



By: Joel Broida

Head coach Mike MacIntyre calls out instructions to the offensive line.

Brooks: OL's Debut Decent, But Bernardi Expects More

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By: B.G. Brooks, Contributing Editor

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BOULDER – Connor Wood had nothing but praise for Colorado's offensive line after Sunday's season-opening win over Colorado State. Of course he did; Wood is CU's quarterback, and his buddies up front kept him standing tall and off the lawn for the entire game.

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Gary Bernardi concurred that the Buffs' O-line turned in a credible first-game performance in pass protection. But then Bernardi – he's the O-line coach – added a qualifier: "God forbid that from the first game they don't have the chance to get better."

That's this week's across-the-board objective for the Buffs: make the first-to-second game improvement that most football coaches point to as the most dramatic of the season. In Bernardi's area, getting better means continuing to keep Wood upright, relatively untouched and effective. And then there's the running game . . .

Wood's 33 completions accounted for 400 yards and three touchdowns in the 41-27 victory against the Rams, and Bernardi noted, "Considering it was the first game and a team that wanted to put pressure on us, I think (his O-line) responded pretty well. But there's obviously a lot of things we need to get better doing."

After what was close to a total rebuild up front, Bernardi opened with center Gus Handler, guards Kaiwi Crabb (left) and Daniel Munyer and tackles Jack Harris (left) and Stephane Nembot. Crabb, a junior making his first career start, said the O-line communicated well and was mostly efficient for a first game: "I felt good, felt we played well and were prepared."

Crabb, said Bernardi, "did an excellent job preparing. I thought he carried it over into the game as well as anybody."

All the other O-line starters came in with more game experience, although in Harris' case it was on the right side (guard and tackle) in his junior season rather than on the left. Munyer, a junior, had started at both guard and center over the past two seasons but was coming off a spring leg injury that limited his August practice time. Nembot opened seven games at right tackle last season while Handler saw his junior season abbreviated by a pair of injuries but started at center in five games.

Bernardi said Nembot continues to make progress and called the opener "an eye-opener" for the 6-7, 305-pound junior because of his significant number of plays (83) over four quarters. "He's never played that many consecutive plays in his life," Bernardi said. "He didn't get to play 100 plays in Pop Warner football."

"I don't want to say he survived, but the fact he was able to play all of those plays and compete without it being a massacre (was good). It's still a little bit of a roller coaster with him, but the valleys aren't as

deep – I guess that would be the best way to put it.”

Nembot wasn't alone in having a high number of total plays. Handler, Handler and Munyer also were in on all 83 snaps, while Crabb played 82 of the 83.

But Nembot was more pleased with the win than his performance. “It was a good beginning with a ‘W’ but I have a lot of work to do,” he said, pointing specifically to his pass protection. “I need better technique and footwork.”

He said his run blocking “is a little better compared to (pass protection). I’m required now to use a lot of technique in run blocking. I used to just go down and knock people down. But (now) it might be the wrong guy.”

CU’s switch to the pistol offense, said Nembot, has created “very different” blocking assignments than last season. Targeting who to block often changes on the fly, or as Nembot said: “The guy that you see first might go away and then you have to find a new guy. I have to learn to use my footwork and find the new guy that I need to block . . . that’s going to be more difficult and technique-based.”

It’s all part of what Bernardi calls “recognition on the run” – and that applies specifically to the run game, which netted 113 total yards in the opener. Bernardi wants his linemen to “strain to finish our blocks and be a little more aware of what the running back is looking at. Block the second level players, the linebackers. We need to see that a little better.”

He spent extra time at the conclusion of Wednesday’s practice reinforcing that idea of “understanding where the back is going, what he’s seeing. We’ve been doing it (in practice) and seeing the second-level players. It’s just a matter of the game, with bullets flying, everything you try and practice against the defense and then that defense isn’t lined up exactly the way we practiced it. And obviously it’s going a heck of a lot faster than it is with the scout team.”

The Buffs are preparing this week for Saturday’s home opener at Folsom Field (6 p.m., Pac-12 Network) against the University of Central Arkansas, a FCS opponent currently ranked No. 5 in that subdivision of college football. The Bears’ defensive front has the full attention of Bernardi and his group. The defensive ends are 6-6, 271-pound sophomore Johanthan Woodard and 6-0, 265-pound senior Markeith Gaines. Playing inside are 6-2, 281-pound senior tackle Matt Hornbuckle and 6-3, 291-pound junior nose man T.J. Randall. The Bears averaged 2.5 quarterback sacks last season and had a pair in last week’s blowout win (58-7) against Incarnate Word.

“They are very good, very athletic,” Nembot said. “I have to prepare myself for that. They’re very sound and know exactly what to do.”

Crabb echoed that: “They’re very athletic and big. They’re big on the inside, the play low and fire off the ball well. It’ll take good technique and hard work to keep them under control.”

Bernardi agrees with all of the above, but believes what makes the Bears especially formidable is their experience – specifically their experience at winning. “The thing I really respect about them is they have a lot of guys who have played a lot of games and have won a lot of games. That’s what I really respect,” he said. “Their front seven plays hard and tough. But they’ve won a lot of games. I don’t care what level you’re on, when you’ve won a lot of games you usually play pretty confident.”

The Bears finished 9-3 last season, but enjoyed winning streaks of three and six games before losing in the second round of the NCAA Division I playoffs to eventual runner-up Georgia Southern. UCA is 25-11 over the past three seasons.

Contact: BG.Brooks@Colorado.EDU

Colorado Buffaloes Football

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By: CUBuffs.com

Kicker Will Oliver turned in a busy afternoon in last Sunday's season-opener.

Brooks: Oliver Can Kick And More, But Don't Push It

Release: September 06, 2013

By: B.G. Brooks, Contributing Editor

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BOULDER – Will Oliver will tell you with as much honesty as he can muster that he's a football player who just happens to be on scholarship as a placekicker. Maybe he's right.

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For obvious reasons, most special teams coaches shudder when thinking of their kickers making tackles on kickoffs. But take a peek at Colorado's one-game statistics and see who's tied for the lead in special teams points – that's from tackles, forced fumbles, fumbles recovered, wedge breaks, etc.

The 5-11, 190-pound Oliver, no one's idea of a beast, and freshman defensive back Tedric Thompson each accumulated three special teams points in CU's 41-27 opening win over CSU. Oliver finished with two solo tackles and assisted on another. It was, ahem, a career-best hitting performance; Oliver had made one tackle in his previous two seasons. Three in one game should earn him combat pay.

Check back in mid-October and Wild Will likely – or so hopes special teams coordinator Toby Neinas – will have surrendered his perch at the top of the ST tackling chart. If that doesn't happen, let's just say the Buffs' first-game kick coverage shortcomings have gone viral. But Neinas and his boss, Mike MacIntyre, say the coverage issues – CSU had a 74-yard scoring punt return and an 84-yard kickoff return – are being addressed.

As for our kicker-turned-headhunter, Oliver concedes, "I was a little aggressive and I've been talked to about that. I think I had one (tackle) inside the 25 yard-line, which I'm not supposed to do. (Neinas) has us sprinting down the field then kind of slowing down, which I hadn't done before. I kind of jogged down the field. Sprinting down, I'm a little farther ahead of where I usually am. So when I start to break down, maybe it's a little too close . . . in case something breaks I'm the last line of defense. There's a fine line about (kickers) making tackles but you can't miss them."

In Oliver's "day job" – placekicking – he was pretty impressive, too. He opened his junior season by hitting all four of his field goal attempts and tying his career-long make with a 52-yarder that put the Buffs back in the lead (26-24) early in the fourth quarter.

Oliver had said in August camp that he believed his range had increased to 55 yards in – and last weekend's 52-yard kick had at least four or five yards to spare. "I was proud of him," Neinas said. "I thought his leg looked really live. He did a nice job preparing for the game and limiting his kicks leading up to the game, including pregame. He had an awful lot of pop in his leg."

After a productive preseason camp, Oliver entered the opener feeling "more confident, more relaxed and with much less nerves. You never know until you're out there on the field whether you have them or not. I had the usual pregame nerves, but on the 52 (yarder) I was so calm about it I was almost not prepared for it. I didn't let it catch up with me; I just trotted out on the field like we always do and then it was snap, hold, kick and done."

Simple as that.

Neinas' seasonal goal for his placekickers is to have 16-18 attempts, "and we're certainly on track for that," he added. "I don't know if we can go beyond 18, but if we can get him 18 attempts and we hit 85 percent or better we can really, really help our football team. Will will tell you he wants 100 percent on 20 attempts . . . I have to try and present it in a different light."

Oliver also was perfect on three extra point attempts and would rather see his offense present him with those opportunities on Saturday night when the Buffs open at Folsom Field against Central Arkansas (6 p.m., Pac-12 Network).

Oliver also kicked off eight times in the opener, recording two touchbacks among those eight tries. And following Justin Castor's season-ending leg injury, Oliver likely will retain the kickoff duty permanently. With all of Sunday's kicking, Oliver admitted his right leg tired "a little bit." But also said shifting winds at Sports Authority Field at Mile High factored into at least one of his kickoffs not reaching the end zone.

"In that stadium there's different levels of wind," Oliver said. "I thought one of my (kicks) that dropped around the goal line, I thought that was one of my best kicks. And it just kind of died. Then we started to do some other stuff because we had a little coverage stuff going on. But obviously in the game you adapt on the fly and move on."

Neinas didn't mention the shifting wind, but took blame for the short kick: "(It) was probably more me than him; I was concerned about coverage for obvious reasons at that time. I said, 'Will get me a touchback here if you can.' He tried to over-hit the ball. That's a little bit me over-coaching him. But, overall, yeah, it was a great way to start."

Oliver agreed, but filed it all away almost immediately and began looking ahead. Last weekend's overall performance, he said, was merely a nice way to get started: "Obviously you want to build on everything you have. So it's a new week, new team. A lot of people will say I was four-for-four; well, going into this game it's zero-for-zero. It's only the next one that matters."

"It's good to have some success right at the beginning; it gives you something to build on. Last year I can't remember when I had my first kick or two, but it didn't come for a while. You're kind of waiting for it, kind of champing at the bit to get an opportunity. So it's nice to get out there (early) and get a chance in different situations – short, long and everything in between."

"Everything in between" could include those tackles. It's OK if he continues to make them, but isn't it better for all concerned if he's not forced to? No one minds if gets his special teams points in other ways.

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Colorado Buffaloes Football

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Football: CU Buffs' Awuzie finds his niche at nickelback quickly

By Brian Howell Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

After arriving in Boulder in late June, Chidobe Awuzie put all of his energy into one thing.

"I wanted to play," the true freshman cornerback said. "I'm pretty sure every freshman wants to play. I was very confident in my abilities.

"My expectation was to play and to perform on this team."

He's now doing that. Just a few months after high school graduation, Awuzie is the starting nickelback for the Colorado Buffaloes.

"I just try to listen to my coaches," he said of how he got to this point so early. "They get on me sometimes for things. I'm a freshman still, so I'm going to make mistakes. Whatever they try to tell me, I try to correct it as soon as possible and try to remember whatever they say."

At Oak Grove High School in San Jose, Calif., Awuzie did it all. He ran for 1,285 yards, he caught seven passes, he picked off four passes, he blocked four kicks and he even played a little bit at quarterback.

Awuzie wasn't heavily recruited, but San Jose State, Washington State and Colorado State were among the other schools that pursued him. New CU coach Mike MacIntyre began recruiting Awuzie when MacIntyre was at San Jose State and kept at it when he took the CU job.

"When I came here (for an official visit), to be honest, I didn't know if I was going to like it or not," Awuzie said. "I was just going to come on the visit, see what happened and when I came over here I was amazed by the campus, the environment, the coaches, the people and the players. I fell in love with it."

It hasn't taken long for coaches to fall in love with Awuzie's play. Early on in training camp, he proved himself to be among CU's top three corners, along with returning starters Greg Henderson and Kenneth Crawley.

"When camp kept going on and real practices started and I was still nickel, I felt real happy and I was comfortable," he said.

Not too comfortable, though. He knows there are plenty of other corners on the roster pushing to take his spot.

"I don't know if I cemented that (spot); that's up to the coaches," he said. "Whoever is the best player is going to play that week."

Playing nickelback is new to Awuzie. He's used to lining up on the outside and being on an island with a receiver. Nickelback tests his talent in a variety of ways.

"It's way different," he said. "I always knew nickel, the position, but I never played it. I played

corner, I played safety before. Nickel is kind of the combination of the two of those, and a little linebacker.

"I wasn't that comfortable at first, but then going on, learning the techniques from the coaches, learning the plays, I got real comfortable."

He looked comfortable on Sunday in his debut against Colorado State. Awuzie played 25 snaps and was in on three tackles and broke up a Rams' pass.

"I was a little jittery," he said. "That was probably the most jittery I've been before a game since Pop Warner days. When the game started and the first couple of series went by, I felt comfortable and it felt like practice."

With four years ahead of him, Awuzie is sure to have some ups and downs in Boulder, but he's hoping people remember him for providing good moments.

"I would like to be known as someone who changed the program with the other freshmen, and listened to the people above me and respected Colorado," he said.

"I'm really excited. It's a great team, and I feel like I made the right decision on signing day."

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Football: CU Buffs looking for more production from RBs

By Brian Howell Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

Colorado tailbacks didn't find much room to run against Colorado State on Sunday.

The Buffaloes are hoping to fix that as they head into the home opener on Saturday against Central Arkansas.

"I think there are some things that we can do better in the backfield at running back, in terms of being on our tracks and pressing some of the angles a little bit better and running through some arm tackles," CU running backs coach Klayton Adams said. "This week in the backfield we really focused on those things and I think that we can definitely improve as we go."

CU finished with 109 rushing yards, but only 74 of those came from the tailbacks, on 30 carries (2.47 yards per rush). The longest run by a tailback was a 9-yarder from Tony Jones.

A healthy Christian Powell will help. The sophomore starter led the team with 42 yards on 15 carries, but was hobbled in the second half by a thigh bruise. He said Thursday that he'll be ready to go Saturday.

"I've been getting it taken care of, so it's nothing too big," he said.

Powell said he believes he and the other backs have the ability to put up some bigger numbers on the ground.

"You just work at it," he said. "It's what we work at in practice every day. You've just got to be patient with it and it'll come."

Powell and Jones (13 carries for 27 yards) both got a lot of touches last week, and head coach Mike MacIntyre said he could see Donta Abron (two carries for 5 yards) getting more attempts.

Spreading the ball around among the tailbacks could be common all season.

"When you're trying to put some drives together, which is part of our philosophy, the fresher the guy you've got in there, sometimes it's going to make the difference on getting to a hole a little bit faster or getting around an edge a little bit faster," Adams said. "We have the depth to definitely be able to do that."

Powell, who led the Buffs with 691 yards as a true freshman last year, said he's more than happy to share the load.

"I like that, because it's good for all of us," he said. "We can throw new guys in there, so that way we get a lot of reps, but we stay fresh."

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Henderson: CU Buffaloes, beware of FCS football teams, they're tough to beat

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

Posted:

DenverPost.com

It's hard staying objective when I see a quarterback for Eastern Washington make Oregon State look like Oregon Tech. I admit smirking while seeing sideline shots of hang-dog South Florida players as McNeese State puts a 50-spot on them.

The David sympathizer in all of us had an early Christmas last weekend. A record eight FCS teams upset FBS Goliaths. Headlining the uprising was Eastern Washington's 49-46 win at No. 25 Oregon State, the third time an FCS team beat a ranked FBS team. McNeese State's 53-21 rout of South Florida was the worst ever handed down by an FCS school.

Colorado coach Mike MacIntyre has put his players on red alert as Central Arkansas, ranked fifth in FCS, hits Folsom Field on Saturday night. It's one of 34 games matching FCS vs. FBS teams, 34 chances for a small school to make national headlines.

The upsets aren't shocking if you look closer. Here are four reasons:

- **Scholarship limitations.** This is the obvious one. FCS teams have only 63 scholarships. But when FBS schools went to 85 in 1992, talent started trickling down to schools with directions in their name.

In Texas, 371 players signed FBS scholarships in 2012. Think that's all the players who can play good college football?

- **Early commitments.** Perennial top-25 powers get early commitments from players, starting in their junior year. That leaves a lot of late bloomers flying under the radar as seniors, players the big schools overlook.

Central Arkansas quarterback Wynrick Smothers played behind former LSU quarterback Jordan Jefferson for two years at Destrehan (La.) High School. Smothers didn't make a start until his senior year and led Destrehan to a 14-0 record and a state title. He was the Southland Conference offensive player of the year in 2012.

"If you look at the Deep South right now, I'd wager to say Texas, Arkansas, Auburn, Alabama, Florida, Florida State, every one of those programs, has anywhere from 18 to 23 commitments already," said Central Arkansas coach Clint Conque. "Some have a handful of commitments for 2015."

- **Veteran teams.** The NFL doesn't raid the Southland Conference for juniors heading to the pros. FCS coaches get their best players to stay until their eligibility is used up. Central Arkansas starts 17 upperclassmen, including three grad students on defense.

"You take a young man when he's young, he stays there four or five years, he graduates, he grows up, he starts to shave twice a day," Conque said. "He comes in and goes from 185

pounds to 215 pounds or 255 pounds to 315 pounds."

- **Health.** Across the board, FCS teams face depth problems. But early in the season, when they're healthy, some of their starting lineups match up well across the line.

"I think the two things that get you playing the FBS teams are the kicking game and conditioning," said McNeese State coach Matt Viator. "If you can hold your own in the kicking game and you can get in excellent physical condition because you're facing a numbers problem, then offensively and defensively you have a chance."

This weekend doesn't appear to have many big headline games. I disagree. I think there are 34 of them.

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Upstart CU Buffs face real bear in Central Arkansas

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

Posted:

DenverPost.com

BOULDER — Fear the Stripes.

All week Colorado coach Mike MacIntyre has tried to instill the fear of Central Arkansas in his upstart Buffaloes. Its quarterback is the Southland Conference offensive player of the year. Of its two defensive ends, MacIntyre said, "When you see them, you're going to say, 'Wow! Where'd they get those guys?'"

Hey, he may even bring up the stripes. Central Arkansas has been known as much for its gaudy purple- and gray-striped football field as 11 winning seasons in the past 13 years.

Now the Bears, the Southland Conference champions, are even better. And the déj... vu around here is downright weird.

A year ago, Colorado State upset Colorado with a first-year coach and then North Dakota State, an FCS school, came in and poleaxed the Rams off their cloud, 22-7. The Bison went on to win the FCS national title. On Sunday, Colorado upset CSU with a first-year coach, and at 6 p.m. Saturday at Folsom Field comes Central Arkansas, ranked fifth in the FCS. Last weekend eight FCS schools beat FBS teams. Only two are ranked higher than Central Arkansas.

The architect behind the Bears is Clint Conque, in his 14th year. As MacIntyre did at San Jose State, Conque (career record 99-54) knows what rocks to look under to find talent.

He found his latest this year at Bastrop (La.) High. Jatavious Wilson debuted last week with a 93-yard kickoff return for a touchdown and two TD receptions in a 58-7 win over Incarnate Word, a transitional FCS school. As a senior at Bastrop High, he had 79 receptions for 1,343 yards and 21 touchdowns. One problem: He was 5-foot-9 "and 170 pounds dripping wet," Conque said.

Iowa State and Texas A&M contacted him the week of signing day but by then he had decided on Central Arkansas. The only school Conque beat was McNeese State.

"He has all the skill set," Conque said. "He can change direction. He runs good routes. And it's hard for a BCS school to bring back to campus a two-star, 5-foot-9 wide receiver."

Another example of finding undiscovered talent is defensive end Jonathan Woodard. Conque signed him as a 215-pound defensive end out of Ravenwood High in Brentwood, Tenn. Conque only beat the Ivy Leagues on him. Three years later, he's a 6-6, 271-pounder and was last year's Southland freshman of the year.

Take senior quarterback Wynrick Smothers, the league offensive MVP who threw for 3,101 yards and 31 touchdowns a season ago. He started only one year at quarterback in high school, but he led Destrehan (La.) High to the state Class 5A title.

"Wynrick was recruited by schools in our conference, but as an athlete," Conque said. "We were

the only school to say, 'You have a future as a quarterback and we'll develop you as a quarterback.' "

Central Arkansas also has more depth than most FCS teams. Conque has 11 FBS transfers on his roster. Only two are starters: nose tackle Matthew Hornbuckle (Buffalo) and preseason All-America place-kicker Eddie Camara (Arkansas).

"Central Arkansas ... I'm telling you," MacIntyre said. "I am not blowing smoke."

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TV info

Central Arkansas at Colorado, 6 p.m., Pac-12 Mountain

(Channel 430 on Comcast and 5453 on Dish; DirecTV doesn't carry the Pac-12 networks)

[ESPN.com: Pac-12](#)[\[Print without images\]](#)

Thursday, September 5, 2013

Buff s put first win in the rear-view mirror

By Kevin Gemmell

The moment was great. The moment was exciting.

The moment has passed.

That was the message Colorado coach Mike MacIntyre wanted to relay to his players this week following their season-opening 41-27 victory over rival Colorado State.

“It was very uplifting to see the joy on their faces and how hard they have been working to see the work pay off,” MacIntyre said. “I told them it was a great win for us and for our program, but it’s just one. It’s just the first one. Now our guys have put that behind them and we’re working on our next game against Central Arkansas, which is a really good football team. The way everything went last weekend with seven FCS teams beating seven FBS teams, it’s pretty amazing.”



The Buffs are all-too familiar with the wrath of the FCS. Last year they blew two leads and fell in Week 2 to Sacramento State, 30-28, on a 30-yard field goal as time expired. For those who were there, it was a gut-wrenching followup from a blown fourth-quarter lead to Colorado State the week before.

MacIntyre wasn’t there. But watching him on Saturday, you’d think he was. The way he reacted to Saturday’s victory -- the critical fourth-down measurement late in the game, the sideline animation -- you’d think he was carrying all of the burdens of last season rather than coming off a year in which he coached San Jose State into the top 25. But his emotion was as raw and unchecked as his players’.

“I was just so excited for those kids,” MacIntyre said. “The seniors have all had three different coaches. They lost to that team last year. There’s nothing like your first game of the season. When you add into it that it’s a rivalry game and you add to it a stadium that’s divided 50-50, there is a lot of excitement and emotion that goes into it. I knew that when we held them there that was basically the dagger, and it was done. It was exciting.

“... We talked about it in the locker room as soon as the game was over. Enjoy this, they’ve earned it but it’s just one game, so we take every game as a season within itself.”

It sounds like the message has gotten through -- at least at the soundbite level.

“I think it’s just a preventative statement just for all the guys to understand that its only one game,” quarterback [Connor Wood](#) said. “There’s a lot more to go and real winners ... it doesn’t faze them if they win a bunch of games and the media says a lot of good things about you, but they don’t let it get to their head and you stay hungry. I think that’s what he wants to get across to us.”

The Week 1 victory matches Colorado's win total from a year ago -- a bummer of a season that saw the Buffs at the bottom of nearly every major statistical category and ended with the firing of Jon Embree. So the victory -- especially one over a rival -- was welcomed.

"It got the bad taste out of our mouths from this offseason because it's been a long offseason," Wood said. "Especially losing last year to CSU makes it feel a lot better heading into this week but then again its only one game so we have a long way to go."
