasons hang above the cash register at the T-Galaxy shirt shop on University Hill.

It sure is symbolic.

When the University of Colorado's football team is winning, those cash registers are chirping. When the Buffs are doing poorly -- during last year's 1-11 season, for example -- there's hardly anybody shopping for fan apparel.

"We know people will spend money if the team wins," said Mike Stallman, general manager and part owner of T-Galaxy, 1121 13th St. "Sales are almost directly connected to wins."

So just what is the economic benefit of a good football team?

It depends who you ask in this college town -- but many agree that a winning team can give a boost to local shops and restaurants, draw tourism to Boulder and, one national study suggests, lead to an increase in donations and college applications. An economics professor who has studied the impact of sports teams on local economies, though, says college football doesn't have much of an impact on a metropolitan area.

But for shops like T-Galaxy, much depends on winning records.

For example, when the Buffs are faring well, Stallman said he hires about 30 part-time student employees. This year, though, he's got five on his payroll. Sales last year were 25 percent of what they are in an average year .

When it comes to inventory, Stallman needs to be nimble. Should the Buffs be 4-0 by the end of September, for example, Stallman will need to up his T-shirt orders -- and hope licensed vendors can deliver before the season is over.

### Time of transition

The Buffs enter the 2013 football season with a change in regime.

Head football Coach Mike MacIntyre replaces Jon Embree, who was fired in November after the notorious 1-11 season and going 4-21 in his two years on the job.

CU forced Athletic Director Mike Bohn to resign in late May, replacing him with former Texas Rangers executive Rick George, who, with a \$700,000-a-year base contract, is the highest paid administrator ever at the university.

"The hiring of an athletic director is the most important economic decision in our city," said Mark Heinritz, co-owner of The Sink on University Hill. He and his brother also recently co-founded

## West Flanders Brewing Company on Pearl Street.

When the Buffs are winning, fans are enthusiastic and spend money celebrating after home games.

"With a losing team, they leave the game early to go home -- if they even show up at all," Heinritz said.

The last time the Buffs had a winning season was 2005 under Gary Barnett's helm -- the team went 7-6 that year. In 2004, the Buffs were 8-5. CU's football team won the Big 12 Championship in 2001, beating Texas 39-37.

Heinritz suspects that just one winning season is all it will take to re-energize the fan base.

George, who is settling in as CU's new athletic director, said he knows some fans are frustrated with the football team. In his new role, he expects the team to improve, the game-day experience to get better -- and he'll be visiting with fans tailgating before games, as well as inviting donors, alumni and former athletes to join him in his box at every game. He also vows to find ways for the Athletic Department to partner with local businesses.

"I think we're going to have a very good season," George said during an interview last week. "Will it meet everyone's expectations? Probably not. But we're going to get better every year."

George's contract holds several bonus potentials, including \$50,000 each year if the average attendance at Folsom Field for regular-season football games is at least 50,000. Last year, average attendance was 45,373.

Eventually, George said, he's hoping to regularly sell out Folsom, a stadium that seats 53,613.

## Roaming Buffs

Football also is good for tourism, said Mary Ann Mahoney, executive director of the Boulder Convention and Visitors Bureau.

The average daily expenditure of an overnight guest in Boulder is \$288 -- a figure includes fans who have traveled here for football games, according to Mahoney. That includes money spent on lodging, dining out and at retail shops.

CU's entry into the Pac-12 also helps tourism, Mahoney noted, as alumni who are now living in Pac-12 territory, such as California, are coming out to watch games. And fans from the Pac-12 travel well, coming to Boulder from California, Oregon, Washington and Arizona to cheer their teams.

When the Buffs are playing well, not only do the season ticket holders show up, but so do the more casual fans from around the state, Mahoney said.

"When they are winning, people want to meet up with their friends and go out for a meal afterwards and re-live what a great day it was -- instead of packing up their tailgate and going

home," she said.

There are no specific studies that measure the economic impact that CU's Athletic Department has on the local economy.

"Fundamentally, though, when you're supporting the Buffs and the University of Colorado, you're supporting the Boulder economy," said John Tayer, president and CEO of the Boulder Chamber. "It gives us the opportunity to showcase what a wonderful community we have here."

Much more generally, though, CU's four-campus system pumped roughly \$5.3 billion into the state's economy in 2011, according to an analysis released by the school last year.

William Beyers, a professor emeritus of geography at the University of Washington who still teaches, has conducted economic impact studies on everything from high-tech industries to the arts and sports teams.

A football team is hardly a "make or break" for economies of metropolitan cities, he said. However, more rural areas with football teams tend to be more dependent on the tourism dollars generated by those teams.

Football, he said, has obvious impacts on businesses that depend on fans' spending -- industries that include hotels, restaurants and bars, entertainment and travel.

"The bottom line is even though the economic impact of football may be small, it's greater than zero and it's part of a diverse portfolio," Beyers said.

### **Measuring financial impact of wins**

A 2012 study from the University of California at Berkeley found that colleges with winning football teams reaped several benefits that ranged from a jump in donations to an increase in the number of applications from in-state students.

The study, titled "The Benefits of College Athletic Success" by Michael Anderson, revealed that a school that improves its season wins by five games could expect alumni athletic donations to increase by \$682,000 and applications to increase by 5 percent. In-state enrollment could increase by 3 percent, the acceptance rate might drop by 1.5 percentage points and the incoming 25th percentile SAT scores increase by 9 points.

A separate 2009 report found that a \$1 million increase in football team expenditures is associated with 6.7 percent increase in football winning percentage -- or 0.8 games.

Ryan Chreist, CU's assistant vice chancellor for alumni relations, said there's no doubt that graduates want to cheer on their school, especially when their teams are winning. But he points out that there are 250,000-plus alumni -- and not all of them are paying attention to athletics.

While the CU Alumni Association connects with both in-state and out-of-state fans with pre-game events, there are other popular, non-sports events organized throughout the country where graduates live. Chreist points to a networking event for alumni in cities where the Broadway

musical "The Book of Mormon" is touring. Matt Stone and Trey Parker, the creators of the Tony Award-winning production, met at CU when they were film students in the early 1990s.

CU Admissions Director Kevin MacLennan said nationally televised games have the potential to showcase the Boulder campus to possible out-of-state students. But, he said, there's a number of factors that go into students' decisions about where they'll attend college.

"The question that we get a lot in admissions is not so much about the records of the team as it is about whether there's a lot of school spirit and are the students and the community members behind the Athletic Department. We're able to say 'Yes' to that.'

"Students want to belong to an enthusiastic student body."

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## Football: CU Buffs' Connor Wood believes he will start

By Kyle Ringo Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

Mike MacIntyre still hadn't named a starting quarterback for the Colorado Buffaloes within the team or publicly going into the weekend, but junior Connor Wood says he expects it to be him when the season opens in a week against Colorado State.

That is the biggest difference between Wood in 2012 and Wood now. He suddenly has confidence.

It remains to be seen whether the confidence he has gained in practices and meetings with his new coaches in a new offensive system translates to poise in games, but if Wood was asked at any point a year ago if he expected to be the starter, he wouldn't have answered "I think so" as he did Friday.

"It's a new year," Wood said noting he wasn't trying to get out in front of his coaches and was simply answering a reporter's question. "It's a new time for me and for this football team, but I can speak for me and it's a new era for Connor Wood. It's about growing from the past and learning from the past. I've been preparing all this offseason for this moment. I'm excited for it."

MacIntyre has been proud to point out throughout the offseason that he didn't name a starting quarterback last season at San Jose State until three days before the first game. It appears he will follow that time table, or close to it, again this year even though Wood seemed to get the more reps with the first team offense than any quarterback during the portions of fall camp that were open to the media and public.

Wood played in seven games last season but much of that action came at the end of blowout losses. He threw four interceptions and one touchdown pass and rarely looked comfortable or confident with his reads or the speed of the game.

"I think you're going to see a more confident person out there, a person who is more in command and has more ownership of the offense," Wood said. "I think the way coach Lindgren has taught us the offense and grown us through that process, I feel confident in all the calls we have to make and I'm thinking on the same level as him. I can almost finish his sentences when we're out there on the practice field."