

Bzdelik may tinker with rotation before Big 12 play

Bufs coach wants Dufault to play forward

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Colorado's starting lineup might get even younger during Big 12 play.

Jeff Bzdelik would prefer for Austin Dufault, who has started at center in the Buffs' first 10 games, to play forward against the stronger opponents CU will be dealing with beginning Jan. 9 at Texas.

"We have to move Austin over to the four (position) where we can get longer and bigger," Bzdelik said.

But who else is worthy of starting at the five spot?

True freshman Shane Harris-Tunks, a 6-11 Australian with international playing experience, appears to be Bzdelik's best option at center.

Casey Crawford has never lived up to expectations, Trey Eckloff has been an innocent bystander on the end of the bench based on practice performance, and Trent Beckley hasn't been healthy since the trip to Maui.

"That's something I've spoken to (Bzdelik) about a number of times," Harris-Tunks said of picking his level of play up to allow Dufault to move back to forward. "He has told me what I have to do to do that, and I'm working on that. ...

"One of the main things is keeping my fouls down. I tend to get in foul trouble and typically am not playing as many minutes as my fouls would say. I need to stay out foul trouble to be able to play and I need to grab more rebounds as well."

Harris-Tunks has only averaged 11.6 minutes, 2.7 points and 2.3 rebounds off the bench this season, but he is 13-for-16 (81.3 percent) from the field and leads the team in blocks.

Crawford has similar numbers -- averaging 11.8 minutes, 3.4 points and 2.3 rebounds -- but the 6-9 junior is more of a 3-point shooter than a reliable post defender.

Offense hasn't been the problem for CU with Cory Higgins (19.7 ppg) and Alec Burks (16.1 ppg) leading the way.

"I feel like I can do better than what I've been doing. I think it's more a matter of finding the confidence to play how I'm more used to playing," Harris-Tunks said. "I think I've played pretty well, but I know there's more I can bring."

Dufault, a 6-9 sophomore, leads the team in rebounding (4.4 rpg) but said he didn't even play center at tiny Killdeer High School during his prep days in North Dakota.

"I learned it last year because coach has always stressed learning every position," Dufault said. "I felt like I had a good grasp on it from last year. This season it was a matter of getting reps and getting used to it. I feel like I've picked up on it pretty decently."

Foul trouble has limited Dufault to 24.7 minutes and 7.8 points per game.

"That comes down to never really playing the position before, especially at this level," Dufault said. "I have to play a lot more with my feet than trying to get into physical confrontations with people. I'm learning slowly."

Marcus Relphorde, a versatile starter who the coaching staff describes as a "point-forward," is third on the team in scoring (9.4) but only shooting 34.1 percent from the field. The 6-7 junior has only grabbed a total of six defensive rebounds in CU's four losses and could also benefit from having a center like Harris-Tunks battling alongside him more in the paint.

Bzdelik can use these next couple weeks -- when the players won't have to worry about finals or classes -- to develop young players like Harris-Tunks and perhaps tinker with his rotation.

"I think it's going to be really good not having anything else to worry about, not having to worry about the paper that's due tomorrow," said Harris-Tunks, who has been playing with a finger injury since the Chaminade game. "Now you can get a good night sleep before practice and work out hard."

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