



COLORADO BUFFALOES

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CU's Kirk Poston rushes toward's the Colorado State backfield during last season's 22-17 loss to the Rams.

Photo Courtesy: Joel Broida



Brooks: After 2012, Buffs Know Value Of Solid Start

Release: 08/04/2013 Courtesy: B.G. Brooks, Contributing Editor

BOULDER – The importance of an opener might pale in comparison with a football game played in late November or early January, but at Colorado over the last several seasons looking past early September has produced major eyestrain and very little comfort for Buffs fans.

When a team is starting fresh with a new coach and desperately trying to put away putrid memories – a 1-11 season produces a bunch – the weight of an opening game increases by the ton.

First-year coach Mike MacIntyre is trying his best to keep the weight of CU's Sept. 1 opener with Colorado State properly proportioned. The CU-CSU rivalry is new to him, but he knows a little something about openers, the value of fast starts and early momentum.

"I think every team in America's first game is important," he said. "Everybody is excited. It's like Christmas morning – you open that first present and you're excited. Now, it's always great to get the first present, no doubt. But that tenth present might be the best present of them all. So you have to keep everything in perspective."

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That said, MacIntyre narrowed his focus and added this: "But our game (with CSU) being a big rival game, being an in-state game, being a neutral site game . . . that all adds a little more pomp and circumstance and excitement to it. Every game is important, but given all that, I guess you could say it adds a little more importance."

Ah, yes indeed.

It would be difficult, maybe erroneous, last season's 22-17 opening loss to the Rams started a CU death spiral that lasted until Thanksgiving and produced a handful of hideous entries in the school's record books. But there's nothing blatantly wrong in saying that come-from-ahead loss to the Rams didn't help. In the weeks thereafter – until the winless Buffs visited Washington State – recovery never seemed plausible or possible.

Returning CU players remember last September's loss to CSU and the tone it set for 2012. Not all of them agree that the season's first 'L' sent the Buffs to the cliff's brink, but most of them realize the importance of turning the page early in the Mac II Era. On several levels, this is a very large opener.

"I think it's huge," said junior tight end Kyle Slavin. "Last year I think the season could have been completely different if we'd ended up getting that CSU game. Morale, momentum . . . it just speaks volumes if you can get that one under your belt. You develop confidence in the team and can start building each other up instead of having to kind of force it, I guess."

Senior linebacker Derrick Webb, one of the team's six captains, called winning the opener "extremely important . . . we've got to get this season kicked off right, starting with CSU. We have to be prepared for that game and it starts in camp."

But Webb, CU's leading tackler in 2012, wasn't sure that the CSU loss rendered the season irreparable. "People would say it shook the team . . . I don't know," he said. "I can't tell what could have or should have happened. I just know between winning and losing, we'd rather win – especially that first game and get that momentum. We don't need people doubting themselves, that's why that first game is extremely important – to get the ball rolling."

Memories of the CSU loss lingered a little longer for D.D. Goodson than many of his teammates. His bobbled punt just before halftime led to a Rams score and helped blunt the Buffs' momentum. Second-guessers, with justification, pounced on the coaches' decision to even have a returner back to field the punt. CU held a 14-3 lead but CSU took advantage of the fumble recovery at the 20-yard line and scored with 26 seconds left in the half.

"It stuck with me a little bit . . . but as a football player you make plays and you make mistakes," Goodson said. "My job was to get over that hump and prepare for next week's game."

He has succeeded in moving on and into a new position – slot receiver – that appears to suit him more than tailback, which he played in his first two CU seasons. Reflecting now on the CU-CSU rivalry, he called it "a really big game . . . I haven't really played much in both of them, but I can see the atmosphere, the fans and even with our last staff I could see the passion they have for this game. It's just an incredible event. If we prepare well, we'll be happy with the outcome."

Like Webb, he wasn't prepared to say that the Buffs were doomed after losing to the Rams. "There was definitely more to the season," Goodson said. "The way we started the season kind of took us on a different track, but there was definitely more to the season than just that game. We could definitely have recovered, but we took that loss the wrong way. We suffered."

Mightily, too. Returning to Folsom Field the following weekend, the Buffs lost to Sacramento State (30-28). They next trekked to Fresno State and were slapped silly (69-14). It capped one of more humbling three-game stretches in CU history, but then came October and November and more misery – an eight-game losing streak.

The Rams didn't exactly prosper from rallying to beat their in-state rival, winning only three more times under first-year coach Jim McElwain. Nonetheless, opening day in Denver proved historic for McElwain, who became the first rookie Rams coach in 13 attempts (1-11-1) to defeat the Buffs.

MacIntyre has met McElwain "a few times at various events." He was familiar with him because MacIntyre's first-

year San Jose State team (2009) played Alabama, where McElwain was the offensive coordinator. "I knew when he got the CSU job," MacIntyre said. "But I've never coached with him or spent a lot of time with him."

In preparing for the Buffs, CU's first-year coach expects McElwain to draw heavily on San Jose State tape. Plus, CSU has an on-staff resource in offensive coordinator Dave Baldwin, a one-time SJS head coach who also coordinated Utah State's offense.

Said MacIntyre: "I do know him – and he does a great job. I would imagine they're looking at a lot of our San Jose State film and will try to take advantage of some stuff there."

CU's in-earnest preparation for CSU likely won't start until near the end of the third week of camp, which opens Tuesday. MacIntyre's initial camp goals are scrutinizing personnel – especially the newcomers – and cultivating team unity.

Then the focus switches to the Rams and the opener. No, it won't be a make-or-break afternoon in Denver, but know this: from past experience the Buffs are aware of how much better a 'W' would make the rest of September and beyond.

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SHOW MENU



Mike MacIntyre preaches patience in first year of rebuild

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

Posted:

DenverPost.com

BOULDER — Patience and football are the oil and water of college athletics. Fans aren't patient. Athletic directors aren't patient. Coaches definitely aren't patient.

But coaches are also realistic. Colorado opens fall camp Tuesday and first-year coach Mike MacIntyre knows the rebuilding job he has in front of him. No one around him is making bowl plans.

MacIntyre's approach is one of calm, instruction and, above all, external optimism.

"First of all, you have to make your mind and your heart and your soul believe that you're not going to struggle," said MacIntyre, sitting in his office. "Because if you don't believe it, the kids don't believe it. I don't think that's a coachism.

"That's a truism."

Despite only his second head coaching job, MacIntyre is an old hand at this. Three years ago, he took over a San Jose State team that had gone 2-10 and was in the bottom six nationally in nearly every major offensive category.

What happened next has gone down as one of the great rebuilding jobs of the 21st century. In three years, MacIntyre led San Jose State to a bowl win and an 11-2 record, its best since 1946.

What is often forgotten is that first season in 2010 those Spartans went 1-12.

His Buffaloes, 1-11 a year ago, are near unanimous picks to finish last in the Pac-12 South. The approach he takes won't be any different.

"Everybody in our worlds and even businesses, they always look at the final project, the final outcome," he said. "But it's all the little things along the way. So you have to do the mundane things well."

MacIntyre's plan is to give each player, each position, each side of the ball little goals to reach each day. The goal when camp opens isn't to break a school-record seven-year losing streak.

It's a goal as small as footwork. If a player does it right, they check it off and go on to the next goal on a long list of them. Example?

"Our first six practices, we're going to judge our defense if we're leveraging the ball and running to the ball at the correct angles," MacIntyre said. "That's a *huge* fundamental.

"Individually, maybe our left tackle is stepping under himself with his right foot and it's killing him. Well, he's got to get that fixed."

The more small goals checked off, the better a player becomes, MacIntyre says.

" 'OK, I've accomplished that goal,' " he said. " 'I go on to the next goal.' That builds confidence. At the end of camp, you go down the chronological list: 'Man, I've accomplished 25 things. I have definitely gotten better at 25 things.' "

"It's not just, 'Well, I got better.' What'd you get better at? 'I don't know. I just got better.' "

These Buffaloes need all the positive reinforcement they can get. Last year their average score was 46-18. Only once after September did radio announcer Larry Zimmer not dip into anecdotes from the 1990s glory days in a second half.

Maybe repairing some fractured psyches will jump-start the Buffs' confidence. In rebuilding, that's as big as the final scores.

"It's almost immeasurable," MacIntyre said. "It's the most important thing you do."

MacIntyre's coaching style is an adjustment, too. Did you hear how predecessor Jon Embree's first practice went two years ago? If you lived within a 30-mile radius of Colorado's practice field, you probably heard him.

He and offensive coordinator Eric Bieniemy both came from the NFL and they were occasionally louder than some of Colorado's home crowds.

The players didn't mind — "Different people have different coaching styles," senior linebacker Derrick Webb said — and supported both to the bitter end

But MacIntyre brings a Southern warmth to Boulder. His spring practices were as much about establishing a culture and a confidence as an offense and defense.

"I do yell some," MacIntyre said. "Most of the time it's effort, effort and not concentrating. When I do that, it's really to heighten their awareness. But if you yell all the time, they tune you out."

The first game is still four weeks away, but the players appear to appreciate the approach.

"He definitely treats it like college," Webb said. "When I say that I'm saying it's not an NFL mentality: Give a guy two practices to show what he can do and if he isn't any good send him somewhere else."

"He's really big on developing us as players and young men. That's his whole philosophy."

Sophomore tackle Marc Mustoe said MacIntyre has players put little goals in a box.

"He'll find one thing to fix in practice and you just fix that one thing," Mustoe said. "No matter how much you mess up on everything else, just fix that one thing. ... All of us putting that in there, we make a collective whole."

If the Buffs struggle this year, they should take solace in one forgotten game at the end of the 2010 season. Idaho hosted 1-11 San Jose State in the season finale.

San Jose State lost in overtime, 26-23.

"We were in the locker room afterward and they were really down," MacIntyre said. "But they had that I-want-to-start-again attitude, I want-to-get-back-to-work attitude. It wasn't like, 'I'm glad this is over.' There's a huge difference.

"The seniors were right there with me. They said, 'Coach, we're coming to the first bowl game.' "

Two years later, they were in Washington to watch San Jose State beat Bowling Green in the Military Bowl.

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CU football lookout

The Denver Post's John Henderson breaks down Colorado heading into fall camp:

Three freshmen to watch

Addison Gillam, ILB. He's the only freshman atop a position depth chart out of spring ball. The 6-foot-3, 225-pounder from Foothill High in Palo Cedro, Calif., has the speed Colorado is looking for to stop the plethora of spread offenses in the Pac-12. He originally signed with San Jose State in 2012 and intended to grayshirt and enroll last spring. However, he changed to Colorado when Mike MacIntyre came from San Jose.

Jeff Thomas, WR. The 6-foot-3, 190-pounder missed last year when he returned home to Dallas to tend to family problems. While sitting out, he said he improved his speed to 4.49. He didn't produce big numbers for run-oriented Duncanville High but his size attracted the likes of Texas A&M and Oklahoma State. If his hamstring problems from the spring are over, he should keep defenses from double-teaming Paul Richardson.

Sefo Liufau, QB. With transfers by Nick Hirschman and Corey Dillon and returning starter Jordan Webb's knee injury and pending assault charge, Liufau will get every chance to unseat junior Connor Wood, listed No. 1 entering camp. The 6-foot-4, 215-pound Liufau has running ability that he rarely tapped in leading Bellarmine Prep in Tacoma to the Washington state title game last year.

Team strengths

Wide receiver. This has gone from a weakness to a strength. The return of junior Paul Richardson from the spring knee injury that knocked him out of 2012 gives Colorado a badly needed injection of speed.

Coach. If Mike MacIntyre can turn around San Jose State, it's argued he can turn around Colorado which has given him more with which to work.

Kicking game. The Buffs have the league's best punter and potential All-American in junior Darragh O'Neill. Junior place-kicker Will Oliver has made 17-of-24 field goals the last two years,

including six straight to open his career.

Areas of concern

Speed. Like his two predecessors, MacIntyre inherits a team woefully lacking in speed. He told the defensive line to lose a collective 100 pounds to combat against the spread offenses. The secondary was repeatedly beaten deep and there is no true breakaway threat at running back although the depth is good. They're still trying to build needed depth at wideout.

Defensive line. Outside of senior Chidera Uzo-Diribe, who could be one of the top defensive ends in the league, this unit must improve. Only Eastern Michigan gave up more than Colorado's 5.92 yards per carry as opponents ran up 226 yards a game, 115th in the country. Outside of Uzo-Diribe's seven sacks, returning defensive linemen combined for only seven.

Offensive line. David Bakhtiari's early departure for the NFL and Alex Lewis' transfer to Nebraska turned this unit from a strength to a weakness. The starting unit may be fine but they must stay healthy. They have little to no depth, particularly with sophomore backup guard Jeromy Irwin (foot) out for the start of camp. The listed backups are all underclassmen.

Key dates

Monday: Players report.

Tuesday: First practice, Tuesday 3:50-6:20 (open to public).

Aug. 12: First two-a-days, 8:30-10:45 a.m., 4-6 p.m.

Sept. 1: First game, vs. Colorado State at Sports Authority Field at Mile High, 4 p.m.

Deseret News

Pac-12 preview: New coach Mike MacIntyre sees a bright future for Colorado Buffaloes

By Dirk Facer, Deseret News

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Colorado head coach Mike MacIntyre listens to a question during the NCAA college football Pac-12 Media Day on Friday, July 26, 2013, in Culver City, Calif. (Jae C. Hong, ASSOCIATED PRESS)

CULVER CITY, Calif. — New Colorado coach Mike MacIntyre wasn't wearing shades at his first Pac-12 media day. Even so, he sounded like a guy who could have used a pair of Ray-Bans — despite taking over a program with seven consecutive losing seasons.

"The future is bright, no matter what you hear out there," MacIntyre said. "Our future is going to be bright and we're going to work hard and make the right steps and do it the right way."

It's been awhile since Ralphie and Co. have shined. The program's last winning season was a 7-5 mark under Gary Barnett in

2005. Since then, Dan Hawkins and Jon Embree have failed to produce another campaign with more wins than losses. Including interim coach Brian Cabral's 2-1 mark when Hawkins was fired in 2010, the Buffaloes are just 25-61 since Barnett's departure.

MacIntyre can relate. He's been in a similar situation before at San Jose State. The Spartans went 1-12 in his first season as head coach and wound up winning 10 games just two years later in 2012.

"There are always similarities but there are always differences," MacIntyre said. "The first thing we have to do is work with these young men, get them to believe in us, believe in what we're doing and change the culture."

Change, he acknowledged, is tough sometimes.

"You will have some kids that move to commit and some that stay reluctant. We've got to get them all going the same direction. That's what we have to do," MacIntyre said. "I think the similarities would be that both programs (Colorado and San Jose State) had great history, great times. It wasn't too long ago (that) Colorado was one of the top 15 programs in the country year in, year out. We need to get back there."

OFFENSE: There was hardly a stampede here in 2012. The Buffs ranked last in the Pac-12 in total offense (302.8 yards) and points per game (17.8). Junior quarterback **Connor Wood** and sophomore running backs **Christian Powell** and **Donta Abbron** will likely lead the charge to turn things around.

DEFENSE: Colorado had trouble rounding up opposing offenses a year ago. The Buffaloes ranked

12th in the conference in scoring defense (46 ppg) and rushing defense (226 ypg). Senior linebacker **Derrick Webb** (team-high 88 tackles in 2012) and senior defensive end **Chidera Uzo-Diribe** (seven sacks) top the returnees.

SPECIAL TEAMS: A pair of juniors return to give the Buffaloes a solid punter and kicker. **Darragh O'Neill** averaged 43.5 yards per punt last season and **Will Oliver** made six of his eight field goal attempts.

EXTRA POINTS: Colorado hasn't been ranked in the national polls since Nov. 6, 2005. ... Logan native **Kent Baer**, who played and coached at Utah State, is Colorado's defensive coordinator. ... Redshirt freshman quarterback **Shane Dillon** has transferred to the University of San Diego to play basketball.

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