

New CU Buff Marcus Relphorde looks to settle in

Juco forward learns ways of 5th team in 5 years

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Marcus Relphorde seems to travel almost as much as George Clooney's character in "Up in the Air."

In the last five years, the talented 6-foot-7 point-forward has played at Homewood-Flossmoor High School near Chicago, at a prep school (American Christian) in Alston, Pa., at Saint Louis University, at Indian Hills Community College in Iowa and now at Colorado.

This instability has led to a little inconsistency in Relphorde's game this season for the Buffs. However, the coaching staff believes his performance against Cal State Northridge -- 13 points, four rebounds, four assists, three steals and a block in 27 minutes -- is another sign that the versatile junior college transfer is starting to settle into Jeff Bzdelik's system.

"I feel like it's definitely starting to come. It has been a process, but now I really know what I have to do to help the team win," Relphorde said. "Coach made that pretty obvious the week we had (in practice) after the Colorado State game with my defensive rebounding and moving without the ball. That's what helps the team win and helps the team play the best."

When Relphorde grabs four defensive rebounds, the Buffs typically win. When he isn't as aggressive or productive in the paint, the Buffs usually lose.

"In all fairness to him, he has had a lot of different coaches," Bzdelik said.

Relphorde went from a high school coach to a prep school coach. He was recruited by Brad Soderberg at Saint Louis, but by the time he arrived on campus Rick Majerus had taken over the program. That coaching change led to his transfer to Indian Hills where his play gave him an opportunity to produce in the Big 12 at CU this season.

"So he has had five coaches in five years, and us coaches can screw up a player real quickly," Bzdelik joked.

The Buffs have enjoyed solid overall play and leadership from Cory Higgins and an amazing start to the season by freshman Alec Burks. Nate Tomlinson, Dwight Thorne and Austin Dufault have all accepted and played well in their roles.

If Relphorde, a junior, can become a dependable third scoring option and consistent rebounder, the Buffs should be a team that gets stronger in February and March instead of running out of gas as they did last season.

"You can see it in practice," Relphorde said of the improved depth and competition on the roster. "As it goes on we're getting more on the same page and as everybody learns each other's games and tendencies it's really going to help us."

It's not like Relphorde has played poorly - he is averaging 9.7 points and 3.1 rebounds per game - but he has the skill set to take even more pressure off Higgins and Burks on both ends of the floor.

"You go from robotic, not knowing where your shots are coming from or where other guys' shots are coming from, to being a little more instinctive every day," Bzdelik said. "And you play better when you're instinctive."

In addition to Relphorde and Burks, freshmen Shane Harris-Tunks and Keegan Hornbuckle are new faces in CU's lineup this season.

"You're talking about four players who are new to our program being asked to play a lot of minutes in an impactful way," Bzdelik said. "I've got to be cautious because I don't want reasons to become excuses, but the reality is the mission is to build a junior-senior team of experienced guys to overcome some of the other challenges that we face. That takes a little time."

CU's opponent tonight, Yale, has four seniors and three juniors on its roster. The Bulldogs (4-7) are led by senior guard Alex Zampier, who is averaging 18.9 points and coming off a 25-point, seven-rebound performance in an 87-78 loss at Providence.

However, the Buffs (7-4) are 6-0 at the Coors Events Center and coming off a 92-58 thrashing of Cal State Northridge a week ago.

And it appears that Relphorde has finally found a basketball home.

"We definitely feel real comfortable here and I feel like we have good fan support," Relphorde said. "They've come out and made it a nice place to play and made it exciting to play here."

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