

Q&A: Boyle not taking anything for granted

By Ryan Thorburn Camera Sports Writer Tad Boyle recently took some time from his busy schedule to sit Boulder Daily Camera

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Tad Boyle recently took some time from his busy schedule to sit down for an interview with the Camera to discuss his first month and a half on the job and the general state of the Colorado men's basketball program he is now responsible for.

After being named Jeff Bzdelik's replacement on April 19, Boyle, a former Kansas player and Northern Colorado head coach, was able to keep the Buffs' promising roster together for the most part, hire three assistants, sign three recruits and even mingle with fans throughout the state during a recent barnstorming tour.

Boyle, a Greeley native, understands the historical struggle CU has had in men's basketball and accepts the greater expectations entering his first season with the return of All-Big 12 players Alec Burks and Cory Higgins.

"You can't take anything for granted at Colorado," Boyle said. "I think that's the one message I'm going to try to get through to our players in the fall is we have to take every day seriously."

Here is the rest of the Camera's conversation with Boyle:

Camera: How were you received on the recent athletic department bus tour around the state with Dan Hawkins and other CU coaches?

Boyle: It was great. The one thing as you go throughout the state is you find how much Buff pride is out there and how much love there is for the institution, whether it's as far south as Pueblo or up into the mountains in Edwards, Dillon and that area, or out in the plains of Fort Morgan. Everywhere you went there was a lot of Buffs fans. It

was a great idea that we did it, especially with so many new faces on board. Coach Hawkins was a veteran of the tour, but with Linda (Lappe) and myself being new and Liz (Kritza) being here for one year, it was a great opportunity for us to meet a lot of people. The challenge for me will be to remember all of the names.

Camera: What did the fans want to know about you and the program?

Boyle: Obviously, people are interested in recruiting. In the springtime with basketball, people are anxious to hear about the new kids that we signed. To be honest, they were pretty nice to me. Nobody put me on the spot or had any real hard questions. I'm still in the honeymoon stage. I think people are just genuinely excited about the direction of all the programs. We were very well received I thought.

Camera: Speaking of recruiting, when there is a coaching change the new coach usually has to do some recruiting with the team he is inheriting to keep it intact. Clearly, that was the case with Alec Burks and his family. How did you make sure the key returning players stayed on board?

Boyle: The first thing I did with our team is relay to them the fact that I've been in their shoes when I was a student-athlete. When I was (at Kansas) there was a coaching change right in the middle of my career, so I can empathize with the emotions a lot of them are going through. What I try to do is just appeal to their Buffalo pride. I said, 'If you guys are truly Buffaloes, you're in this thing together and you're going to stick together.' I made a pledge to them that I was going to put a staff together they could be proud of and relate to. Respect and trust has to be earned, it can't be given to you. As a coach when you come into this situation, you want to fast-forward that process, but there's really no way to do it until you spend some time with them. What I asked Alec and all the players to do is give me a chance, give our staff a chance to build that relationship with them and build that trust and respect.

Camera: You're still getting to know the players and their skill levels, having spent limited time with them during individual workouts. But knowing the Big 12 the way you do, how impressed were you by Alec's Freshman-of-the-Year season and his overall talent?

Boyle: The thing that's exciting to me is the solid nucleus we have coming in here. Alec had a tremendous freshman year, obviously. We're excited about his future here and his upside. We've got a good nucleus to build on. I think the biggest challenge we have is to add on a quality of depth to our roster, and that's where recruiting comes in. What I challenged the players with before we broke for the summer was that everybody in here has to have the best offseason of their career. Whether you're Marcus Relphorde or Cory Higgins or Levi Knutson going into your senior year, or whether you're Shannon Sharpe or Alec Burks or Shane Harris-Tunks coming off your freshman year, you all have to have great offseasons.

Camera: Given the brief time frame from when you were hired to the end of the spring signing period, were you pleased to land the three players you signed (guard Carlon Brown, center Ben Mills and forward Andre Roberson)?

Boyle: I'm elated. This year, probably more so than any of the 16 years I've been involved in college basketball, I think there were more quality players available in the spring than I had ever experienced. I feel very good about the three kids we've brought in so far and their futures. The transition to the Big 12 Conference is sometimes a very steep one, but I think in time all of the guys we brought in will be good players. Of course Carlon Brown (a Utah transfer), he has to sit out next year, but he is a battle-tested veteran. He fit where our roster is pretty well.

Camera: Can you talk about the staff you have assembled so far (assistants Tom Abatemarco, Jean Prioleau and Mike Rohn)?

Boyle: It's a great mix and we're going to be adding to our staff here (a director of basketball operations) in the coming weeks, but I feel really good about the guys we have in the fold. This is Tom's second time around here at Colorado and he has a real good feel for the landscape of the campus and the league. He also has contacts from coast to coast because he has been in the business for so long. I think he brings something to our staff that is pretty unique. Jean and Mike are guys who I've been in the trenches with at Wichita State (all assistants under Mark Turgeon). That was a great turnaround situation we went through there. Those guys are both familiar with the Big 12 and guys I trust implicitly.

Camera: Jeff (Bzdelik) made it clear he wasn't comfortable playing Jeff Reynolds and Air Force given his history there, and Steve (McClain) obviously was the coach at Wyoming before getting fired. Are you going to try to schedule more Front Range teams during non-conference play?

Boyle: I'd love to. I think we need to help promote basketball in the state of Colorado. I think that's one of the responsibilities we have as the flagship university and as I see it the flagship program in the state. I would like to play as many Front Range teams ... are we going to be able to play all of them in a single year? Probably not. But we want to get as many of them on the schedule as we can, whether it's Wyoming, Air Force, Denver and eventually Northern Colorado once those kids graduate. Obviously, Colorado State is already on the schedule.

Camera: How much does having the construction of the new practice facility help CU basketball, even though it won't be ready to use for a year?

Boyle: Every time you come to work you look out the window and you see progress, that's exciting. It's something that's sorely needed, and I think it puts us on par with some of the other programs we're competing with. The one thing we ask of our coaches and players is to try to get better every day. Once they have the facility they will be able to do that. They won't have to go hunt for gym time on campus and ask, 'Are we in Balch today or at the Rec Center?' That will be a question that's laid to rest. This is where you come to get better.

Camera: Texas A&M is known as a football school, but the success of the basketball program over the last five or six years also has their fan base excited. Mark (Turgeon) had the student body engaged to point where they were lined up outside Reed Arena last season to get into the CU game. Can CU create that kind of interest at the Coors Events Center?

Boyle: I've never looked at schools as being football schools or basketball schools. I've just looked at it as: Do you have the resources to be successful? Just talking about the practice facility and the arena we play in and the city and campus we have to recruit to, there's no question we can have success here. The challenge is going to be: How do we sustain that success? We're climbing the mountain right now, but we're here to build a program, not just build a team. I'm exciting about next year's team, but as the head coach you kind of have to look at the big picture and where we're going in years ahead. That's the challenge and that's what Mark faced at Texas A&M. He took over a program that was on the upswing and they were coming off a couple NCAA Tournament experiences. We don't have that here at Colorado, but certainly the arrow is pointing up. Our challenge is to keep it pointed up and get over the top of that mountain.

Camera: What is your stance on tournament expansion? Is 68 the right number for the NCAA Tournament field?

Boyle: I don't know if that's the right number or not. I've never been an advocate of 96, just because I think that's too big.

The balance that we have in college basketball is a good one in terms of the emphasis on the conference seasons and the non-conference schedules and postseason tournaments. By expanding that tournament I think you're really jeopardizing the quality and the emphasis that needs to be put on the preseason and the regular season. I like where it's at. I think you can tinker, but if you change things dramatically you run the risk of ruining one of the best sporting events we have in this country.

Camera: Nationally, conference realignment is the hot topic. Bzdelik was in favor of CU moving to the Pac-10, if invited, and viewed it as a better fit for the university for recruiting and competing in basketball. You're a Big 12 guy, what do you think?

Boyle: I think the University of Colorado is positioned well wherever we go. As long as we remain in the BCS, which I don't think is in jeopardy ... I tend not to spend a lot of time thinking about things I can't control. Certainly it's a hot topic right now, a lot of people are talking about it. As long as we are a member of the BCS and have the resources to compete at that level, we can sell Colorado wherever we are.

Camera: It feels like there's a lot of time between now and when practices begin this October, but it sound like you still have plenty of work to do before the 2010-11 season tips off?

Boyle: I keep thinking it's going to slow down but it doesn't. And that's OK, I love it. I'm running on adrenaline right now and at some point I'm going to need to take some time and charge my batteries to make sure we're ready when the kids come back in August. But July is a huge recruiting month for us with the 2011 class. We're a little bit behind, but Tom, Mike and Jean have done a tremendous job of getting us involved with some good kids going forward. It's a 24-7-365 job. It is important that we balance our lives to some degree, but this first year is going to be a little abnormal.

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