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Jordan Gehrke (18) believes he's ready to compete at QB next month.

Photo Courtesy: CUBuffs.com



Brooks: QB Numbers Might Offer Big Boost For Gehrke

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BOULDER – Earlier this spring, Jordan Gehrke committed to play football at Colorado knowing that come August a highly competitive numbers game at his position – quarterback – awaited.

What Gehrke couldn't have known was that well before the calendar reached August, CU's QB numbers would begin fading like spring flowers.

A position that could have been populated with no fewer than seven players has lost a pair since mid-May. Junior Nick Hirschman, expected to duel junior Connor Wood for the starting spot in preseason camp, has transferred to Akron. Redshirt freshman Shane Dillon, the gem of CU's recruiting class two winters ago, announced earlier this week that he will leave Boulder to pursue basketball at another school.

Factor in the uncertain health and legal status of incumbent starter Jordan Webb and suddenly the August QB competition focuses on Wood, Gehrke and freshman Sefo Liufau.

Gehrke's humility, which seems as expansive as the Rockies, won't permit as much as a grin as he surveys the pared down competition. He arrived on campus on June 2 with the mindset of competing against whoever was already here and anyone else who showed up.

But let's face it, that numbers game just tilted a bit in his favor.

"I'm a competitor," he said. "Every quarterback comes in to compete for the starting job. Only one gets it. I'm excited to be in this situation, coming from a junior college and getting a chance to play in the Pac-12. Every day that starting spot is on my mind. I wake up and know I'm blessed to have a chance to compete for that job."

His path to Boulder was the one less traveled. Coming out of Notre Dame Prep in Scottsdale, Ariz., Gehrke concedes he was "borderline" 6-feet and barely pushing 170 pounds. Moreover, his arm strength was questionable and his lack of FBS offers reflected all of the above.

He wound up staying in the neighborhood to play for one season (2,358 yards, 22 TDs, 14 interceptions) at Scottsdale Community College before transferring last February to Ventura (Calif.) College. If he wasn't there long enough to take one snap, he did hit it off nicely with his future coach – Steve Mooshagian – and teammates.

Why the transfer from Scottsdale to Ventura? Primarily, it was the lure of California and the prospect of increasing his exposure to a Pac-12 Conference school.

"I just wanted to play in California," Gehrke said. "Scottsdale was a great start for me but I wanted more things. I took visits and when I met Coach 'Moose' (Mooshagian), I just fell in love with everything he had to offer. He was a great guy; he really cared for me. He was just awesome and everything his offense had was what I was looking for – and it was five minutes from the beach. I could not pass that up."

Though he never ran a play in Mooshagian's offense, a strong coach/QB bond was formed. After Ventura's first practice earlier this week, Gehrke said he received a text from Mooshagian asking how everything was going. "I miss him," Gehrke said. "Being at a junior college, every single day you want to make it count. I just feel blessed to have this opportunity."

It came about because of CU coach Mike MacIntyre's connection with Mooshagian. When the Buffs began shopping for a quarterback – about half a dozen JC prospects were scrutinized – after Hirschman's departure, MacIntyre and offensive coordinator/QB coach Brian Lindgren turned to Mooshagian, who offered this scouting report on Gehrke: "A in accuracy, B-plus in athleticism, B in arm strength."

"But," added MacIntyre, "(Mooshagian) told me he could flat-out play and probably would be one of the top two JC quarterbacks in the country next year."

Even though Gehrke leaving Ventura would send Mooshagian back on a QB hunt, Mooshagian knew what signing with a Pac-12 school meant to Gehrke and what it could mean for MacIntyre. Gehrke's goal has been to play in the Pac-12 "since Day One . . . the first game I ever watched (as a kid) was Oregon vs. Colorado (2002 Fiesta Bowl). It's kind of crazy how I ended up here. Ever since that I wanted to play here. I just knew this is where I wanted to be."

Gehrke isn't that barely 6-0, 170-pounder anymore. He's grown to 6-2, 190 and could add more inches and pounds; he's still 18 and only three months older than Liufau. "I'm supposed to be in their class," Gehrke said. "I grew when I left high school and I hope I'm still growing."

In his first month and a half in Boulder he's become fast friends with Wood and Liufau. Dillon's departure was a blow because "he was a great guy . . . he always took extra time with Sefo and me to teach us things and make sure we were up to speed. He was just an all-around great guy. I wish him the best of luck wherever he is."

Gehrke and Wood attend the same church in Boulder, and Gehrke and Liufau live in the same dorm. Wood organized a recent one-night camping trip and invited a handful of teammates, including Gehrke. "They're great guys," Gehrke said. "It's awesome to have a great group of quarterbacks who want the same goal but can be friends with each other."

Of the Buffs' summer workouts, Gehrke said, "Everything is organized and has a purpose. I really love coach (Dave) Forman. You can really tell he's got a passion for what he does. Having a leader like that in the weight room really trickles down to us. It's awesome waking up every morning – I'm in the 6 a.m. group – and having a guy with us who's fired up and getting everybody going. It's been a great atmosphere."

The Buffs' official reporting date is Monday, Aug. 5 with practice beginning the next day. By then, Gehrke believes he will be up to speed in MacIntyre's offense and able to compete as he envisions. "I'm starting to learn the offense and feel really comfortable," he said. "The routes and everything are pretty similar to what I've been in . . . I've gotten really familiar with this one in a couple of weeks.

"I've been studying the playbook every day, watching film every day . . . even when other the other quarterbacks are getting reps, I'm taking mental reps. I'm sitting back thinking what would I do in this situation? I'm reading the defense and understanding the plays, the protections. I'm getting myself prepared because come August I know it's going to be a short window to really show yourself."

From their time together in player-organized summer practices and passing drills, junior receiver Tyler McCulloch said Gehrke "seems to have picked up the offense really well. He gets the ball out fast (and) he's got a very good throwing motion. He's just a cool kid."

Gehrke cited competitiveness as his strong suit at quarterback: "I'm really competitive . . . eager to learn. Some quarterbacks I've trained with, sometimes they're really hesitant on learning. They think they've got it. But even when I'm with younger guys or older guys I'm always watching them – their footwork, their throwing motion just so I can pick up things they do well. Then I can use that. I just love to learn. I know I'm nobody; I can always learn and get better. I think that's where I am, but my competitive edge definitely drives me. I hate losing more than anything. Winning is something I really enjoy."

Through his one season at Scottsdale and his brief time at Ventura, Gehrke developed an affinity for JC players and their shared goal to take the next step. "I just have so much respect for junior college players because every day they're grinding, every day they talk about getting to the Division I level," he said. "Everyone is so happy when someone on their team makes it."

That makes the circumstances of him arriving at CU and in the Pac-12 even more special.

"I'm so fortunate . . . I thank God every day," he said. "He has a huge plan and I try to follow it . . . it's just amazing the kind of little roller coaster ride He has me on right now, but I'm strapped in and ready for anything He has to offer. With the starting spot being open, it's one of the things I want to fight for. I want to show that junior college players can make the switch and start."

August offers the chance to state his case, and given his position's attrition the chances are undeniably better.

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