

Growing pains felt by CU's Burks

Guard can still set Buffaloes' record for most points in freshman season

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Alec Burks has created some great expectations for Colorado basketball.

Perhaps this was most evident on Saturday when the smooth 6-foot-6 guard scored 11 points with four assists, two rebounds and just one turnover in 33 minutes. Although it was a brilliant Big 12 line for most players, especially freshmen - he had to fielding questions on how Iowa State slowed him down.

"It wasn't my day," Burks said after CU's 75-72 victory at the Coors Events Center. "It was the man to my right's day."

That would be junior Cory Higgins, who led the Buffs with 33 points on 12-for-15 shooting. Still, Burks has scored in double figures in every game he has played this season, except for the first meeting with Iowa State when he suffered a knee injury two minutes after the opening tip.

CU head coach Jeff Bzdelik, who gave the team Sunday off, said his prize recruit is trying to clear the same physical and mental hurdles all freshmen face at this point in the season.

"I think Alec is a little worn right now as a freshman. He has played a lot of minutes. You know what though? You look at his stats ... it shows you what a great talent he is," Bzdelik said. "It's not just about basketball. He's just a freshman in college and everything is different than high school -- study halls and tutors and exams and playing Big 12 basketball and traveling -- it's an adjustment.

"And he has done very well on it. He's done well with his grades, he's doing everything right, it's a credit to him."

Burks was being shadowed for much of the game by Marquis Gilstrap, a gifted senior who will likely be playing in the NBA next season.

"He's a great player, athletic inside and outside," Burks said of Gilstrap, who led Iowa State with 26 points. "He can do it all really."

With the game on the line, Burks did what he had to do to close out the Cyclones, knocking down four free throws in the final 76 seconds with his dad Steve watching from the front row.

"I'm not surprised because he's a good player," Steve Burks said of his son's phenomenal freshman campaign. "But I am surprised that it has happened for him this quick and they're talking about him and the NBA already."

Burks is projected as a top-five pick in the 2011 NBA draft at nbadraft.com. He needs just 36 points to set the CU freshmen record for points in a season held by Richard Roby.

With Burks, Higgins, Relphorde and perhaps the addition of a big man who can block shots and clean the glass, next season could be a special one for CU.

Right now, it's easy to forget that Burks is still an 18-year-old kid.

"We expect so much out of him," Bzdelik said. "We just need to keep it in perspective."

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