

QUARTERBACKS

BY JOHN BORTON

Shea Patterson is gone, and it's time for the ultimate next man up — a new Michigan quarterback. There are talented contenders, but no one who has yet led the Wolverines into a game, let alone led the team to victory.

The single-most scrutinized position in all of Michigan athletics will draw extra attention once again. Especially without spring practice, expect Jim Harbaugh not to name a starting QB until fall camp, and maybe late in that process. Whoever best combines production and leadership will become the most talked-about individual in U-M sports.

BY THE NUMBERS

1st

Patterson's rank among Michigan quarterbacks regarding career passing yards per game. His 217.7 average soared to the top of the list.

2nd

Patterson became the second-fastest passer in U-M history to reach 5,000 yards through the air (24 games played).

9

Interceptions tossed last year by Wolverine quarterbacks, tied for the second-lowest total in the Harbaugh era and second lowest at U-M since 2006.

96th

National ranking for Patterson's completion percentage last season. He made good on 56.2 percent of his throws, a number Michigan would like to see improved by its next starting quarterback.

WHO'S GONE

Shea Patterson

The transfer who plugged in and earned third-team All-Big Ten notice twice by conference coaches, and Michigan's MVP award in 2019, is off to the professional ranks. He threw for 3,061 yards as a senior, second most in Michigan history for a single season, and more than 5,661 in his truncated U-M career.

WHO'S BACK

Redshirt junior

Dylan McCaffrey

McCaffrey has shown plenty over the past two seasons, filling in capably at Notre Dame two years ago, throwing a 26-yard TD pass against the Irish this past year and more. He's demonstrated he can run as well, with a 44-yard bolt against Wisconsin two years ago. Now it's time to prove he's Michigan's next man in the fishbowl.

Redshirt sophomore Joe Milton

Milton possesses all the physical tools in the world, including the ability to cover 80 percent of a football field with a single throw. He's also mentally strong, waving off notions of a transfer and insisting he'll compete here. He's learning touch on his throws and, if he does so successfully, watch out.

TOP NEWCOMER

True freshman Dan Villari

Villari involved somewhat of a break-glass-in-case-of-emergency pickup, when U-M's top QB prospect (JD Johnson) was discovered to have a heart issue. Jim Harbaugh insists, though, that the native of Massapequa, N.Y., belongs at this level.

POSITION BATTLE TO WATCH

This is a two-man show, with a couple of very different candidates. McCaffrey has been around a year longer, and gotten a little more run, usually impressing when he's on the field. But he's also needed to get bigger and stronger, and has been sent to the sidelines with both a broken collarbone and a concussion over the past couple of years.

Milton is bigger, stronger and possesses the more powerful arm. Accuracy comes into play here, and he'll have a chance to show he can put the sort of spin on the ball that not only gets it far down the field, but to the right spots and in a catchable fashion.

There's no reason both can't see the field in 2020. But there's only one No. 1, and that battle will play out through the summer and fall.



DYLAN McCaffrey

PHOTO BY LON HORWEDEL

QUOTABLE

"This is going to come down to execution on the field and leadership. You've got to have great leadership from the quarterback position."

— Michigan All-American Jon Jansen