



Athletic Director Mike Bohn believes CU's men's basketball program is more attractive now than ever before.
Photo Courtesy: CUBuffs.com



04/14/2010 B.G. Brooks, Contributing Editor

Bohn Wants Search To Be Thorough, But Expeditious

BOULDER - The University of Colorado's goal in replacing Jeff Bzdelik is to move swiftly, but efficiently. Athletic director Mike Bohn said Wednesday that CU has no timeline for hiring a new men's basketball coach, but added, "We have a respect for the importance of moving forward quickly."

Rather than exercising careless expediency, Bohn said CU is intent on finding "the right coach" to succeed Bzdelik, who was introduced as Wake Forest's new head coach Wednesday morning in Winston-Salem, N.C.

Bzdelik's former CU players said the timing of his exit stunned them most. With solid steps taken over the past three seasons toward rebuilding the program, the Buffaloes had their sights on an NCAA Tournament berth next March - with Bzdelik leading them.

"I'm angry, but you can't let that affect you; you still have decisions to make and you move forward," senior-to-be Cory Higgins said. "I only have one year left, so I don't have time to be angry; I just have to move on."

Given almost five full days of lead time before Bzdelik's departure became official, CU had a search committee ready to begin work on identifying Bzdelik's successor. Also, most of the committee's parameters and *modus operandi* were in place after the search for a women's basketball coach. It produced former Buffaloes player Linda Lappe, whose hiring

BUFFALO EXTRAS



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Mike Bohn 4.14.10
04/15/2010

was announced on Monday.

"For the last three days we've tried to do as much work as possible without compromising Jeff's leadership in the event he had stayed," Bohn said.

But in retrospect, Bzdelik staying put after the deliberations with Wake Forest had gone as far as they did from Friday to Tuesday might have strained Bzdelik's credibility with CU's administration to the breaking point.

The men's search committee will be composed of chairman Tom McGrath, senior associate athletic director; associate AD for student services Ceal Barry, who chaired the women's search and will have administrative oversight over the women's program; Rocko DeLuca, director of development for the CU Foundation; Julie Manning, associate AD/compliance and financial aid; Will Simpson, director of ticket operations; and Andy Horowitz, of the school's human resources department.

Since news of Bzdelik's interest in leaving CU became public late last week, Bohn said he and other school officials had heard from NBA coaches/administrators Larry Brown, George Karl (by text message) and Rod Higgins; longtime in-state hoops coach Bobby Hofman, and "ADs (athletic directors) from the West Coast to the East Coast."

"It's really interesting to hear from someone and you ask them about Coach X and they tell you about Coach Z and what you learn," Bohn said. "That's served us well in the past. We're trying to return all the phone calls and do as much intelligence work as possible."

ANOTHER ASSIST FOR BILLUPS: Bohn first heard of Bzdelik's interest in the Wake Forest opening from ex-Buffs/current Nuggets guard Chauncey Billups.

"He was the one who first gave me the impression that we had an issue with Jeff," Bohn said. "I received a text from him (Friday) . . . I responded I wasn't aware of what he was talking about, but I quickly found out there was some validity to it."

Bohn said he appreciated Billups' outreach: "He cares about this program; he's a great Colorado kid . . . it's refreshing and inspiring to have that type of individual helping us."

Bohn said Billups keeping the best interests of CU at heart was what the athletic department needs in all sports.

"We have the tendency to divide rather than unite," Bohn said. "And I think it's why we're spending so much time and trying to be as thorough as we can and do all the different things we're doing . . . we want to continue to unite and present a support level behind the program that gives us a chance rather than continue to have factions that disappear from time to time. That's not healthy for us - and that is no easy task; that's a significant challenge for us to try and do that."

Bohn said he hoped to keep Billups informed on the progress and direction of the search, but realized the Nuggets star is about to begin the NBA Playoffs.

FINDING MR. RIGHT: CU believed it found "the right fit" in all of its most recent men's hoops hires, only to discover otherwise.

The men's program, Bohn said, "is in a better place" after three years under Bzdelik, adding, "I think the key thing is that we have made progress; we've put a lot into helping support Jeff and his staff. His players have put in a lot of blood, sweat and tears as well."

He acknowledged Chancellor Phil DiStefano for his role in shepherding the new \$10.8 million basketball/volleyball practice facility, as well as the improvements to the Coors Events Center.

"We want a coach that can take advantage of all that passion and energy and steer it and herd it in the right direction," Bohn said, calling the attractiveness of the CU program "night and day" over what it has ever been.

As for finding the elusive "perfect fit," Bohn noted, "You never know until it goes . . . we think Linda (Lappe) is a great fit - all the things she stands for, impeccable work ethic, integrity, all those things. But in 10 years if we look at her record and it isn't so good, we say that wasn't such a good fit. It's tough . . ."

He referred to CU hiring Joe Harrington, from Long Beach State - the "hottest coach on the West Coast" at the time. But it didn't turn out so well. Harrington was fired and replaced by Ricardo Patton - Bzdelik's predecessor.

Bohn said the search committee hopes to find someone who has "familiarity with Colorado, familiarity with the history, the challenges, what it takes to grow here, someone that's excited about and recognizes the commitment made to basketball here that is probably unprecedented in the institution's history.

"We've got to find somebody who can seize that opportunity, take that equity that's been built over the last three years . . . that's all momentum. We want somebody who can take advantage of that and keep pushing the rock uphill rather than have it roll right back on top of them."

The players, meanwhile, hope the committee settles on "a players' coach."

Said senior-to-be Levi Knutson: "At any school that's what the players want - somebody they can play hard for, somebody they look up to and respect. I know there's a lot of good coaches out there who do that. I know coach McClain is one of them."

Knutson said Bzdelik "tried real hard to be a players' coach We wish him the best over there (at Wake Forest)."

THE MCCLAIN FACTOR: In the wake of Bzdelik's departure, several players - including freshman All-America selection Alec Burks - have publicly expressed hope that Associate Head Coach Steve McClain be promoted to head coach.

Bohn said McClain would be given an interview, but made no promises beyond that.

"You factor it in, but I think every AD or general manager knows that you hire coaches that can work with your players and make that work," Bohn said. "I respect Alec's passion for Steve; we have respect for Steve. We will certainly look forward to an interview session with Steve, but in the end we've got to do what's right for the program long term. We think the world of Alec, but we think the world of all of his teammates."

Bohn said he respected McClain's leadership in Bzdelik's absence. McClain has helped oversee spring conditioning work and academic responsibilities. He has not been named interim coach.

Higgins said it was "no secret" who the players would push as Bzdelik's successor: "We've expressed this to many people that we'd like coach McClain to be here. For me, the most important thing was to try to keep everybody together."

Asked if there would be a splintering effect if McClain isn't the school's choice, Higgins said, "It could be . . . a couple of our players have said it publicly, but that's something that could happen. I hope it doesn't; I hope we don't even have to go down that path."

But Higgins also said his father, Rod, the general manager of the Charlotte Bobcats, told him to "keep an open mind . . . you don't always get what you want, so you have to move on."

Two other possible candidates - Northern Colorado coach Tad Boyle and former Metro State College coach Mike Dunlap - have emerged in media speculation.

Bohn called both "intriguing candidates," but said it was premature to talk specifics about individuals.

THE WORST TIMING: Wednesday was the first day of the spring signing period, which runs into mid-May. Wake Forest isn't expected to have any trouble holding together what analysts have predicted will be a Top 10 recruiting class.

CU isn't so lucky. Bzdelik had targeted several inside players as prospects, and Bohn said one still had a weekend visit scheduled.

But landing the "bigs" that the Buffs so desperately need could be a too-tall order.

"I think that's one of the most frustrating pieces of this transition - the timing related to recruiting," Bohn said. "That is a challenge. But we do have a recruit coming in this weekend. We'll try to take advantage of the great work the staff has done, despite Jeff's departure."

Knutson said he and his teammates were trying to compensate for their head coach's departure: "We'd like to. Obviously, with some uncertainty, it's going to be hard to get the recruits we want in here. But we're going to try and keep all our guys together in that locker room so that when a coach is named we've got a solid group of guys who have had some success . . . so that recruits will want to come join us and we'll have success next year."

AND THAT'S SUCCESS? Bzdelik left CU with a 36-58 record, three consecutive losing seasons and no postseason appearances. So what did Wake Forest Athletic Director Ron Wellman see in his newest hire?

"You have to dig deeper than the numbers," Wellman said. "You look at where Colorado was three years ago ... He really had to start over. Their situation was very challenging, so you can't take a three-year snippet and compare it to other programs, whether it be in his conference or another conference or us. That would be totally unfair, and obviously, we dug a lot deeper than that to look at the program and the progress of the program."

Bzdelik has a career college coaching record of 111-105 and lost his only NCAA tournament game as a head coach (Air Force).

PAY UP . . . SOMEBODY: Being a private institution, Wake Forest isn't bound to reveal how its coaches' contracts are structured - and Bzdelik's numbers were not revealed.

But Wellman did divulge this: Bzdelik will be responsible for paying the \$500,000 needed to buy him out of his CU contract.

Said Wellman: "We do not pay buyouts, no."

Asked if he believed Bzdelik would pay CU the money owed, Bohn said, "I can't speculate on that."

In mid-October 2009, Wake Forest extended former coach Dino Gaudio's original five-year contract for two years, or through the 2013-14 season. Gaudio was believed to be earning upwards of \$850,000 - about \$200,000 more than Bzdelik was making at CU.

LONG-DISTANCE GOODBYES: At Wednesday's press conference in Winston-Salem, Bzdelik said he called each of his former CU players on Tuesday night to tell them he was accepting Wake Forest's offer.

At a Sunday afternoon meeting at McClain's home, Bzdelik said he told CU's players, "If they offer it to me, there's a great chance I'm going to take it - but you will be the first to know."

Higgins and Knutson said they did, indeed, receive telephone calls Tuesday night, but neither was shocked Bzdelik was leaving.

"I think in this business nothing can really come as a shock," Higgins said. "There's always going to be certain changes. He has what he wants to do in the future and so, at least to me, it wasn't a shock. I know how coaches can think, and I know they can be gone in a second."

Added Knutson: "It wasn't really a shock, (but) a little bit of a surprise with the timing of it all - just because we feel like we've got a strong group coming back next year to make a run at the NCAA Tournament. That was a little bit of a surprise."

Knutson said when Bzdelik had past overtures from a couple of NBA teams (Chicago, Minnesota), "He let us know." But, Knutson noted those didn't seem that serious.

OUT IN THE COLD? Bzdelik is expected to retain two of former Wake Forest coach Dino Gaudio's assistants (Jeff Battle, Rusty LaRue), meaning he has one slot open for a full-time coach.

Will it go to Tom Abatemarco?

On March 17, Bzdelik announced CU's hiring of Abatemarco, a well-traveled college assistant beginning his second tour of duty in Boulder. Now his fate at CU apparently is tied to whoever is named to succeed Bzdelik.

CU is Abatemarco's 12th college stop, and that includes a previous layover in Boulder (1990-93) under then-Buffs coach Joe Harrington. Abatemarco spent most of the past seven years in Sacramento, Calif., working in several roles (player personnel director, scouting coach, assistant, broadcaster) for the Kings (NBA) and Monarchs (WNBA).

How's this for irony? On Monday, the moving van hauling Abatemarco's belongings from Sacramento was scheduled to arrive in Boulder. Two days later, Bzdelik is being introduced at his new job in Winston-Salem.

So long, boss.

PARTING WORDS: "On behalf of the basketball program here at the University of Colorado, a heartfelt thank you to all who are making a difference in the lives of these student athletes. We really appreciate it. I can tell you, for me it's an honor and a privilege being the head basketball coach here. Thank you very much for that opportunity." - *Bzdelik, on March 25 at the groundbreaking ceremony for CU's \$10.8 million basketball/volleyball practice facility*

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college basketball

Wake Forest a "dream job" for Bzdelik

By The Associated Press

Posted: 04/15/2010 01:00:00 AM MDT



Jeff Bzdelik, who was 36-58 in three years at CU, is responsible for a \$500,00 buyout. (Chuck Burton, The AP)

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. — Jeff Bzdelik is taking over Wake Forest's program from a coach who was fired despite going 30 games over .500 at the school.

No extra pressure there, Bzdelik insisted.

"I embrace the challenges," he said. "I have both eyes open."

Wake Forest ended its weeklong search for Dino Gaudio's replacement Wednesday with Bzdelik's introduction as coach. The former head man at Air Force and of the NBA's Nuggets left Colorado after going 36-58 in three seasons with the Buffaloes for what he described as "my dream job" leading the Demon Deacons.

His challenge: Keeping Wake Forest a contender in the Atlantic Coast Conference after Gaudio, who went 61-31 in three seasons, was fired because of

CU Basketball

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what athletic director Ron Wellman described as a pattern of late-season fades.

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Bzdelik has a career college coaching record of 111-105, lost his only NCAA Tournament game as a head coach and is coming off his third straight losing season at Colorado.

"Here's the bottom line: I don't read papers, I don't even read (the) Internet, I don't look at any — I have no idea," Bzdelik said. "All I care about is moving forward."

Bzdelik, 57, said current assistants Jeff Battle and Rusty LaRue will remain on his staff in an effort to maintain stability and familiarity.

Wellman declined to disclose the new coach's salary or the length of his contract, but said Bzdelik would be responsible for handling the \$500,000 buyout clause in his CU contract.

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Higgins 'angry' but ready to move on after Bzdelik departure

CU seniors hope to avoid attrition

By Ryan Thorburn Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 04/15/2010 12:02:51 AM MDT

April madness.

This isn't what Jeff Bzdelik's first Colorado recruit signed up for.

Obviously, Cory Higgins is not happy about dealing with a coaching change entering a senior season the talented All-Big 12 guard believes has a chance to finish with an NCAA Tournament run next March.

"Angry," Higgins said when asked what his emotions were on Wednesday, the day Bzdelik was introduced as the Wake Forest head coach. "But you've got to move forward. I only have one year left, so I don't have time to be angry. I just have to move on."

Higgins said there is a chance some of the younger players might transfer out of the program, depending on who is hired.

And the timing of the coaching change could also prevent CU from signing some key recruits capable of bolstering the team's glaring weakness -- rebounding.

Not surprisingly, Higgins joins his teammates in the locker room campaign for CU associate head coach Steve McClain to take over the program.

"It's no secret. We've expressed to many people that we'd like coach McClain to be here," Higgins said. "For me, the most important thing in trying to keep him here is to keep everybody together."

When asked if he would be back next season, Higgins replied: "I should be."

Levi Knutson said the senior class is doing its part to keep all of the players focused on returning to CU for the 2010-11 season.

Alec Burks, the reigning Big 12 Freshman of the Year, has hinted that he might have other plans if McClain is not retained.

"That would be too bad," Knutson said on possible player attrition. "That's why as seniors we're trying to keep the team together as best we can. Obviously, everybody will make decisions for themselves, but we're trying to keep the team together."

CU athletic director Mike Bohn said McClain is an official candidate and will be interviewed. However, the search committee will be doing an extensive search to find the right coach for the long term.

McClain told the Camera that he turned down a the chance to go to Wake Forest with Bzdelik as an assistant to remain in Boulder to pursue the head coaching position at CU.

Bohn said McClain and his staff are free to sign any recruits who want to come to CU. At least one recruit will be making a visit to campus this weekend.

"With the uncertainty right now it's going to be hard to get the recruits that we want in here," Knutson said. "We're going to try to keep all our guys together the best we can in that locker room so that when a coach is named we have a solid group of guys who have had some success this past season together."

Rod Higgins, Cory's father and the general manager of the Charlotte Bobcats, is one of the big names in the basketball world who contacted Bohn after Bzdelik's departure.

"We have a good relationship, and I expressed my feelings towards the situation," Cory Higgins said of his conversations with his dad. "I can be completely open to him, and he just told me to keep an open mind and that you don't always get what you want and have to move on. ...

"He's not going to be involved (in the coaching search). Right now, he's just a parent and that's it."



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Heavy hitters offer advice to CU

CU fielding calls from Karl, Brown with opinions on men's basketball opening

By **Ryan Thorburn** Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 04/14/2010 05:20:57 PM MDT



Mr. Big Shot is not calling the shots at Colorado.

However, athletic director Mike Bohn is willing to listen to Chauncey Billups and other big names in the basketball world as the search begins for Jeff Bzdelik's replacement.

During a round-table discussion with the media at the Dal Ward Center on Wednesday, just hours after Bzdelik was named the new head coach at Wake Forest, Bohn said he had already received unsolicited advice from Denver Nuggets head coach George Karl and Charlotte Bobcats head coach Larry Brown.

CU senior associate athletic director Tom McGrath is heading the search committee. From his days working with USA Basketball and the Boston Celtics, McGrath has his share of big-name contacts to query, including Bob Knight, Mike Krzyzewski and Jim Boeheim.

"The basketball minds we're talking about are the type of people we need to have in this process and to help this program long term," Bohn said. "Whether their horse in the race is ultimately named coach or not, that's the indivisible type of following and support that I think is imperative for us to build here."

Billups actually broke the news of Bzdelik's eminent departure to Bohn via text message as Wake Forest quickly targeted the CU coach to replace Dino Gaudio.

"It was Chauncey who was the one that really gave me the first impression that we had an issue with Jeff," Bohn admitted. "I appreciate that outreach from Chauncey. He cares about this program, he's a great Colorado kid as you all now, and it's refreshing and inspiring to us to have that type of individual helping us."

There is not a specific timetable for naming Bzdelik's replacement, however, Wednesday was the first day in a critical recruiting period for CU men's basketball.

"That's probably one of the most frustrating pieces of this transition is the timing in how it relates to recruiting. That's a challenge," Bohn said. "We do have a recruit coming in this weekend and we'll try to take advantage of the great work that the staff has continued to do despite Jeff's departure."

CU associate head coach Steve McClain has been working with players and recruiting this week. He is officially a candidate for the position and told the Camera that he turned down an offer from Bzdelik to leave for Wake Forest so he could pursue the head coaching position with the Buffs.

The players have made it clear that they would like McClain to be hired. Alec Burks even hinted that he might leave CU if another coach were named.

"You factor it in, but every AD or general manager knows that you hire coaches that can work with your players and make that work," Bohn said. "And I respect Alec's passion for Steve. We have respect for Steve and we will certainly look forward to an interview session with Steve."

"But in the end we have to do what is right for the program long term."

Mike Dunlap, the former Metro State head coach and Nuggets assistant, is another likely candidate with local ties. Same story for Northern Colorado head coach Tad Boyle, whose Bears took the Buffs to school during a preseason scrimmage at the Coors Events Center last November.

"Those are both intriguing candidates," Bohn said. "But I think it's premature to talk specifically about any candidate or any process associated with any individual until our committee has the ability to do their work."

Karl could have been lobbying for Dunlap or current Nuggets assistant Jamahl Mosley, a former CU player.

And Brown? Perhaps Kansas assistant Danny Manning or someone Bobcats general manager Rod Higgins, the father of current CU star Cory Higgins, wants to see on the bench at the Coors Events Center.

"We have to find somebody that can seize that opportunity and take that equity that has built over the last three years," Bohn said. "Building facilities and infrastructure, our young men, and the excitement and energy of our fan base ... that's all momentum."

"And we want someone who can take advantage of that and keep pushing the rock up hill rather than have it roll right back on top of them."

Jay Humphries, a former CU and NBA star, would like to throw his hat in the ring. He believes his background as an alumni of the school and knowledge of what it takes to make it to the next level fits perfectly.

"I'm sure this is going to work out for all parties and that they will find a good coach to take over," Humphries, a former Phoenix Suns assistant who is now the head coach of the D-League's Reno franchise, told the Camera. "A lot of high caliber student-athletes are going to want to have an avenue of opportunity to further their basketball career. I most definitely can help them with that."

Bohn did not watch Bzdelik's introductory press conference at Wake Forest. The former CU coach put in a brief plug for McClain.

"I hope so, but I don't know," Bzdelik said when asked if he thought McClain would be named as his replacement. "I don't know what their thought process was, to be honest with you. I don't know."

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Woelk: Buffs need coach who will make CU his destination

By Neill Woelk Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 04/13/2010 12:02:32 AM MDT

With what now appears to be the imminent departure of Colorado hoops coach Jeff Bzdelik, CU officials must ask themselves a very tough question this morning:

How do they prevent CU from becoming a stepping-stone school? A destination rather than a layover?

It's a legitimate question with no easy answers -- and the implications don't conjure up happy thoughts.

To find a textbook example of stepping-stone school, one needs look no farther than Laramie, Wyo., where the Cowboys have served as a proving ground for a long list of coaches. Those who had a stopover in Wyoming before moving on include Bob Devaney (Nebraska), Pat Dye (Auburn), Dennis Erickson (Washington State), Fred Akers (Texas), Joe Tiller (Purdue) and Larry Shyatt (Clemson).

(In one of those lovely little twists of irony, one guy who lasted longer than most at Wyoming was hoops coach Steve McClain -- who spent nine seasons in Laramie before getting fired -- and who is now an assistant at Colorado and a candidate for the top job.)

Stepping-stone is by no means the reputation a school wants to have. It makes it difficult to build a fan base, difficult to develop anything resembling continuity, and virtually impossible to construct long-term success.

Not that one coach leaving means CU has become such a place. Fact is, before Bzdelik, the list of football or basketball coaches who have left Colorado for better college jobs in the past 50 years is a short one:

Rick Neuheisel and Rene Portland.

(Before that, you might have to go back to the 1933-34 basketball season, when a young man by the name of Henry Iba spent a year as CU's head coach before departing for Oklahoma A&M).

But the question about CU becoming a stepping-stone nevertheless came to mind as I listened Monday to Linda Lappe's initial press conference as CU's women's basketball coach.

For Lappe, a former Buff standout, there's no doubt Colorado is a destination.

"I can't think of another place I'd rather be," she said. "When I left here, I knew I always wanted to be back."

Lappe is a terrific hire for Colorado. If Lappe wins -- and she will, given time -- I can see her pacing the Coors Events Center bench area 10 years from now.

Now, CU officials have to find the same kind of coach to replace Bzdelik. A coach who wants to be here, a coach with roots and ties to the state -- and one who won't be lured by a few more (or a few hundred thousand more) dollars.

The money factor won't be easy to overcome. When Bill McCartney signed his new contract at CU late in his career, it put him among the nation's upper echelon in terms of salary. Then, Colorado could still pay a salary competitive with most of its peers.

That's not the case anymore. Colorado's coaches -- and administrators, for that matter -- are all among the lowest-paid in the Big 12. The bet here is that we won't see the day anytime soon that Colorado will catch Texas, Oklahoma, Nebraska, etc., in terms of pure salary.

It means Colorado has to close the gap in other areas.

The athletic department has made great strides in one of those areas, facilities. CU has greatly increased its commitment to the program, making it an appealing job -- maybe more appealing than ever before.

That's a start.

Another part of the equation is finding someone who appreciates the quality of life Colorado brings to the table. Not to knock many of the other stops in the Big 12 (we won't name names, but we know where you live), but Colorado in general and Boulder in particular offer benefits many other places simply can't.

CU must find someone who fully appreciates those benefits.

Then, of course, there are the other criteria every coach must fit: the ability to coach, recruit and run a clean program. The ability to navigate CU's unique obstacles when it comes to admissions.

Most of all, the ability to win at a place that has seen precious few winners in men's basketball over the years.

There are coaches who fit all those criteria. There are coaches out there who could come here, continue to build on the foundation constructed over the last three years and make it their home rather than an overnight stop. (If you're looking for someone who fits that description right down to "Colorado native who wants to be here," Northern Colorado coach Tad Boyle has the credentials.)

Honestly, nobody in Boulder ever thought Jeff Bzdelik was here to stay forever (although I think most folks were hoping for at least a couple more years). Bzdelik is a good man and a good coach, but his history strongly suggests that he will always be looking for another challenge.

That's the nature of the majority of coaches. There's always another mountain to climb.

CU's task, however, will be to find a coach in the minority: Someone who wants to be here, someone who can win and someone who will stay because this is their dream job.

Simply, someone who will make it their destination.

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Former CU coach Jeff Bzdelik introduced as Wake Forest head coach

CU athletic director Mike Bohn says interest high in coach job

By Ryan Thorburn Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 04/14/2010 09:17:00 AM MDT

Jeff Bzdelik says Winston-Salem, N.C., is where he has always really wanted to be.

During a press conference on Wednesday morning, the former Colorado head coach was introduced as the new head coach at Wake Forest.

"It really goes full cycle and bring us home to where we want to be," said Bzdelik, who was a young assistant at Davidson, a small college in North Carolina, three decades ago. "This is my dream job and I embrace it with all I have."

Wake Forest athletic director Ron Wellman said Bzdelik's 36-58 record in three seasons at CU was as impressive to him as the coach leading the Denver Nuggets back into the playoffs or compiling a 50-16 record at Air Force.

"If you look at his career it is a very storied career, I believe ... Colorado was a very difficult job," said Wellman, who has known Bzdelik since they both worked in the Northwestern athletic department from 1981-86. "Anybody in college basketball will tell you about the challenges at that particular time. ...

"Next year they have everyone coming back. They should be a contender for an NCAA (Tournament) berth. He did an outstanding job at Colorado as well."

Bzdelik replaces Dino Gaudio, who compiled a 61-31 record in three seasons at Wake Forest.

"What Jeff has done is very impressive to me and will be to our fan base, eventually," Wellman said. "He loves his players, he treats his players as family, and at the same time he has very high expectations of his players on and off the court."

Bzdelik pointed out that when he replaced Ricardo Patton three years ago the CU program had a low APR, a collective 2.0 grade-point average and "no competitive spirit."

There is no question the Buffs have made strides in the classroom, on the court and with upgrading facilities over the last three years.

CU was 15-16 last season and if Cory Higgins, Alec Burks, Shannon Sharpe and the rest of the nucleus returns the 2010-11 campaign was advertised as NCAA Tournament or bust before Bzdelik's sudden departure.

"The Colorado job had very little tradition at all and poor facilities," Bzdelik said. "Now they're in a great place."

Bzdelik will keep two Wake Forest assistants, Jeff Battle and Rusty LaRue, which means he will be looking to hire one more coach.

"Nobody puts any more pressure on me than I put on myself. Period," Bzdelik said. "I know I have a responsibility. This is a storied program and a great school. If someone said to me I could pick any school in the country to go to it would be Wake Forest."

Bzdelik's daughter, Courtney, is a student at Wake Forest. The family also has a beach home in North Carolina where they vacation.

"These kind of situations are uncomfortable for everybody," Bzdelik said of the coaching change. "Even for my family. You have to pick up and move."

Back in Boulder, CU associate head coach Steve McClain continues to go about business as usual with recruiting and conducting individual workouts with players.

CU athletic director Mike Bohn said there has been a lot of interest in the vacancy Bzdelik's decision to leave has created.

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Bzdelik bolts

Bufs lose men's basketball coach to Wake Forest

By Ron Knabenbauer on April 15, 2010

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For the second time in two months, University of Colorado Athletic Director Mike Bohn will search for a new basketball coach, but this time for the men's team.

Wake Forest Demon Deacons men's basketball officials introduced Jeff Bzdelik, the CU men's basketball head coach for the past three seasons, as their new head coach on Wednesday.

In his three seasons in Boulder, Bzdelik compiled a 36-58 record with the Buffs and had a 15-16 record last season where it seemed like CU had turned a corner and were heading in the right direction, away from their losing ways.

Bzdelik replaces Dino Gaudio in Winston-Salem, N.C., who went 61-31 in three seasons at Wake Forest.

After he found a replacement for former women's basketball head coach Kathy McConnell-Miller, who was dismissed from her position on March 29, Bohn will once again look for another basketball coach. He may not have to look very far to find one. Men's basketball associate head coach Steve McClain has been rumored to possibly fill the position left by Bzdelik.

Prior to him joining the Colorado staff, McClain was the head coach for the Wyoming Cowboys from 1998 to 2007 where he won 57.7 percent of his games (157-115), the fifth-highest winning percentage in school history. Last season, McClain filled Bzdelik's position many times with the former CU coach missing several games because of family reasons.

No other possible candidates have been revealed at this time and there is no specific timetable for naming a new men's basketball coach. However an announcement may come soon with the team in the middle of recruiting.

Stay tuned to the CU Independent for more on this story as it develops.



In this file photo, Jeff Bzdelik explains his Buffs' potential. On Wednesday, however, he was introduced as the new head coach for the Wake Forest Demon Deacons men's basketball program. (CU Independent file photo/Elise Puritz)

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Deacs make it official: Bzdelik will replace Gaudio

Journal Staff Report

Jeff Bzdelik was named Wednesday as the 21st men's basketball coach in Wake Forest history. Athletics Director Ron Wellman made the announcement at a 10 a.m. news conference at BB&T Field.

Bzdelik, the head coach at Colorado, comes to Wake Forest with a career collegiate coaching record of 111-105 in seven seasons including stops at Maryland-Baltimore County, Air Force, and Colorado. He has also served as a scout, scouting director and assistant coach in the NBA with the Denver Nuggets, Miami Heat and New York Knicks.

Bzdelik spent the last three seasons at Colorado after having led Air Force to its most successful run in school history.

Bzdelik is also a former head coach of the Denver Nuggets. His first head coaching position was at Maryland-Baltimore County in 1986.

"I am very pleased that Jeff Bzdelik has accepted our offer to become our head coach," said Wellman. "He is a perfect fit for Wake Forest. Jeff holds the same values and the same standards that are so dear to this university. He has a great deal of experience in both collegiate and professional basketball. He will produce a program and develop players that we will be thrilled to have as Demon Deacons."

Wellman and Bzdelik first became acquainted in the early 1980s when Wellman was the baseball coach at Northwestern and Bzdelik was an assistant basketball coach under Rich Falk.

"It is an honor and a privilege to be here at Wake Forest," said Bzdelik. "I am ready to roll up my sleeves and get to work. We will be looking for a very special type of student-athlete for Wake Forest. We will be looking for young men who are passionate about playing basketball, care about getting a great education, have a high basketball IQ and care about their future."

"Our goals are simple. We want to win games, get to the postseason, advance in the postseason and win championships without compromising the moral and academic integrity of this great university."

Bzdelik also announced that he expects current assistant coaches Jeff Battle and Rusty LaRue to remain part of his staff at Wake Forest.

A 1976 graduate of the University of Illinois-Chicago, Bzdelik was a four-year letterman for the Flames. He was UIC's MVP as a senior and holds the school record for season free throw percentage at 88 percent.

He began his coaching career as an assistant coach at Davidson under Eddie Biedenbach and helped the Wildcats to a 75-72 win over Wake Forest in 1979. After two years, Bzdelik moved to Northwestern for six seasons before becoming the head coach at Maryland-Baltimore County in 1986.

In 1988, Bzdelik joined the Washington Bullets as an assistant coach. During his six years in Washington, Bzdelik coached former Deacons Frank Johnson and Muggsy Bogues. After spending the 1994-95 season with the New York Knicks as a scout, he became an assistant coach and director of scouting under Pat Riley with the Miami Heat in 1995. The Heat would win four straight Eastern Conference regular season titles from 1997-2000. During his time in Miami, Bzdelik was voted the NBA's best advance scout in a Sports Illustrated poll of NBA coaches and general managers. In 2000, he was named one of the top five assistant coaches in the NBA by USA Today.

In 2001, Bzdelik joined the Denver Nuggets as a scout and was promoted to head coach prior to the 2002-03 season.

After opening with a 17-65 campaign, Bzdelik engineered one of the biggest comebacks in NBA history, leading the Nuggets to a 26-game improvement, the sixth-largest turnaround in league history. He also became the first NBA coach, since the adoption of the 82-game schedule, to lead a club to the playoffs a year after winning less than 20 games.

After being released by the Nuggets during the 2004-05 season, Bzdelik took over the program at Air Force. He helped the Falcons to a 24-7 record during the 2005-06 season and followed that with a 26-9 campaign. The 50-16 record during his two years in Colorado Springs marked the most victories in a two-year period in academy history. Air Force defeated three ACC teams during Bzdelik's tenure including a 94-58 win over Wake Forest.

Bzdelik was hired by Colorado prior to the 2007-08 season where he inherited a team that had gone 7-20 and 3-13 in the Big 12 while finishing in last place. Through careful recruiting, he made Colorado's basketball program relevant again, leading the Buffs to a 15-16 record (6-10 Big 12) in 2009-10 and a sixth place finish.

While in Boulder, Bzdelik improved Colorado's program in every facet, raising the team grade point average to 2.94 and improving attendance by 40 percent. He also recruited Alec Burks to Colorado as the freshman earned Big 12 Freshman of the Year honors and was voted to multiple Freshman All-America teams.