



By: CUBuffs.com

Mike MacIntyre makes his debut as CU's head coach on Sunday against CSU.

Brooks: MacIntyre Eager To See His Buffs Make Debut

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By: B.G. Brooks, Contributing Editor

BOULDER – One of the last things he said to his players at Thursday night's team meeting was, "I can't wait to watch you guys play, I really can't."

Mike MacIntyre isn't alone.

Colorado football fans – many numbed, some disenchanted by seven consecutive losing seasons – are waiting with cautiously high hopes for Sunday's 4 p.m. debut of the Buffaloes under MacIntyre. It comes in Denver's Sports Authority Field at Mile High against in-state rival Colorado State in the Rocky Mountain Showdown.

Even before Sunday, MacIntyre has a history against CSU; his three San Jose State teams played the Rams twice and won both games (38-31 in 2011, 40-20 in 2012).

But those games didn't pack nearly the intensity that MacIntyre and his first CU team will experience on Sunday. It's a rivalry game – a "365 game," as MacIntyre likes to call it – and it means as much in this state as higher profile in-state battles mean in other regions. But this one, this season, in this state, is a monster.

"Yes, there's no doubt," MacIntyre said. "Opening games are always exciting. I don't care who you're playing. Then adding a rivalry game on top of that at a neutral stadium where half of the stadium is one color and half the stadium is another color. I just think that makes it unique. I also think it's a 365-day-a-year game where you're going to hear about it all the time – win, or hopefully not the other side of it, lose – all year long."

Added senior inside linebacker Derrick Webb, one of six CU captains: "The first game is always important in setting the tempo for the season, also because of the tradition of the game. This is CU vs. CSU; it's time to bring the title home to the Buffs and kick off the season right with a win."

The Rams won 22-17 last season and packed away the Centennial Cup for the trip to Fort Collins. CSU coach Jim McElwain debuted successfully in that game and earned a spot in school history, becoming the first of four rookie Rams head coach to defeat the Buffs. But CU leads the series by a robust 61-21-2 margin and has won eight of the 13 games played since 2000, including four of the last six.

CU's Sunday story lines are abundant – and abundantly clear. Five to watch unfold:

- MacIntyre is seeking to become only the third CU coach since 1931 to win his first game. The most recent: Rick Neuheisel in 1995 (43-7 at Wisconsin). In his head coaching debut in 2010, San Jose State tripped to No. 1 Alabama and fell hard, 48-3;

- Quarterback Connor Wood took the Buffs reins in spring, excelled with his leadership through the

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summer's player-run practices and strengthened his grip on the starting job throughout August camp. His focus now is carrying that confidence, efficiency and grasp of the offense into the regular season;

- Immediately behind Wood is Sefo Liufau, a true freshman whose maturity and August performance belie his age. MacIntyre has indicated no reluctance to use Liufau, even saying it is unrealistic to think of Liufau spending time in a redshirt;

- CU's defense, now in a 4-3 alignment, is on a mission to prove the major overhaul didn't merely apply to the scheme. After allowing laughably large point totals (46 per game) and yards (489 per game) last season, the Buffs "D" could use a large dose of redemption. Quickly;

- CU's offense, now in MacIntyre's and coordinator Brian Lindgren's version of the pistol, is up-tempo. Also heavy on misdirection, it has been tailored to the strong suits of Wood, his running backs and an improved receiving corps that features the return of Paul Richardson, the speediest of the Buffs and an acknowledged focal point for the CSU defense. A lingering offensive question: How effective will the running game be behind a rebuilt offensive line and relieving early pressure on Wood?

The Buffs have made noticeable off-season progress since MacIntyre was hired in December and through preseason camp. "They're buying into us," MacIntyre said. "Our job as a coaching staff is to get the right guys in the right spots on defense to make plays . . . we definitely feel the kids are starting to understand what we do."

But the Buffs have yet to experience the unavoidable pitfalls associated with any coaching change – namely the overall newness of game day and the interaction during four quarters under pressure. With CU in a new system, said MacIntyre, "you definitely don't have everything in yet by any stretch . . . you want to be able to execute and be able to get the snap count right and get lined up right and do the little things you have to do to win. So we're still in the process of doing that."

Wood, who made one start last season and played in seven games, said last season's 11-loss debacle sent the Buffs onto the practice field in August with the realization of how much work faced them. "We went 1-11 last year and we have to make some strides to get to where we want to be and you just can't take a day off, you know," he said.

And, the junior captain added, that must apply to him: "You can't say, 'All right I'm the starting quarterback so I really don't have to do much.' It should be the opposite because now it's my job to keep. I mean look at last year. It was a quarterback circus and guys were going in and out and no one really solidified that spot. My job right now is to solidify my spot."

As for any other personal motivation, he said it comes from an inner drive and his penchant for hard work: "I try to keep a level head and not try to think about the competition or about this or that. Just about the job that I need to do. I think that got me in trouble in the past sometimes. I was thinking about too much out there, this and that. It's all about X's and O's and all about ball getting from point A to point B – and point B is that end zone."

Here's something else MacIntyre told his team on Thursday night: "This isn't a normal game." He's a Southern guy with no CU connections, no pent-up wrath toward the Rams. Doesn't matter; he knows what Sunday means to the 2013 season, to a football program that's been in free-fall, and to him.

Contact: BG.Brooks@Colorado.EDU

Colorado Buffaloes Football

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Colorado has new coaches, new starting QB, new schemes as season kicks off

By Kyle Ringo *Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera*

Posted:

Buffzone.com

Mike MacIntyre lost his first game as a head coach 48-3 at No. 1 Alabama.

While his debut for San Jose State didn't end with smiles, his tenure with the Spartans certainly brought more happiness to that program than its fans had felt in years. San Jose State went 11-2, won a bowl game and finished in the national rankings last season, earning MacIntyre the opportunity to start another rebuilding effort here at the foot of the Flatirons.

Colorado fans are hoping -- make that praying -- that MacIntyre can restore their program in Boulder as quickly and successfully as the amazing work he did with the Spartans, a lesser program with fewer resources, a less competitive conference and lower expectations starting out.

It's going to be a high bar to clear.

While the effort has been underway for months, the first major public test comes Sunday in the 2013 season opener against Colorado State at Sports Authority Field in Denver (4:04 p.m., CBS-Sports).

"Opening games are always exciting," MacIntyre said. "I don't care who you're playing. Then adding a rivalry game on top of that at a neutral stadium where half of the stadium is one color and half the stadium is another color. I just think that makes it unique. I also think it's a 365 day a year game where you're going to hear about it all the time win or, hopefully not the other side of it, lose all year long."

The Buffs have an entirely new coaching staff, a new starting quarterback, their best player back from injury and new philosophies on both sides of the ball compared with the last time they met the Rams here, exactly one year ago.

It looks like a complete makeover, but are they really a different team? Are they better than the team that squandered a double-digit lead last year and lost 22-17 to the Rams?

That is the major question on the minds of CU fans, and to some extent, CSU fans as they head for the stadium or turn on the televisions.

There are still plenty of faces remaining on the CU roster who remember the pain of watching the Rams collect the Centennial Cup and haul it back to Fort Collins after a mistake-filled effort from the black, silver and gold.

The Buffs finished last season with the worst record in the program's history (1-11) and as perhaps the worst team in the nation from a Bowl Championship Series conference. They gave up 46 points a game while leading the nation in starts made by freshmen.

MacIntyre beat CSU last year with his San Jose State team using basically the same offense and defense he will put on the field Sunday. Of course, last season he had players who had been in those systems for three years and were adept at limiting mistakes and forcing them on opponents.

The Buffs did almost none of that last season.

Plenty of attention will be focused on fourth-year junior Connor Wood who earned the starting quarterback job for the Buffs in fall camp. Wood has looked more confident and poised in practices this month than he did at any time last year in the seven games in which he played, but now it must translate to game day.

If it doesn't, MacIntyre will have to be patient with Wood or turn to a true freshman in Sefo Liufau, who earned the backup job.

CSU coach Jim McElwain, who won his debut against the Buffs last year, didn't announce who his starter would be, but CU doesn't expect much to change regardless of which of the three options McElwain chooses. Sophomore Conner Smith and junior Garrett Grayson both played last season and enjoyed success at times. Freshman Nick Stevens also is the mix.

Whoever is under center for the Rams can rely on an experienced offensive line and a power running game to take some of the pressure off. The Buffs will have to stop the run to give MacIntyre a more satisfying debut than the last time he started climbing a mountain.

Contact staff writer Kyle Ringo at ringok@dailycamera.com or twitter.com/kyleringo.

Howell: CU Buffs need win more than CSU Rams

By Brian Howell Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

Last week, new Colorado football coach Mike MacIntyre said he didn't think the Colorado State game was a big game.

"It's a huge game," he said.

Sure, that was probably a little bit of coach-speak from MacIntyre, but he's absolutely right.

When the Buffs and Rams square off on Sunday at Sports Authority Field at Mile High, there will be plenty on the line for CU.

CSU can lose this game and still go on to have a nice year by winning some games in the Mountain West Conference. Other than bragging rights, the Rams don't need this game.

For Colorado, there's much more at stake than in-state bragging rights. This game presents one of CU's best chances at a win, and often the opener sets the tone for the rest of the season.

"I definitely feel that way," senior safety Parker Orms said. "We have to start out with a W and that's going to help us continue having success in the future."

History backs that up. The Buffs have won 76 season openers in program history and have gone on to post a winning season 79 percent of the time. In the 42 years they have lost the opener, they've rebounded for a winning season just 45 percent of the time.

A year ago, the Buffs led the Rams 14-3 late in the first half. They were outscored 19-3 the rest of the way and lost the game. That was the first sign that the 2012 season was going to be a long one.

Had the Buffs won the opener last year would they have been much better than their final record of 1-11? Maybe not, but winning produces confidence, which can produce success.

Success is something CU coaches have had a hard time finding in their debut games, going 1-13 since 1935. Rick Neuheisel, in 1995, was the only one of the last 14 CU coaches to win his debut.

Bill McCartney was routed by California. CSU pounded the Buffs in Gary Barnett's first game. Dan Hawkins suffered an embarrassing loss to Montana State to open his tenure, and Jon Embree was rolled at Hawaii.

In MacIntyre's only other debut game as a head coach -- in 2010 when he was at San Jose State -- his team was pounded by Alabama, 48-3. Alabama's offensive coordinator that day was Jim McElwain, now the head coach at CSU.

The good news for MacIntyre and the Buffs is that McElwain doesn't have anywhere near the type of talent at CSU that he had Alabama. But, ultimately, it doesn't really matter which team is on the

other side of the field.

After seven consecutive losing seasons, including last year's debacle, Colorado is a team desperate for a positive result. It's been nearly two years since the Buffs have celebrated a victory in their home state.

MacIntyre, his staff and many of the CU players have spent the offseason building up their confidence and self-esteem.

Positive energy has been flowing through Boulder all summer. CU needs this one to keep the good vibes going. Right now, they truly believe in themselves. They believe they can be a winning football team, whether the rest of us do or not.

That's why this game is so important to the Buffs. Three hours at Sports Authority Field can either tear down the rebuilt mindset of the Buffs or it can reinforce it.

"It's crucial," guard Daniel Munyer said.

Contact staff writer Brian Howell at howellb@dailycamera.com or twitter.com/BrianHowell33.

Rocky Mountain Showdown with Buffs and Rams offers intrigue, if not powerhouses

By Tom Kensler *The Denver Post* *The Denver Post*

Posted:

DenverPost.com

For a season opener between rivals that couldn't muster a half-dozen victories combined a year ago, Sunday's 2013 Rocky Mountain Showdown between Colorado (1-11 in 2012) and Colorado State (4-8) offers more intrigue than some may suspect.

All eyes are always on the quarterbacks, but fans at Sports Authority Field at Mile High (and those watching the national telecast on CBS Sports Network) will be especially focused on the QBs in this game.

Live blog: Follow a mobile-friendly blog of the game.

Colorado junior Connor Wood, a former transfer from Texas, will make his second career start for the Buffaloes and obviously his first under new CU coach Mike MacIntyre.

CSU coach Jim McElwain never did announce who will take the first snaps for the Rams among a trio of candidates: junior Garrett Grayson (five starts in 2012), sophomore Conner Smith (four) and a true freshman, Nick Stevens.

But it was Grayson, the 2012 starter until he broke a collarbone in the fifth game against Air Force, who trotted out for the game's first series. He was also seen practicing taking snaps from starting center Weston Richburg during pregame warmups 40 prior to kickoff.

Grayson, 6-foot-2 and 220 pounds, has started eight games during his CSU career. He has thrown for a total of 1,488 yards and nine touchdowns. And in a 22-17 victory over Colorado last year, Grayson went 14-of-21 for 173 yards passing and two touchdowns.

McElwain has said, however, it is likely that Colorado will use more than one quarterback in Sunday's game.

And speaking of the coaches, CU faithful will be watching with keen interest to see how the Buffs look under MacIntyre compared to the past two seasons under Jon Embree, who produced a combined record of 4-21.

Colorado State fans, on the other hand, hope to see substantial improvement in McElwain's second season. The former Alabama offensive coordinator has said that the 2013 Rams roster is faster and more athletic than a year ago thanks to an influx of young talent.

But, McElwain acknowledged that it's difficult to predict how new players will react when playing in the spotlight for the first time.

Las Vegas oddsmakers have made Colorado State as much as a 3-point favorite in the Showdown. But CU's MacIntyre may have an advantage in having played against McElwain's Rams last year when MacIntyre coached at San Jose State. The Spartans crushed CSU 40-20

in San Jose, Calif., with the hosts rolling up 568 yards of total offense, almost 200 more than the Rams could generate.

In preparing for Sunday's game, CSU's McElwain and his staff have studied 2012 San Jose State game films to get an idea of perhaps what to expect from Colorado. But that footage obviously isn't in the context of players MacIntyre is now coaching.

Recent history could be on the side of CU's MacIntyre. The past two victories in the Rocky Mountain Showdown have been claimed by coaches making their debut in the rivalry game: CU's Embree in 2011, CSU's McElwain in 2012. MacIntyre will try to make it three straight for newby coaches.

Tom Kensler: , tkensler@denverpost.com or twitter.com/tomkensler

Big-time prospect could jump-start CU program

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

Posted:

DenverPost.com

BOULDER — For Connor Wood, Sunday has always been a day for prayer. Last year, his prayers went into overtime.

It would be the day after another loss for the Colorado football team. Maybe it was the Buffaloes' 69-14 drubbing at Fresno State. Or the 48-0 shutout by Stanford. Or the one game he started, Washington's 38-3 beatdown at Folsom Field.

Wood would get down on his knees and pray. He prayed for peace and help and strength. He needed strength to walk into the Dal Ward Athletic Center on Mondays and be a leader as a quarterback through the darkest season in school history.

"I've had some difficult times with football," Wood said. "Last year was a very, very difficult time."

When Wood starts Sunday's season opener against Colorado State at Sports Authority Field at Mile High, however, the Buffaloes may have the quarterback they've sought all these years: a 6-foot-4, 225-pound rifleman who just three years ago was one of those Texas prep quarterback gods every school wanted.

Coming out of Houston's Second Baptist School, Wood had 14 major offers — Notre Dame, Florida State and Oklahoma among them. Texas coach Mack Brown visited his home and eventually got him to commit.

"Recruiting was an amazing, over-the-top experience," said Wood's mother, Shana.

"Sometimes he'd be on the phone: 'Who are you talking to?' He's talking to Charlie Weis or the coach at Alabama. It was thrilling."

It also confirmed a decision Wood made three years before. He was attending Second Baptist, a private, religious school of 1,100 total students PK-12. Wood was a starter his freshman year and the team went 4-6. He thought about transferring.

But the difference between Texas private and public school football is like the difference between FCS and FBS at the NCAA level. He lived in the district of Memorial High (enrollment 2,546).

"We looked at it, actually, but at the end we completely believed after thinking about it and praying about it, he should stay where he was," Shana said. "We believed if he was supposed to play in college, they'd find him."

Boy, did they.

So long, Longhorns

Second Baptist had a new coach entering Wood's sophomore season, Mike Sneed, and Wood

blossomed. He threw for 9,899 yards in high school. Rivals.com ranked him the sixth-best high school pro-style quarterback in the country.

Among those who scouted him was a recruiter at Texas A&M named Jeff Wood, Connor's older brother. Jeff had jumped from Second Baptist to A&M's quarterback stable, where he got buried under names such as Reggie McNeal and Ryan Tannehill.

Even if Connor hadn't been a Wood, Jeff thought Connor was the real deal.

"I did an exercise looking at three years of quarterbacks, going from Connor's class and the next two after that and I thought Connor was in a different league from a feet standpoint, from an arm-strength standpoint, from a size standpoint," said Jeff, now pursuing an MBA at the University of Houston. "It's hard to find a kid that has good feet, arm and accuracy as well as being tall and big."

Brown saw the same attributes. His Longhorns were coming off a berth in the national championship game and returned Garrett Gilbert, who nearly came off the bench in relief of the injured Colt McCoy and saved Texas against Alabama as a true freshman.

Brown's signing of McCoy's brother, Case, didn't bother Wood. He redshirted in 2010 and entered preseason camp in 2011 ready to fight for the backup job with Case McCoy and true freshman David Ash. Then came the first depth chart of that camp. Wood was listed last. "I was disappointed," he said. "Every competitor wants to be the top guy. If you're not, if you're not working for that, what are you doing?" Soon after, he transferred to CU.

In retrospect, Jeff Wood said, "We should've done more research on the overall depth chart."

Also, don't underestimate the difficulty of making the jump from a private Texas high school to the Big 12 Conference.

"It took me two years to get up to speed of how fast everything was," Jeff said. "When I was quarterback my senior year, I was bigger than my offensive linemen. That's not a good thing."

"Having more fun"

In seven games and one start a season ago, Wood was 21-of-42 passing for 265 yards, one touchdown and four interceptions. But now with new CU offensive coordinator Brian Lindgren, Wood's accuracy and leadership have skyrocketed.

"I'm having more fun than I have the last three years," Wood said.

Anyone around him can tell.

"It's been such a journey for a young person at such a young age to go through so many things," Shana said. "I can see it has brought him so much character and so much strength. It's been such a blessing to watch. As a mom, I couldn't be more proud."

Now all Wood must do is make football-starved Buffs Nation feel just as proud. If Colorado is

going to end a streak of seven consecutive losing seasons, this junior quarterback will be the reason.

Wood said he has no chip on his shoulder. But from somewhere deep in his soul, where he asked God for help each Sunday last season, he wants to show everyone he is the player all the top schools wanted, to show why Alabama coach Nick Saban called him.

"He'll surprise a lot of people this year," Jeff said. "People will go, 'Who's that guy?' "

John Henderson: jhenderson@denverpost.com or twitter.com/johnhendersondp

Rollercoaster ride

Colorado junior quarterback Connor Wood built a fabulous football resume in high school. Things haven't gone so smoothly in college. A look:

2006-09, Second Baptist School, Houston: Four-year starter threw for 9,899 yards and 110 TDs, including 2,669 yards and 19 TDs as a senior. Started in U.S. Army All-American Bowl.

2010, Texas: Red-shirted.

2011, Colorado: After finding himself buried on depth chart at Texas, transferred and sat out per NCAA rules.

2012, Colorado: Played in seven games, 1 start, 21-of-42 for 265 yards, one TD, 4 interceptions.

2013, Colorado: Named co-starter after spring drills. Named starter this fall after co-No. 1 Nick Hirschman transferred to Akron, returning starter Jordan Webb blew out his knee and Wood beat out true freshman Sefo Liufau and sophomores Jordan Gehrke and Stevie Joe Dorman in camp.