

Higgins not leaving CU Buffs early

Junior may declare for draft, but withdraw after NBA evaluation

By Ryan Thorburn Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 03/04/2010 08:01:37 PM MST

Cory Higgins expects to be a part of Senior Day at the Coors Events Center next March.

"I'm definitely planning on being here next year," Higgins, a junior who has leads Colorado in scoring (18.6 ppg) and the Big 12 in steals (2.1 spg), said before Thursday's practice.

That doesn't mean Higgins won't declare for the NBA draft and allow himself to be evaluated and interviewed at pre-draft camps this summer.

Players are allowed to go through the draft process and return to school as long as they do not hire an agent and withdraw their name from consideration at least 10 days before the draft. This year's NBA draft will be June 24 in New York.

"I would be open to it ... that can't hurt me," Higgins said of declaring early. "I can definitely see myself just seeing what the experience is like and then after next year I'll be more accustomed to it."

Higgins, a third-team All-Big 12 selection last season as a sophomore on a last-place team, is projected to be a second-round pick in a 2011 mock draft at nbadraft.net.

Unlike a lot of young players, Higgins probably has a very realistic idea of where he stands in the eyes of NBA scouts and executives.

CU coach Jeff Bzdelik was a longtime NBA scout and assistant before becoming the head coach of the Denver Nuggets. Higgins' father, Rod Higgins, is the general manager of the Charlotte Bobcats and one of new majority owner Michael Jordan's best friends.

Alec Burks, who leads all Big 12 freshmen in scoring (16.6 ppg), is more likely to leave CU early. He is a projected lottery pick in 2011 (nbadraft.net currently has Burks as the No. 3 overall pick should he leave after his sophomore season).

Having players leave early for the NBA isn't something CU has to deal with on an annual basis like Kansas and other perennial powers, but it does happen.

Chauncey Billups left CU after his sophomore season (1995-96) and was taken by the Boston Celtics with the third pick. David Harrison left after his junior season (2005-06) and was taken by the Indiana Pacers with the 29th pick (the final first-round selection that year).

Both of the above helped take the Buffs to the NCAA Tournament before leaving. With Higgins and Burks back next season, Bzdelik expects to get the program back in the Big Dance.

Seeing Red

(Raiders) again?

There is a good chance the Buffs, who wrap up the regular season against Texas Tech on Saturday, will have to face the Red Raiders again Wednesday in the opening round of the Big 12 Tournament in Kansas City.

CU will be the No. 8 seed with a win on Saturday and No. 9 with a loss. Texas Tech will be the No. 8 seed with a win and No. 9 with a loss combined with an Oklahoma loss.

The No. 8 and No. 9 seeds will play at 10:30 a.m. on Wednesday at the Sprint Center. The winner will face No. 1 Kansas

in the quarterfinals.

"I'm just worried about Saturday," Bzdelik said on the possible postseason rematch with Texas Tech. "It's the game that's next on our schedule and a game that's important in a lot of ways."

If CU wins and Oklahoma upsets Texas A&M in Norman on Saturday, the Buffs will face the Sooners at the Big 12 Tournament.

Beckley to be honored

Dwight Thorne, CU's only senior in eligibility, will not be the only player honored during Senior Day on Saturday at the Coors Events Center.

Trent Beckley, a walk-on from Vail who joined the program in 2006 as part of Thorne's class, will also be honored.

Beckley still has one more year of eligibility remaining after redshirting last season with a serious back injury, but non-basketball medical problems have kept him out of action this season and he will not play for the Buffs again.

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Woelk: Bzdelik's Buffs on doorstep of bright future

By Neill Woelk Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 03/05/2010 12:01:50 AM MST

It's been a while since the Colorado basketball team has played an "important" game this late in the regular season.

Saturday's home matchup with Texas Tech qualifies -- at least when using the program's history as a measuring stick.

Only once in the last five seasons have the Buffs won three consecutive Big 12 games.

They can accomplish that Saturday.

Only once in the last five seasons have the Buffs finished higher than 11th in the Big 12.

A win Saturday would give them the eighth seed in the conference tournament.

But maybe most importantly, a win Saturday over the Red Raiders would put the Buffs at .500 for the season and -- coupled with a win in next week's Big 12 Tournament opener -- put them in position for an NIT bid.

Granted, eighth in the Big 12 isn't going to have Jeff Bzdelik doing handstands. CU's coach didn't take the job in Boulder with a goal of finishing in the bottom half of the conference.

But eighth place in the nation's toughest league, one that will likely send seven to the NCAA Tournament, is a nice step in the right direction. Ditto for an NIT berth.

Those circumstances would put the Buffs on the doorstep of much bigger and better things. Bzdelik's program is one that's poised to make some serious noise in the Big 12, and it promises not to be a one-year wonder.

There's as much talent on this team as the Buffs have seen in years -- and yes, that includes the David Harrison bunch that made a one-game NCAA Tournament appearance in 2003.

Cory Higgins is an all-conference caliber player. Alec Burks might be the league's freshman of the year. Marcus Relphorhe is a workhorse who has an impact on both ends of the floor. The recent play of Casey Crawford -- 30 points in CU's last two games -- has the CU coaching staff crossing its fingers that he's finally ready to live up to the potential they saw when he came here three years ago.

And you haven't even seen the player CU's coaches thought would be the team's best freshman when the year began, Shannon Sharpe. A knee injury sidelined Sharpe for the season, but he's recovering ahead of schedule -- and he's the type of athlete that could have the same impact next year that Burks has had on the team this year.

There's depth on this team, depth that won't all be disappearing a year from now. There's a foundation of talent, a chance to not only experience some success but to sustain it over several seasons.

Still, there is one piece missing, and Bzdelik and his assistants have spent more time in airports and tiny gymnasiums than they have at home recently attempting to find that piece.

They're looking for a big man. In CU's case, it's almost become the hunt for Sasquatch (who, come to think of it, would be a pretty imposing presence in the paint).

Did you see the Buffs' rebounding statistics in their last two games? In a win over Iowa State, the Buffs were beaten 18-3 on the offensive boards. In an ensuing win over Nebraska, the Buffs managed exactly one -- yep, one -- offensive rebound while the Huskers gathered in 20.

Yet despite losing the offensive board battle by an astounding 38-4 margin over those two games, Colorado won them

both.

Just think what a legitimate rebounder and shot blocker could do for this team.

They're looking. They're currently pursuing a pair of junior college big men. But in what's become a never-ending refrain in Boulder, they're falling behind in the race because other schools pursuing the same players have cleared the players for admission while CU is still considering the players' transcripts.

It's nothing new. CU has always faced academic hurdles that simply aren't a factor in other places. But this seems to be a make-or-break moment that you hope CU officials would be anxious to take advantage of.

Bzdelik's program is ready to explode. Ask any coach around the Big 12 and they'll tell you how close the Buffs are to becoming a serious contender in the conference.

With the roster they have right now, the Buffs could be good next year. Fun to watch and competitive in the conference.

But throw in a big man, a player who can block shots and reduce the rebound differential, and the Buffs could be more than fun to watch.

Add a big man to the equation, and Buff fans will be studying bracketology a year from now.

Here's hoping CU's coaches get a fair shot at completing that equation.

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MARCH 5, 2010, 7:38 AM

CU's next two: Red Raiders, Red Raiders?

By **TOM KENSLE** |  No Comments

Back to back?

After finishing the regular season against visiting Texas Tech on Saturday, the Colorado men's basketball team may have to turn right around and face the Red Raiders again on Wednesday in the first round of the Big 12 Tournament in Kansas City, as the Nos. 8 and 9 seeds.

The only scenario in which that would not happen is if Colorado (14-15, 5-10 Big 12) defeats Texas Tech (16-13, 4-11) on Saturday and Oklahoma beats (13-16, 4-11) visiting Texas A&M. In that situation, Oklahoma would get the No. 9 seed by finishing with a better conference record than Texas Tech.

Colorado is assured of no worse than the No. 9 seed because it has the tie-breaker advantage over Oklahoma, having defeated the Sooners in their lone regular-season matchup.

Playing Texas Tech again in Kansas City "would be good for preparation," CU junior guard Cory Higgins said. "On Saturday, we can get a feel for what they like to do."

But, Buffs senior guard Dwight Thorne cautioned, "Sometimes it can be hard to beat a team twice in a row."

The Nos. 8 and 9 seeds will kick off the tournament, with the Wednesday opener set to tip off at 10:30 a.m. Mountain.

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MARCH 5, 2010, 7:15 AM

CU's Higgins to return but may do NBA camps

By **TOM KENSLE** |  No Comments

In no surprise, but good news for Colorado basketball fans, nonetheless, junior guard Cory Higgins said he will return for his senior season.

Higgins, tied for third among Big 12 scorers with 18.6 points per game, said he may test the NBA waters this spring by declaring for the 2010 NBA draft and going through pre-draft camps before pulling out.

That way, Higgins said, he could see how he stacks up against other top guards around the country and also find out which parts of his game need work in order for him to reach the next level.

"Obviously, I'm definitely set on being here next year," Higgins said. "But (going through NBA pre-draft camps) can't hurt me. I could definitely see myself seeing what the experience is like, so when I go after next year I'll be more accustomed to it.

"I'm thinking about doing that, but it's not a set plan or anything."

Higgins' father, Rod Higgins, was a longtime NBA player and is general manager for the Charlotte Bobcats.

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MARCH 4, 2010, 6:04 PM

Full disclosure: Kensler's men's all-Big 12 ballot

By **TOM KENSLE** |  3 Comments

Here's the ballot I submitted for The Associated Press all-Big 12 men's basketball honors as selected by beat writers covering the conference.

First team: Cole Aldrich, KU; James Anderson, OSU; Denis Clemente, KSU; Sherron Collins, KU; and Damion James, Texas.

Second team: Craig Brackins, ISU; LaceDarius Dunn, Baylor; Cory Higgins, CU; Jacob Pullen, KSU; and Donald Sloan, A&M.

Coach of the year: Frank Martin, KSU.

Player of the year: Sherron Collins, KU.

Newcomer (transfer) of the year: Ekpe Udoh, Baylor.

Freshman of the year: Alec Burks, CU.

Feel free to take exception and give your ballot.

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