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sports tech

Buffs bouncing back with lift from court

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Cory Higgins takes a shot against Kansas this year on CU's \$250,000 UniForce floor. (John Leyba, The Denver Post)

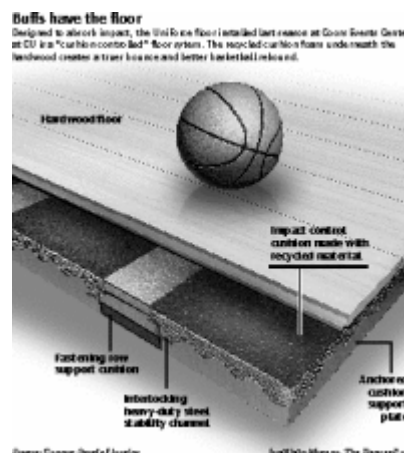
BOULDER — The basketball technology that gets the most attention has always centered on the obvious — breakaway rims, lighter shoes and

different material blends of the basketballs themselves.

But quietly, more professional and college teams are taking an in-depth look at the courts the athletes play on and investing in floors that can help performance and reduce the risk of injury.

The University of Colorado did, and last season CU paid \$250,000 for a UniForce floor made by Connor Sports Flooring. The Buffaloes did so for a couple of reasons, said Tom McGann, CU's director of game management and operations.

"It gives energy back," McGann said. "So what happens is all of the footers or headers that the



floor leans on is actually rubber padding, so there's spring to it, which gives less wear and tear on your joints, your knees, your legs. In theory, you're supposed to be able to run without

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getting leg weary on this floor more than you would a normal floor.

"And we made the commitment to say we're going to be a basketball school, we're going to try to compete in the Big 12, and the first thing we're going to do is have the best floor we can have."

Under the court is what is called an "Impact Control Cushion," which allows the court to give, making landings after jumping softer. But it also provides better basketball rebound, giving a truer bounce off the hardwood. The cushion is made of recycled foam. For a long time it was made of recycled Nike shoes, but that is no longer the case.

"We had a portable floor, which you have dead spots," McGann said. "They aren't consistent. They have little gaps."

This court, in its second season at the Coors Events Center, is used by the CU volleyball team as well.

The NBA's Miami Heat uses a UniForce floor, as do Gonzaga and Pepperdine, among other schools. The Boston Celtics use a slightly different version of the court. Colorado plans to have the floor installed on its practice courts as well.

"When people get on it, you can really feel the difference, as opposed to a generic-type floor system," said Gary Gray, Southwest regional

manager of Connor Sports Flooring. "It has a carpet foam pad. Pretty much 65 percent of that pad is directly under the maple. It's the only floor system that has that. It has great shock absorption, great ball rebound, just great everything."

It's also rigorously tested to ensure quality. A DIN (Deutsches Institut fur Normung) test "takes into account ball rebound, shock absorption, vertical deflection and area deflection," Gray said. "You have to meet or exceed a certain amount of numbers. It's just a very uniform floor."

A year ago, in partnership with Sport Court, Connor Sports unveiled a court with a subfloor that is 100 percent recyclable.

"That's the next step, something that's green, that's recyclable but at the same time is a high performance system," Gray said. "Our technical department is always coming up with new and different ideas to get the latest and greatest floor that can protect the athletes even greater."

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