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## CU lands a gem with Alec Burks

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Freshman guard Alec Burks from Kansas City, Mo., has scored in double figures in every game this season for the Buffs. (Hyoung Chang, The Denver Post)

**BOULDER** — Nine games into his college career, Colorado freshman guard Alec Burks has already filled a highlight reel with his flashy moves. But teammates say one in particular stands out, and few saw it.

It occurred during practice. Burks, 6-feet-6 and springy, was on a 2-on-1 fast break but did not appear to be the first option because junior Cory Higgins, who was back on defense, looked to have Burks shielded from the hoop.

"Alec was under the rim, and I didn't think he'd be in the play," forward Austin Dufault recalled. "Somehow, he got the ball and then went around Cory and scored on a finger roll. I don't know how he made it. It had some crazy spin.

"Alec started laughing, and we all started laughing. He has so much fun playing the game. He does things that make you step back and say, 'Wow!' "

Colorado coach Jeff Bzdelik believes he landed more than a keeper from Grandview High in suburban Kansas City, Mo. The former Nuggets coach said he is not afraid to "go out on a limb" and predict Burks will some day play in the NBA.

A stats-sheet stuffer, Burks enters tonight's game at Colorado State (5-3) second among the Buffaloes in scoring (15.5) and rebounding (40) and third in field-goal shooting (.563) and fourth in assists (15).

"It's both on him and me to realize his potential," Bzdelik said. "And if he (works hard) and stays healthy, and his head and heart are in the right place, he has a chance to be really special."

A common question among first-time observers

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is, how in the world did Colorado (6-3) get this kid?

Burks signed during the November 2008 signing period, prior to his senior year of high school, with little fanfare. Colorado's primary competition was Kansas State.

Had Burks not signed early, other suitors surely would have come calling, because Burks broke out during his senior season, averaging 23 points per game and leading Grandview to the state championship game in Missouri's largest classification. He was selected the state's Gatorade player of the year.

Burks took his official visit to Boulder during a September 2008 weekend and watched the Buffs football team upset 21st-ranked West Virginia at Folsom Field. Talk about timing.

"I got to rush the field with my future teammates," Burks recalled. "I felt like I was at home. I loved it so much, I didn't want to leave. And I was tired of the recruiting process. I wanted to get it over with."

CU coaches spotted Burks while scouting a 2008 summer camp at a small Kansas college.

"There were two gyms. One was air-conditioned, one was not," Bzdelik recalled. "I went to the gym that was not air-conditioned, because there were only about two other coaches in there. Alec made a couple of moves right in front of me, about 10 feet off the

baseline. I thought those moves were really special. From that moment on, we recruited him hard."

Burks has not disappointed. He has reached double-figure scoring in every game, and has already shown a propensity for being at his best against tough competition. Against Gonzaga, Arizona and Oregon State, for example, he averaged 16.3 points.

Colorado got a steal. That's what Kansas coach Bill Self said when he saw Burks play in the Missouri Class 5A state championship game last spring. Self was there to scout a junior playing for Chaminade High of St. Louis. But he couldn't help but notice Burks, who had already signed with the Buffs.

"Colorado did a good job of identifying him early," Self said in a phone interview. "There are schools in this area, and you can include Kansas, that will look back and think, 'Gosh, the Burks kid was right there under our nose. He could have been a nice fit for us.'"

Burks can play both guard positions and also is comfortable slashing to the hoop. He may be Colorado's toughest matchup: too big for most opposing guards and too quick for forwards. Burks grew up playing the point, but sprouted 4 inches in the past two years, which has enabled him to take his game to new heights.

"Alec is very athletic, very versatile," said junior forward Marcus Relphorde, another newcomer.

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"Especially as a freshman, he's pretty advanced with all the things he can do. He creates (opportunities) for everybody, as well as for himself. He's very valuable to this team."

That's not to say Burks is a finished product. He has much to learn on defense. His high school team usually played a soft, match-up zone. The intensity required to play defense for Bzdelik came as something of a shock.

"In high school, I got by with my athleticism," Burks said. "At this level, you have to get down and play D."

Bzdelik believes the freshman, with his quick feet and long arms, can develop into an effective defensive player. Higgins, who grew up watching pro players as the son of an NBA executive, described Burks' overall skill set as "off the charts."

"Sometimes when Alec starts to make a move you're thinking, 'What are you doing?' " Higgins said. "And then he turns it into a layup. His talent is ridiculous."

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