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Mitch confident he's ready if needed

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South Carolina's No. 2 quarterback, whoever he might be, will be just one minor injury away from being thrown into real game action this season.

Redshirt freshman Connor Mitch, the presumed favorite to win the job, isn't rooting for redshirt senior Dylan Thompson to twist an ankle, but said Tuesday he'd be "absolutely" comfortable with jumping into a real game if his number is called.

"I would never wish that upon him, but I put in work last spring and summer to get to the place where I am right now, so I think I'm ready," Mitch said.

Mitch redshirted as a true freshman last year, entering this spring in a competition with redshirt sophomore Brendan Nosovitch and walk-on Perry Orth for the right to back up Thompson.

Nosovitch fell out of favor as a passer with head coach Steve Spurrier, taking reps as a tight end, wide receiver and Wildcat quarterback instead this preseason. But true freshman Michael Scarnecchia stepped in to take his place in the three-man competition, impressing Spurrier with some of his throws in the first two weeks of preseason practice.

College football teams virtually never go a full season without a backup quarterback throwing a pass. Thompson played a major role in USC's offense over the past two seasons as a backup, passing for 1,810 yards and 14 touchdowns in relief of Connor Shaw.

Mitch, who enrolled a semester early to practice with the Gamecocks in the spring of 2013, said he used the offseason to prepare for a similar role. He credits Thompson with mentoring him since his arrival at USC, teaching him everything from what to look for before each snap to how to react to what defenses do once the play is in motion.

"Going into the spring, that was my time to get comfortable with the offense, with the fall redshirting," said the former four-star prospect from Raleigh, North Carolina. "I'm comfortable with it now."

Mitch says he's faster, stronger and smarter than he was a year ago, noting that after spending the fall watching the team play from the sideline, the offense began to make more sense in spring practice.

"It all started in the spring when I started to get a lot of reps, and it kind of transitioned from summer into fall," said Mitch, who passed for 4,661 yards and 63 touchdowns as a senior at Wakefield High School.

Mitch said he's more confident running the offense in practice than he was a season ago, though he admits he still has room to improve.

"The coaches put me in a great position to lead the offense, and I think I'm doing a pretty good job of it," Mitch said.

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