

CU Buffs football team going camping with five key questions

By John Henderson The Denver Post The Denver Post

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BOULDER — Coach Mike MacIntyre begins his first preseason camp with Colorado on Tuesday. Few teams in the Pac-12 have more questions than the Buffs. Here are five:

Will Connor Wood keep the No. 1 quarterback job? He sure has less competition with Nick Hirschman transferring to Akron, Shane Dillon transferring to play basketball and last year's starter, Jordan Webb, recovering from a knee injury and facing an assault charge.

Under Brian Lindgren, the new offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach, Wood made remarkable strides in the spring. He was accurate, productive and confident. It also helped that he had a much faster receiver corps.

Competition will likely come from true freshman Sefo Liufau, who will compete against junior college transfer Jordan Gehrke and unused sophomore Stevie Joe Dorman.

Will the offensive line solidify? Wood's improvement — and health — will go to waste if this unit doesn't jell in a hurry. David Bakhtiari's early departure to the NFL and Alex Lewis' transfer to Nebraska forced senior Jack Harris to move from right tackle to left tackle.

They have a returning starter in Daniel Munyer, who's moving back to right guard, and a part-time starter in senior center Gus Handler. Sophomore Stephane Nembot started the second half of last season at right tackle.

But junior guard Kaiwi Crabb has yet to start a game, and backup tackle-guard Jeromy Irwin will miss the start of camp because of a foot injury. The starters must stay healthy. Depth is nonexistent.

Will the D-line be in shape? MacIntyre told six linemen to lose a combined 100 pounds. They're about 80 percent there with four weeks left before the Sept. 1 season opener.

Sophomore tackle Josh Tupou has gone from 340 pounds in January to 312. Senior Nate Bonsu, listed as Tupou's backup, has lost 10 pounds and is down to 285.

Chidera Uzo-Diribe, an end, is the defense's best player.

Will the secondary recover from last year's trial by fire? No team in the country gave up more touchdown passes (39), but no team had more starts from true freshmen (57). Nearly all of CU's defensive backs return, and there is reason for optimism. Junior cornerback Greg Henderson quietly had a very good season last year.

On the other side, coaches say sophomore Kenneth Crawley is much improved. Parker Orms' injuries crippled the secondary a year ago. He's healthy and back at his natural position of safety, solidifying a talented but young and maybe psychologically scarred secondary.

Who fills the holes at linebacker? Senior Derrick Webb is the only returning starter. Brady Daigh, a junior from Mullen High School, could be a starter by the season opener, but freshman Addison Gillam is listed first.

New defensive coordinator Kent Baer wants an attacking unit in his 4-3 alignment and may lean more toward speed. If that's the case, count on part-time starter Paul Vigo (6-foot-1, 205 pounds), who has big-play potential.

Don't count out junior Woodson Greer, who won the Greg Biekert Award for most improved CU linebacker.

John Henderson: 303-954-1299, jhenderson@denverpost.com or twitter.com/johnhendersondp