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colorado basketball

CU might have coach in place this week

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

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With the three known candidates having completed their interviews, all signs point to Colorado introducing a new men's basketball coach early this week.

CU athletic director Mike Bohn said "we'll see" when asked Saturday evening if there's a good chance of an announcement coming soon. He added that he has not yet extended an offer.

He would not comment on how the interviews have gone, saying it was "premature to talk about anything."

Within two days of the official announcement that Jeff Bzdelik had taken the Wake Forest job, Bohn and the search committee headed by associate athletic director Tom McGrath conducted interviews in rapid-fire fashion with

Bzdelik's top CU aide, associate coach Steve McClain (Thursday); former Metro State coach Mike Dunlap (Friday); and Northern Colorado

CU Basketball

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coach Tad Boyle (Friday).

Boyle, who led the Bears to a school-record 25 victories this season, interviewed Friday afternoon away from the CU campus.

Naming a replacement for Bzdelik could not happen soon enough, said Rod Higgins, general manager of the NBA's Charlotte Bobcats and father of CU star guard Cory Higgins, a senior-to-be.

"I think that would be good for the kids (if the coaching search is completed quickly); everybody

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needs direction," Rod Higgins said. "And if it happens fast, the new coach can get on with recruiting."

Colorado has three scholarships to offer during the spring signing period, which began Wednesday. Frontcourt players with rebounding skills have been targeted. But the scheduling of official visits has been put on hold until a coach is named.

Bohn said it is "undisclosed at this point" whether other coaches will be interviewed.

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Woelk: CU has luxury of three strong basketball candidates

Camera staff
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With a men's basketball program hovering on the cusp of respectability, Colorado officials know the importance of their next hire can't be understated. The right coach will have a table set like few coaches before him have enjoyed at CU -- but the window of opportunity won't be open forever.

A team with talent and experience is ready to return next season. CU's facilities are on par or above those of their Big 12 brethren. And, the current administration has not just promised a strong commitment to men's basketball, but has actually delivered.

There has been nationwide interest in the job. But what became apparent over the last few days is that Colorado is not going to go the route of the itinerant coach looking to get back in the game, hoping to use CU as just a stop back to bigger and more lucrative places. There's no "baggage" in the background of any of the three finalists, no past history at any of their other stops that might suggest a future problem for CU.

Honestly, Colorado couldn't go wrong with any of the three. If there's anything that CU fans should be comfortable with this morning is that no matter who their "favorite" is in this race, the winner should be a good one. Current CU assistant Steve McClain, former Metro State head coach Mike Dunlap and current Northern Colorado head coach Tad Boyle all brought a long list of positives to the interview table -- and each also has some unknowns.

Here's how this outsider views the three (in alphabetical order):

Tad Boyle: A friend of mine following the search called Boyle the "ultimate basketball guy." Great prep player (still one of the best I've ever seen), solid career as a college assistant and he's done a terrific job of rebuilding Northern Colorado. The program that was dead last in the nation's RPI in his first season there finished second in the Big Sky Conference this season, and he was named the league's coach of the year. The Bears beat Colorado State and Denver this season, lost by one at Oklahoma in the final three seconds, and by all accounts, dominated Jeff Bzdelik's Buffaloes in a preseason scrimmage.

Positives: Has recruited at the Division I level. Has substantially upgraded the talent level at Northern Colorado, and had a big hand in recruiting the players that took Wichita State to the Sweet 16. Has a background at high-level D-I schools (assistant at Oregon and Tennessee). Colorado native with great ties to the state's prep coaches, is familiar with Boulder (worked in Boulder as a stockbroker before beginning his college coaching career) and comes with the endorsement of folks such as Larry Brown and Turgeon.

Unknowns: Would he be comfortable making the leap from the Big Sky to the Big 12? Can he recruit the NBA-type player necessary to win at CU?

Mike Dunlap: Dunlap won two national titles at Div. II Metro State, finishing there with a 248-50 (.832) record in nine years. He then spent two seasons working as an assistant with the Denver Nuggets, then one year each at Arizona and Oregon. Ask folks who follow the game, and they'll tell you his basketball acumen is as good as it gets. A bona fide student of the game in every respect. He also worked as an assistant at Southern Cal and Iowa, and coached professionally in Australia.

Positives: As a head coach, he's always won. Recruited well at Metro State, with great overseas connections (particularly Australia). His teams have had solid academic performances. Reputed to be a tough but great teacher of the game. Has worked with some very good coaches, and comes with the recommendation of the likes of George Karl.

Unknowns: Has never recruited for any length of time at the Division I level. Like Boyle, the question is simple: Could he recruit the caliber of player necessary to win in the Big 12? Has been at four different places in the last six years -- would he be satisfied to stay at Colorado if he experienced success?

Steve McClain: McClain is a former head coach at Wyoming who won a league title there, and took the Cowboys to the postseason four times in nine years. He joined CU's coaching staff when Bzdelik took the job in 2007, and has been

instrumental in helping CU rebuild its program. Served as CU's head coach four times this season in Bzdelik's absence, going 2-2 while losing close games to Gonzaga and Arizona.

Positives: Could guarantee continuity in the program, something the other two candidates can't promise. Has coached in the Big 12 and knows the ropes. Is the only one of the three with first-hand knowledge of the obstacles CU faces in the recruiting/admissions world. Proved he could rebuild at Wyoming.

Unknowns: Could he make the transition from assistant to head coach at CU and become the "tough guy"? At Wyoming, he appeared to hit a plateau after early success. Could he recruit the players necessary to take Colorado to the next level?

Again, I don't think CU could go wrong with any of the candidates. Pick one and he'll win next year, giving him a great springboard to future successes.

But my pick, if it were up to me?

I'd lean toward Boyle. I love his Colorado background (yes, I know he went to Kansas to play college ball -- but seriously, given the state of both programs at the time, wouldn't you have played for Larry Brown?). I'd love to see a Colorado guy win at Colorado.

But more importantly, I love the success he's enjoyed at previously struggling programs. He and Turgeon rebuilt Jacksonville State in just two years, then made Wichita State a power to reckon with. Then, he went to UNC -- where the program had been a loser for seemingly forever -- and he built it into a winner.

He knows basketball, he knows Colorado and he knows how to win, even at places where success has been a foreign concept.

Most of all, I think he'd be a guy who would come here, win, and stay. I could see him making Boulder his destination stop, not a layover.

But that's just my personal pick. I freely admit to it being flavored by a little home-state bias.

The best part is that no matter who your favorite is this morning, Colorado's next coach should be a good one.

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