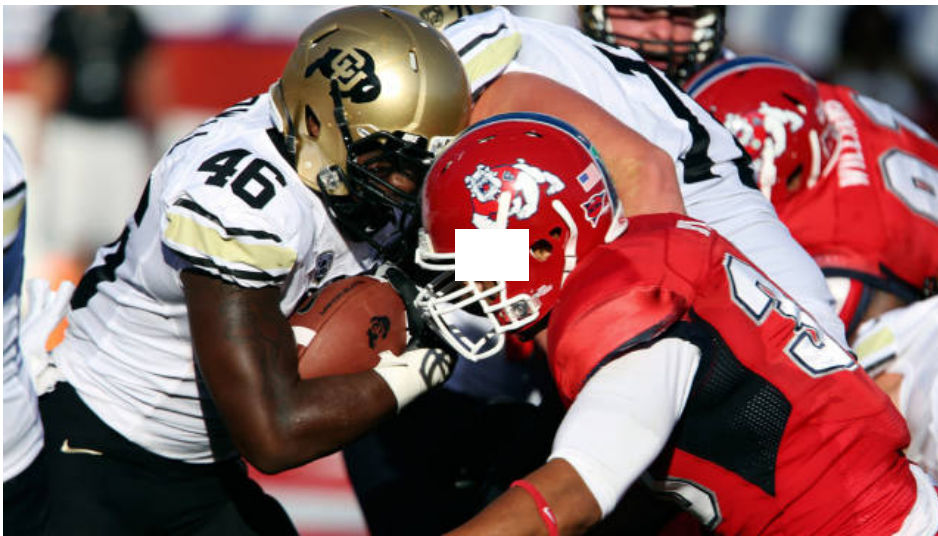




By: Associated Press

Christian Powell (46) looks for running room during his first season at tailback.

Brooks: Powell Eager For Second Season At Tailback

Release: August 08, 2013

By: B.G. Brooks, Contributing Editor

(First in a series of position-by-position previews of the 2013 Buffs to be posted on CUBuffs.com during preseason camp. Today: Running backs)

BOULDER – Last September, the element of surprise worked in Christian Powell's favor. This September – and for the remainder of the 2013 football season – Powell can't count on being an unknown in Colorado's backfield.

But that's not such a bad thing. For Powell, tailback is no longer an unfamiliar position. After a high school career and nearly an entire August camp at CU spent at fullback, he debuted at tailback in the Buffs' second game last season. His 147 yards and three touchdowns provided the lone bright spot in an unsettling 30-28 home loss to Sacramento State.

Switching to tailback was nearly as big an adjustment for Powell as simply acclimating to the college game.

"It's a whole different level; you've got to improve everything tremendously," he said. "Now, it's year-round – training, working to better yourself to play against bigger, faster, stronger people. You know you have to upgrade your game to match that."

He's upgraded his game most noticeably "in my reads," he said. "I've been working on that a lot. At this level you have to or you're going to run into a mess."

More than one tackler encountered that when running into the bullish Powell. He finished 2012 as the Buffs' leading rusher, gaining 691 yards on 158 carries (4.37 yard average) and scoring seven TDs. This season finds him packing more experience and fewer pounds; he's down five pounds to a trim 229 – a considerable drop from the nearly 260 he was carrying when he visited CU two winters ago.

CU running backs coach Klayton Adams is counting on Powell, a sophomore, being the load-bearing tailback in a two- or three-man rushing attack that likely will feature junior Tony Jones and senior Josh Ford.

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That's TBD in camp, along with the roles other tailbacks – returnees and fresh faces – who might challenge for playing time and carries once the season begins. But Adams is fairly certain about this: Powell and whoever else steps up will provide the Buffs different looks at the position.

"The more different styles you have the more opportunity you give yourself on offense," Powell said. "Having these different styles, we can throw more at teams and be more effective."

Powell and Jones (5-7, 190), noted Adams, "are their own styles of runners and Josh Ford (5-9, 205) factors in as a guy who can do a lot of different things and has some flexibility. You start off looking at those three guys and say you have some pretty good flexibility there. All three catch the ball pretty naturally, which is big for us. All three have a pretty solid understanding of what we expect from them in pass protection as well."

In addition to that trio, Adams plans an early assessment of returnees Donta Abron, Malcolm Creer and Terrence Crowder and incoming freshmen Phillip Lindsay, Michael Adkins II and Ryan Moeller. Lindsay (Denver South) and Adkins (San Diego Helix) are scholarship players, Moeller (Rifle) is a walk-on. Lindsay, coming off a knee injury in high school, is to be used at running back, while Moeller has worked at running back/defensive back during the summer.

As for how many backs he'll play on a given Saturday, Adams won't pigeonhole himself or his players. The "hot hand" theory might or might not hold. "It probably depends on how comfortable you feel with the depth," he said. "We played two different guys last season (at San Jose State) because we felt like they were the two who could help us the most."

"But if we're in a situation where we're looking to run the ball a lot, I think you've got to have different guys to spread it out to. The other side of that is if there's one guy you just can't take off the field, then you don't take him off the field."

Entering training camp, Adams' goal was to determine his most productive backs and "try to put them and the offense in the best position to be successful . . . but if you're running downhill a bunch and into the line of scrimmage in short yardage situations with someone that doesn't have that as a strength, then you're not putting your team in position to be successful."

Powell sees his short-yardage capabilities as a strength, although one observation from the former coaching staff was that he ran "high in the hole" – or upright when reaching the line of scrimmage. That critique isn't new to him and he's addressing it.

This coaching staff, said Powell, has instructed him "to run comfortable. If I'm running through a hole straight up, I'm going to get popped, obviously. So if (Adams) sees that he's going to point it out to me and tell me to lower my pad level. I'm going to continue working at that so eventually it becomes what I do on every carry. Usually when I'm running I try to stay low. But sometimes it just happens; you come up."

CU's offensive goals might differ weekly, but in the run game there will be this constant: Coach Mike MacIntyre wants the number of rushing attempts at a high level. Explained Adams: "The reason we say attempts is that when you're getting attempts you're being productive on the runs you're attempting. If you come to the end of the game and you don't have a lot of rushing attempts, it's usually because you haven't been effective in it."

"Sometimes early in a game you might not be effective but you keep hammering and hammering and pretty soon the wall comes down . . . I don't know that we look at a certain statistic in terms of (weekly) yardage or yardage for this back or that back. But we want to wear down the opponent and to be able to take pressure off of the pass game by running effectively. And your defense can rest."

The running game relieving pressure in the passing game is particularly important because the Buffs will open the season with a relatively inexperienced quarterback. "We have to do it," Adams said. "It doesn't mean we have to line up with I-backs and beat somebody's brains in. There's a time and place for that. But one of the things I think we can be effective in is running the ball with different tempos, looks and formations, shifts and motions and dressing it up a little bit."

Adams, who also coaches the tight ends, believes his tailbacks and fullbacks – how much Alex Wood, Clay Jones and Jordan Murphy are used at that position will vary weekly – appear proficient in pass protection. A key, Adams said, is "not to put a back in a position where he's one-on-one with someone he'll have a real problem with . . . most sacks come off a four-man rush. When a back is able to get out to his spot and understand the concept, it generally takes pressure off some of the offensive linemen when they're going against a great pass rusher. That's been a key for us."

The Buffs will use variations of the pistol offense, which doesn't ask any less from a back in pass

blocking than any other offensive scheme. "When we're lined up that way we're giving a little less away to the defense in terms of what our intentions are," Adams said. "Sometimes we can end up with a more vanilla look. But we're not lined up that way all the time. I wouldn't say less is asked of him; I'd say we're trying to make his job a little easier in terms of scheme. In general it's designed to get the back downhill faster in the run game and give away less information about what you're doing in the pass game."

After spring drills, Powell said the new offense appeared more player-friendly than last season's pro-style scheme: "Yeah . . . they made it easier to understand. As a team we're picking it up well; it's not too complicated for us."

THE INSIDE LOOK AT . . .

Running backs

Coach: Klayton Adams, first season on CU staff

Returning starters: Christian Powell, So.; Tony Jones, Jr.

Returnees: Donta Abron, So.; Malcolm Creer, Jr.; Terrence Crowder, Fr.-RS; Josh Ford, Sr.; Clay Jones (FB), So.; Jordan Murphy (FB), So.; Alex Wood (FB/TE), Sr.

Newcomers: Michael Adkins II, Fr.; Phillip Lindsay (also DB), Fr.; Ryan Moeller (also DB), Fr.

Key losses: None

Stat line: The top three leading rushers (Powell, Jones, Abron) are back and – if the restructured O-line coalesces – should help the Buffs improve on last season's 110.3 rushing yards a game. Powell rushed for 691 yards in 2012, Jones for 320 and Abron 256.

Bottom line: Powell and Jones offer a night-and-day different TB combination. Ford, recognized as a tireless worker, is listed with Jones as a co-backup to Powell and with a good camp could challenge for more playing time. For depth purposes, the coaching staff will take a close look in camp at the other returnees as well as anyone (Moeller) who could play another position before finding a home. Creer has shed 15 pounds and appears to have healthy knees. "His body looks great and he looks like he's made big jumps," Adams said. Abron also appears healthy after a hamstring injury curtailed his spring participation. "He had some explosive plays as a freshman," Adams said. The coaching staff wants to see if a healthy Crowder, who has what Adams calls a "unique style of running," can duplicate what he showed in his high school highlight tapes.

Next: Tight ends

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Colorado Buffaloes Football

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Football: CU Buffs' MacIntyre says there's plenty of playing time to go around

By Kyle Ringo Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

DailyCamera.com

During the Dan Hawkins era in Boulder, Colorado fans grew accustomed to seeing a lot of personnel groups and plenty of different players on the field on game days.

That changed somewhat the past two years under Jon Embree, who chose to stick with his starters and key reserves much more.

Mike MacIntyre said Wednesday he envisions using a lot of different players in games, which is one reason why he tries to maximize the number of practices repetitions. He wants starters and backups and their backups prepared for any situation.

"We'll play quite a few different people," he said. "The way we practice, all the kids will be prepared."

MacIntyre was asked what positions are up for grabs in true open competitions this month. He proceeded to name each position group on the defense, several spots on the offensive line and quarterback.

"There are a few guys who are kind of solid at their spot if they keep pushing like they should," he said.

Receivers expecting more out of themselves with Richardson's return

By Brian Howell Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

DailyCamera.com

Throughout a 2012 season that saw Nelson Spruce and Tyler McCulloch lead the Colorado football team in receiving, the Buffaloes were criticized for their lack of excitement at the receiver position.

Then this week, McCulloch showed up to the start of fall camp sporting a haircut in honor of Ricky "Wild Thing" Vaughn from the 1989 movie "Major League."

Who says these guys don't have some flash?

OK, so a creative haircut won't make McCulloch a dynamic playmaker. But, with several speedsters now in the fold at receiver, McCulloch and Spruce might actually be more important to CU than they were a year ago.

"We're going to need Tyler and Nelson to really step up and be even better than they were last year," Buffs receivers coach Troy Walters said. "The way they've gone in the spring and the way they practiced this summer, CU fans can count on them having a big year."

There were many problems with the 2012 Buffs, one of those being the fact that they didn't have any receivers capable of stretching a defense. Paul Richardson went down with season-ending knee injury in April of 2012 and the Buffs had a severe lack of speed at receiver all year.

Spruce (team-high 44 catches for 446 yards and three touchdowns) and McCulloch (34 catches for 436 yards and two scores) did their best, but they certainly didn't strike fear in the opposition.

This year could be different. Richardson, now a junior, is healthy and looking fantastic early in camp. Speedy Jeff Thomas is now on board, while juniors D.D. Goodson and Keenan Canty, and a talented group of true freshmen give CU a receiving corps that looks worthy of the Pac-12.

All that added speed and talent has some fans excited about the receivers, but don't forget about McCulloch and Spruce.

"Having a guy like P-Rich out there, the defense has got to account for him and that's only going to free us up more and allow us to catch more passes," McCulloch said.

A healthy Richardson figures to lead the team in receiving, but Spruce said he doesn't see any reason why he and McCulloch can't be just as productive -- if not more so -- than they were a year ago.

"With the offense we have, our numbers might not even fall off at all with P-Rich back," Spruce said. "I think he might help us. We'll be effective in different situations."

Already, the two of them are being used in a variety of ways. McCulloch, who lined up almost

exclusively on the outside last year under former coach Jon Embree, has been playing inside and outside during practices with new coach Mike MacIntyre. Spruce can play any of the receiver positions.

McCulloch, a junior, has added about five pounds of muscle, which doesn't sound like much, but he said, "I feel better about my body" at 215 pounds. He's also healthy and feels like he's in the best shape of his life. With a better body and a year of experience under his belt, the 6-foot-5 McCulloch thinks he could be a major asset to the Buffs.

"Being an upperclassmen now I expect a lot more out of myself," he said. "As a big body, I need to be able to be the guy who catches the 50-50 ball when the quarterback takes a chance out there. I've just developed a hunger and a mindset that when the ball is in the air, it's my ball and I need to go get it. There shouldn't be anyone who can stop me from getting it at my height."

At 6-2, 200 pounds, Spruce is smaller, but does have some good speed. The redshirt sophomore is looking forward to showing off how much he's improved, too.

"From an ability standpoint, I'm trying to get my quickness and burst," he said. "I feel really comfortable with my size and strength."

So does Walters, who believes McCulloch and Spruce will be featured receivers in CU's aerial attack.

"Those are two young men that are reliable and dependable," he said. "Coming out of spring, those were guys that I felt comfortable putting in any situation. They are guys you want on your team because they are consistent day in and day out."

"I expect Nelson to catch a lot more (passes) and I expect Tyler to catch more, because they are going to be an integral part of the offense."

What a difference a year makes. At this time in 2012, CU's receiving corps was one of the least experienced groups on the team. Now, it's possibly the most experienced. Richardson, McCulloch, Spruce and Canty have a combined 177 career catches for 2,224 yards and 17 touchdowns.

"I think we'll be a stronger attack this year," Spruce said.

It should be a more entertaining group, too.

Follow Brian on Twitter: @BrianHowell33.

Football: CU Buffs' Mike MacIntyre installing scheme bit by bit

By Kyle Ringo Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

DailyCamera.com

Colorado football coaches continued to install more of the offense and defense Wednesday on the second day of fall camp, but coach Mike MacIntyre admitted he doubts the entire offense will be in the Buffs' arsenal when they take on Colorado State in the season opener.

Some would call MacIntyre a perfectionist. He wants his team to be really comfortable with each new element of the scheme before adding more.

MacIntyre said he thought the Buffs handled the additional material well Wednesday and he could add more Thursday if he likes what he sees on film overnight.

"I'm a true believer in knowledge equals confidence equals playing fast," MacIntyre said. "I think you can overload them and they can slow down. So it's very important. There is a fine line there to make sure you don't do that."

MacIntyre was asked if he has put in some new wrinkles that weren't in the offense he ran at San Jose State last season and might surprise CSU coaches.

"Oh yeah, the whole offense," MacIntyre joked. "We're putting the Wishbone in."

MacIntyre said he was pleased that the Buffs were able to get through a lot of situations in Wednesday's session.

"I want these young men to know exactly what is going to happen in all the situations and the pressure situations," MacIntyre said. "I want them to think just like I think and when they can do that, that's when you execute in those situations. You have to do them over and over and over."

CU Buffs have many open battles for starting positions

By John Henderson The Denver Post The Denver Post

Posted:

DenverPost.com

BOULDER — Most first-year coaches inherit rebuilding teams that don't have a lot of positions set. So analyzing the position battles at Colorado, coming off a 1-11 season, takes some time.

New coach Mike MacIntyre doesn't have to worry about some spots. Junior Connor Wood must have a nightmare fall camp to lose the quarterback job. Sophomore Christian Powell is entrenched at tailback, although there's lots of depth. Defensive end Chidera Uzo-Diribe is one of the best in the Pac-12. And most of the secondary can be penciled in.

"There are a few guys who are kind of solid at their spots if they keep pushing as they should," MacIntyre said after the second day of camp Wednesday. "But there's a lot of open spots."

As camp starts rolling, here's a look at some — but not all — of the biggest position battles:

Offensive line: The early departures of David Bakhtiari and Alex Lewis threw open this unit. Senior tackle Jack Harris has adapted well in moving from the right side to the left, and senior Gus Handler returns at center. Junior right guard Daniel Munyer started all year at either that position or center but is slowed by a leg injury.

That leaves two spots and massive holes behind the starters. Sophomore Stephane Nembot has the 6-foot-7, 305-pound frame of an NFL tackle, but the native of Cameroon is a converted defensive end.

"He has a really big upside and a lot of potential," offensive line coach Gary Bernardi said. "He's so young intellectually in terms of football. He's a wonderful student. You can print that. He's sharp."

At left guard, junior Kaiwi Crabb will battle sophomore Jeromy Irwin, who also can play tackle, when Irwin gets off his walking boot.

Defensive line: Three spots are wide open. Some still must lose weight, but sophomore Josh Tupou and senior Nate Bonsu have lost a lot and could man the two tackle spots. Sophomore Tyler Henington, who came off the bench in 11 games last year, is also in the mix.

Sophomore Samson Kafovalu, a part-time starter in 2012, can play end and tackle. And junior Kirk Poston, vastly improved over the summer, will compete against him at the end spot opposite Uzo-Diribe.

Linebacker: Kent Baer, the new defensive coordinator and linebackers coach, likes the speed of these guys, if not the experience. Besides middle linebacker Derrick Webb, the only others with starts are Paul Vigo, a converted safety, and Brady Daigh with one.

Vigo will compete with junior Woodson Greer at one outside spot, with Daigh likely starting over freshman Addison Gillam, a spring surprise. But Daigh must get his knee healthy. Baer also likes

junior Lowell Williams, who led the team in tackles in the spring, in the middle.

"I see a lot of improvement over the summer," Baer said.

Baer blitzed a lot at San Jose State last year. Count on the fastest players to get on the field.

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