

# CU's Bzdelik not concerned with tournament expansion

## Coach just wants Buffs to be dancing next year

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

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Jeff Bzdelik doesn't care how many people are invited to the party.

Whether the NCAA Tournament remains a 65-team field or is expanded to 96 teams, Colorado's head coach plans to have the Buffs dancing next March.

"It doesn't change my feelings," Bzdelik said of the very realistic possibility that the NCAA will add 31 teams to its men's basketball national championship tournament. "I have no feelings, other than you need to do two things: Play a challenging strength of schedule and win. If you do so, you will be in position for postseason play."

The Buffs, coming off a 15-16 season, had one of the nation's toughest schedules in 2009-10. If Bzdelik's young team had been able to turn a couple heartbreaking losses into quality wins they would have been in the NIT.

Imagine what the interest in the program would have been like down the stretch had CU been on the NCAA Tournament bubble?

"Our vision is plain and simple: To win and go to postseason play without compromising the moral and academic integrity of this great university," Bzdelik said. "All these steps we've taken have produced a culture that shows tangible signs of evidence that we're reaching our vision."

If expansion happens it will obviously be easier for coaches to add NCAA Tournament appearances to their resumes. CU would have made the field on a consistent basis under Ricardo Patton.

More inclusion would also mean pressure on coaches because athletic directors will be looking to make a quick change if their team finishes No. 97 or below, even though there are 347 Division I programs vying for their one shining moment.

"I don't even think of it in terms of that," Bzdelik said. "No one puts more pressure on me than I put on myself."

After returning from the Final Four, where Duke and Butler -- two highly successful programs that actually care about academics -- produced one of the more memorable championship games in the tournament's rich history, the CU coaching staff had a noticeable bounce in its step this week.

Bzdelik and his staff are in the midst of a key recruiting period and this will be an important offseason for a number of players in the program to develop.

## No NBA draft for Higgins

Cory Higgins will not test the NBA waters this summer. The senior-to-be has decided not to put his name in the draft and participate in the pre-draft camps, even though underclassmen can remove their names and return to school so long as they don't sign with an agent.

"Cory is not going to do that," Bzdelik said. "On the court he has a first-hand, full understanding of what the process is. There is no need to go through it this year because he has said he is already coming back anyway."

Bzdelik was a longtime scout, assistant and head coach in the NBA who can give Higgins some honest and accurate advice on where he would realistically be taken in the draft. If the two-time All-Big 12 honoree wants a second opinion his dad, Rod Higgins, is the general manager of the Charlotte Bobcats.

Higgins is projected as a second-round pick in the 2011 NBA Draft. Alec Burks, the reigning Big 12 Freshman of the Year,

is currently projected as a lottery pick should he enter the draft a year from now.

"Alec Burks is an extremely competitive young man and he shares the same common goal as all of us and that is to get this program at a national elite status where we are consistently in postseason play," Bzdelik said. "Everybody is working hard to do that and we all know we need to get better."

### **Sharpe getting closer**

Shannon Sharpe, the promising point guard who sat out last season due to a knee injury, began on-court workouts on Tuesday and should be ready to start playing without limitations soon.

"If all goes well he will be cleared 100 percent for a full go on May 1," Bzdelik said.

Sharpe was expected to split time with Nate Tomlinson this season before sustaining his injury during the team's first practice last October. Bzdelik said Sharpe is as talented as anyone on the roster, which is a bold statement considering how gifted Burks is.

### **Home cooking**

The Buffs were 13-3 at the Coors Events Center this season. Bzdelik plans to solidify CU's chances of earning a spot in the NCAA Tournament by scheduling 19 home games in 2010-11.

Oregon State will visit Boulder as part of the Big 12/Pac-10 Hardwood Series, Colorado State will also be on the home slate, and Bzdelik has lined up an SEC opponent for a national television game that will be announced when the time is set.

### **Abatemarco returns**

Tom Abatemarco, a CU assistant under Joe Harrington from 1990-93, is back on the job in Boulder working for Bzdelik.

"Tommy brings to us a wealth of experience and energy, especially in the recruiting area, having worked for Hall of Famers and coaching legends like Lefty Driesel, Lou Carnesecca and Jim Valvano," Bzdelik said.

CU's staff will be very solid if associate Steve McClain is back for another year. The former Wyoming head coach interviewed for the Hawaii job last month and will likely be a candidate for other jobs in the future, especially if the Buffs continue to move up the Big 12 standings next season.

Bzdelik plans to find a way to keep assistant Drew Long in the fold at CU. He was a paid assistant last season after working as a volunteer the previous two seasons.

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