

Crawford leaving CU year early

Forward wants to play overseas

By Ryan Thorburn Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

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KANSAS CITY, Mo. -- Jeff Bzdelik said his No. 1 priority this offseason was to find a big man on the recruiting trail.

About 48 hours after Colorado's season ended with an 82-67 loss to Texas Tech in the opening round of the Big 12 tournament at the Sprint Center, the head coach has lost a big man.

Casey Crawford, a 6-foot-9 junior who sparked the Buffs to a pair of key conference wins down the stretch, is leaving the program.

The Wake Forest transfer Bzdelik once projected as a potential impact player in CU's Princeton-style offense, has decided to clean out his CU locker to pursue a professional playing career overseas.

Crawford, a member of the All-Big 12 academic team, will graduate in May with a degree in political science.

"I'm at a point in my life where I want to move on," Crawford said during an interview with the Camera on Friday after meeting with Bzdelik. "Everyone knows my college career has been up and down. I'm graduating and ready to do something else."

Crawford averaged 4.6 points and 2.0 rebounds this season but only played 13.8 minutes a game. Bzdelik had an intense meeting with the former Kansas Gatorade Player of the Year as the season was winding down and challenged him to step his game up.

During CU's 75-72 victory over Iowa State on Feb. 27, Crawford responded with 10 points in 12 minutes to help keep the team's postseason hopes alive.

On March 2, Crawford was moved into the starting lineup and scored a career-high 20 points on 7-for-8 shooting (including a 6-for-7 effort behind the arc) to lead the Buffs to an 81-68 victory over Nebraska that ended the program's 36-game Big 12 road losing streak.

"What you saw today and our last game is what I envisioned from him when we recruited him," Bzdelik said of Crawford after the rare win in Lincoln. "He's starting to get it. Better late than never."

Although the player and head coach didn't always see eye to eye, Crawford said his relationship with Bzdelik is not the reason he is leaving CU with one year of eligibility remaining.

"We have a good relationship," Crawford said. "We butted heads every once in a while, but coach is a great guy. I respect the heck out of him and he will be very successful here."

Bzdelik was not happy with Crawford's defense. However, the same could probably be said for all of CU's post players, considering freshman guard Alec Burks was easily the team's best rebounder and the Buffs were the worst rebounding team in the Big 12.

When asked after the season-ending loss at the Sprint Center what he needed to work on this offseason, Crawford quipped: "Find out how to jump."

Crawford did bring the skill the coaching staff bragged about after recruiting him -- the ability to make 3-pointers and create mismatches for his defender -- to the table. He was 24-for-54 (44.4 percent) behind the arc this season.

"I felt good about it," Crawford said of his collegiate career. "There were games where I played 30 minutes and other

games where I didn't play at all. That's hard. But coach gave me an opportunity to play here and I appreciate it."

Crawford said he made the decision to leave during the season, which explains why Dwight Thorne -- CU's only senior -- thought his roommate would be included in the Senior Day festivities before the Coors Events Center finale on March 6.

Returning to be a part of a team that believes it can make the NCAA tournament next season was tempting for Crawford.

But it sounds like four years of college basketball -- Crawford played one season at Wake Forest, sat out one season per NCAA transfer rules at CU, and then played for Bzdelik the past two seasons -- was enough for the forward from Overland Park, Kan.

"The most important thing in life is to be happy," Crawford said. "It sounds selfish, but I've put a lot of my happiness on the side to achieve my goals of graduating and playing in college."

Since Crawford is graduating, his departure will not have a negative impact on CU's Academic Progress Report.

And Bzdelik can use the scholarship to sign an extra big man.

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MARCH 12, 2010, 7:00 AM

CU's Bzdelik to schedule more toughies

By **TOM KENSLE** |  No Comments

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — The Colorado men's basketball program faced the nation's 15th most difficult schedule this season, according to this week's Sagarin college men's basketball ratings in USA Today.

Before departing the Big 12 Tournament in search of two super-sized recruits, CU coach Jeff Bzdelik told reporters to expect more of the same, regarding scheduling.

"A strong nonconference schedule can help get you into the NCAA Tournament," Bzdelik said.

He added that a demanding slate of nonconference game also helps to prepare his team for the Big 12 battles. Colorado (15-16) went 6-10 in conference play during the regular season, winning five more league games than the previous year.

"Next year on the schedule," he said, "we could be playing a Big Ten team, a Southeastern Conference team, a Pac-10 team, a couple of Mountain West teams that are in the top echelon (of that conference), and a Missouri Valley team that is at the top of their league."

It's known that CU will have a home game against Oregon State (as part of the Big 12-Pac-10 Hardwood Series). Colorado State comes to Boulder next season.

Look for Colorado to play in a tournament in Las Vegas, details and announcements pending.

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