

Cards might pass on QB

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Green says team likely to stick with McCown

By DARREN URBAN
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In a surprising twist Tuesday, Cardinals coach Dennis Green said the odds were "slim" that Arizona will take a quarterback in the first three rounds of April's NFL draft.

That means no Eli Manning or Ben Roethlisberger. It also means Josh McCown, named the starter last week by Green,

will have a real chance to be the long-term quarterback answer for the Cardinals.

"Josh McCown, I think he is going to be a great one," Green said. "I think people have a hard time believing it, but when I buy into a quarterback, I really do. That's my track record.

"Nothing against Eli Manning or Drew Henson or Ben Roethlisberger, but we have to be sold on what we see a player do. The proof... will be how Josh McCown does over the next few years."

Green would not



Dennis Green

completely rule out taking a quarterback in the first round. But he emphasized McCown is entrenched as the starter.

Green added that he thought Pittsburgh wide receiver Larry Fitzgerald, who declared for the draft Monday, was the best player in the country.

It's a stunning turn of events for McCown, who left

many in the organization shaking their heads in disappointment as recently as Dec. 7, when he threw a backward pass in his own end zone during relief duty in a 50-14 loss to San Francisco. It was a virtual certainty the team would chase a franchise quarterback in the draft.

Then he started the final three games, playing better than expected. And Green came in, liked what he saw of McCown's tape, and cut former starter Jeff Blake last

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Top non-QB's

Here's a list of some of the top non-quarterbacks available in the NFL draft in April.

Sean Taylor, S, Miami
Larry Fitzgerald, WR, Pittsburgh
Robert Gallery, OT, Iowa
Kellen Winslow Jr., TE, Miami
Vince Wilfork, DT, Miami
Randy Starks, DT, Maryland
Shawn Andrews, OT, Arkansas
Kenechi Udeze, DE, USC
Steven Jackson, RB, Oregon St.
DeAngelo Hall, CB, Virginia Tech
Roy Williams, WR, Texas
Reggie Williams, WR, Washington
Derrick Strait, CB, Oklahoma
Tommie Harris, DT, Oklahoma

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week.

"It's amazing when you look where I was at the beginning of December," McCown said. "If I don't start those three games, we're not talking whether I can start long term, we're talking whether I can start for Barcelona (in NFL Europe)."

The Cardinals will need to sign a free-agent quarterback if they don't draft one, since McCown and Preston Parsons are the only quarterbacks on the roster.

Arizona will have a representative in Houston for the workout of former baseball farmhand Henson, scheduled for this week. Henson, whose rights are held by the Texans, could end up back in the draft if the Texans do not work out a sign-and-trade deal.

The Cardinals also worked out Canadian Football League star quarterback Ricky Ray this week.

But in both cases, Green said the scouting was routine and not necessarily because the team will make a move for either player.

Green's theme with his team stresses the roster as it now stands. Not only doesn't he want his players thinking they will be rescued by some star rookie quarterback, he doesn't want them counting on anyone new, in the draft or through free agency.

"(To make the playoffs) it's not some guys out there," Green said. "That's not realistic. It's the guys in here, the coaches in here, right now."

Green's comments could be simply a start on an early draft smokescreen. So many had already assumed the Cardinals would choose Manning or Roethlisberger with their top pick, it's possible Green was looking for a diversion. Green also said that if there is a surprise — say, Henson falling from the mid-first round to the Cards' second-round pick, for example — things could change on draft day.

McCown understands that, although he said that Green's public stumping for McCown is the same message he had been getting privately from his new coach.

"There is still a long time before the draft," McCown said. "But I have a lot of respect for coach Green. He says one thing and follows through with it. If (not taking a quarterback) is the case, I think he sees my ability and thinks he can do something with it."

That, Green said, is exactly the point.

"I think I understand quarterbacks," Green said. "At one point, Brett Favre was a backup quarterback in Atlanta no one knew about. At one time, Matt Hasselbeck was on the street. Quarterbacks have to be developed.

"The team has to understand, this only works if you give the guy driving the car the support. That guy isn't out there somewhere. We have that guy in the program already."

EXTRA POINT: The Cards also worked out cornerback Eric Joyce and defensive back Todd Howard this week.

CONTACT WRITER: (480) 898-6495
or durban@aztrib.com