

CU out to win over fans

First goal for Bzdelik's Buffs: Play well at home

By Ryan Thorburn Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 11/12/2009 11:49:25 PM MST

Jeff Bzdelik went to marketing meetings with athletic department officials, reached out to students on campus, traveled around to communities throughout the state and made his pitch on radio talk shows and during a Rockies telecast.

Colorado's third-year head coach even turned the table on a reporter during the offseason, asking -- "How can we get fans in here? I'm serious, do you have any ideas?"

The answer to all of the empty seats at the Coors Events Center is simple.

In order to become relevant in a sports market dominated by professional franchises, the CU men's basketball program -- coming off three consecutive seasons in which it lost at least 20 games and finished last in the Big 12 -- must start winning.

Especially the games played in Boulder.

Deep down Bzdelik, who was able to bring some magic back to the Pepsi Center with Carmelo Anthony as head coach of the Denver Nuggets and transform Clune Arena from a visitor-friendly venue into one of the most difficult places to play in the country during his time at Air Force, already knew this.

"We have reached out and done a plethora of things that will hopefully attract people," Bzdelik said. "Now, that's only half of it. We have to win. And in order to do that we must play well."

CU opens the 2009-10 season tonight against Arkansas-Pine Bluff. Tip-off is scheduled for 7:05 p.m. and adults can get into the Coors Events Center for as little as \$1.

The Buffs have a star in junior Cory Higgins, an All-Big 12 third-team selection last season after the gifted guard led the team in scoring, rebounding, steals and minutes.

The coaching staff believes two sophomores, point guard Nate Tomlinson and forward Austin Dufault, will make a similar jump in their second seasons in the system.

And shooting guard Dwight Thorne, the program's only senior, and junior college transfer Marcus Relphorde, a versatile talent, are also Big 12-caliber players expected to start tonight.

A winning season and postseason play is the goal. In order to do that CU is going to have to take care of business at the Coors Events Center, no matter how many people are in the cheap seats.

"If we win people will come and watch us play. I think it's like that everywhere else," Thorne said. "Every team that has a great home court advantage has won at some point in their existence. I think if we win some games people will get behind us and will be in the stands watching us play."

The Buffs opened up with a 76-56 victory over Arkansas-Pine Bluff last season, only to pull a Dan Hawkins and lose to Montana State in the next home game.

"Establishing a home court advantage is something we definitely need to do. Last year it seems like we never had it," Dufault said. "We let one go against Montana State at the beginning of the year and we can't allow something like that to happen this year."

CU was last in the Big 12 in attendance last season, averaging 4,637 per game. Baylor was 11th (7,066), Kansas State was 10th (8,940) and the rest of the conference averaged more than 9,400 fans per game (led by Kansas, 16,350).

"I wish everyone in the world could experience what it's like to play in front of 15,000 people and they're either cheering for you or booing you. As a competitor I love it," Thorne said. "If we get 11,500 here or whatever it holds, all it's going to do is make guys want to play harder, longer and give everybody something to get excited about. We need that feeling at home."

The Buffs play Coppin State next Monday and Texas Southern next Wednesday before leaving for the EA Sports Maui Invitational. Realistically, this team will have to board the flight to paradise with a 3-0 record in order to play with confidence in the prestigious preseason tournament.

"We feel like if we perform as well as we can in the nonconference, once the Big 12 comes around people are going to want to support us, especially if we have a good showing in Maui," Dufault said. "That's a great tournament to be in, and if we can do well out there it would create a buzz about our team."

During the 2005-06 season the Buffs were 14-2 at the Coors Events Center, which was enough to get them on the NCAA Tournament bubble with a 20-9 record before what turned out to be an NIT appearance.

During Ricardo Patton's final season and Bzdelik's first two seasons at CU, the program is 20-27 on Sox Walseth Court.

"Our fans can make a big difference. We need them," Bzdelik said. "We need to play with passion and energy and play better basketball. If we can combine that with the fan support, then we can have some fun nights here. ... Everybody wants someone to say to them, 'I believe in you.'"

"We believe in ourselves, we believe in our fans, and we need our fans. We want to play the kind of basketball where our fans leave appreciating the way we play the game."

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Big 12 men's preview: Colorado

Camera staff
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 11/12/2009 11:51:26 PM MST

(Editor's note: This is the 12th of the Big 12 capsule previews, which have run in order of predicted finish. The first 11 teams: Kansas, Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas State, Texas A&M, Oklahoma State, Missouri, Iowa State, Texas Tech, Baylor and Nebraska)

Colorado Buffaloes

AP preseason ranking: Not ranked

Head coach: Jeff Bzdelik (21-42 at CU, 96-89 overall)

Last season: 9-22 overall, 1-15 conference (12th)

Returning stars: Cory Higgins, 6-5, Jr., G (17.4 ppg, 5.4 rpg); Dwight Thorne, 6-3, Sr., G (12.0 ppg, 3.4 rpg).

Keep an eye on: The development of sophomores Nate Tomlinson and Austin Dufault will be the key to the season. Junior college transfer Marcus Relphorde and freshman shooting guard Alec Burks will have an immediate impact.

Stats that matter: CU has finished last in the Big 12 the past three seasons and has lost at least 20 games in each of the past three seasons. ... The Buffs have only one senior for the second consecutive season and return 86.9 percent of the scoring from last season. ... Defensively, CU has allowed less than 70 points per game in both of Bzdelik's seasons on the bench.

Quotable: "We'll be better. We're in an unforgiving league called the Big 12, so we'll just take it one game at a time. We will be prepared, we will play hard, we will be fearless, and we'll see where that takes us," Bzdelik said.

Outlook: Bzdelik believes the Buffs can turn the corner this season and produce a winning record. That's going to be very difficult considering this might be the best the Big 12 has ever been and CU also plays in the Maui Invitational, at Oregon State and at Tulsa during non-conference play.

Tonight: CU opens the season against Arkansas-Pine Bluff at 7 p.m. at the Coors Events Center.

-- Ryan Thorburn

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There's a little captain in two at CU

Dwight Thorne II, Cory Higgins named team captains

By David Starcer on November 12, 2009

For the second consecutive year, the Colorado Buffaloes men's basketball team will have the same team captains.

According to a news release Wednesday, CU head coach Jeff Bzdelik announced senior guard Dwight Thorne II and junior guard Cory Higgins as the captains for the 2009-2010 season.

Thorne, the team's lone senior, is looking to build off of his best season at Colorado. He averaged 12 points per game and led the team with 45 three-pointers. He was also selected as one of 10 NCAA Division I student-athletes to participate on an Athletes in Action team last summer against teams in Germany and Poland.

Higgins is looking to improve off of a stellar season from a year ago in which he was an All-Big 12 Conference Third-Team selection. He was one of 13 players nationwide ranked first or second in all five major statistical categories (points, rebounds, assists, steals and blocks). Higgins averaged 17.4 ppg last year and needs 196 more to become the 26th player in men's history with 1,000 career points as a Buffalo.

The CU men's team tips off its season Friday at 7 p.m. at the Coors Event Center when they face off with Arkansas Pine-Bluff. There will be free Nike CU basketball T-shirts for student season ticket holders at Friday's game.

Contact CU Independent Staff Writer David Starcer at David.starcer@colorado.edu.

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Basketball team captains Dwight Thorne II and Cory Higgins face off against Nebraska on Feb. 4. Both men will hold onto their captain titles again this season. (CU Independent files/Molly Maher)

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CU looks to be golden against Arkansas-Pine Bluff

Buffaloes host Golden Lions in men's B-ball opener

By David Starcer on November 13, 2009

Editor's note: Welcome to the CU Independent's five-day season preview of Colorado Buffaloes basketball. Each day, we will delve into the world of CU basketball leading up to the men's season-opener against Arkansas-Pine Bluff on Friday, Nov. 13. On Day 5, we will preview the men's season-opener.

The Colorado Buffaloes hope to replicate the result of their last meeting against the Arkansas-Pine Bluff Golden Lions and get the 2009-2010 men's basketball season off to a good start.

CU will open its season against the Golden Lions of the Southwestern Athletic Conference at 7 p.m. Friday at the Coors Events Center.



The two teams met in the season-opener last season at the Coors Event Center, a game the Buffs won 76-56. Casey Crawford led the Buffs with 14 points in just 19 minutes of play while Austin Dufault poured in 13. Nate Tomlinson and Cory Higgins each added 12. Forward Lebaron Weathers led the Golden Lions with 22 points in the loss.

This year, Colorado will have a size advantage against Pine Bluff (something CU won't be able to say much this season), and it's something guys like the 6-foot-9 Dufault and 6-foot-11 freshman Shane Harris-Tunks can use to their advantage.

Pine Bluff is returning its top five scorers from a year ago, including leading scorer Terrance Calvin, a 6-foot-2, 170-pound guard who averaged 12 points per game and led his team in assists (105) on his way to an All-SWAC Third-Team selection.

Calvin, a senior, will definitely have his work cut out for him on both sides of the floor against the Buffs as he will likely go head-to-head with All-Big 12 Conference Third-Team guard Cory Higgins, who averaged 17.4 points per game in 2008-09.

The Golden Lions are coming off a 13-18 campaign from a year ago, but that record is a bit deceiving as the team went 11-7 in conference play, which broke the school record for conference wins. They also had a tough non-conference schedule which included road games at Texas A&M, Cincinnati and then-No. 10 Purdue.

After they face Colorado this year, Pine Bluff will again face a daunting non-conference gauntlet as they will meet No. 15 Michigan, No. 20 Georgia Tech, Oregon, Big 12 opponents Oklahoma State, Kansas State and Missouri, all on the road.

CU will try to utilize the home-court to its advantage and should the starters play well enough to induce a big lead, fans may get to see some new faces on the court.

Freshman guard Alec Burks (6-6, 185), the 2009 Gatorade Player of the Year in the state of Missouri, will see time at both guard positions with the loss of Shannon Sharpe for the season. Forward Keegan Hornbuckle (6-7, 205), another diaper dandy, will be expected to contribute as well.

Junior forward Marcus Relphorde (6-7, 220) is also scheduled to make his debut in black and gold Friday. Relphorde, a junior college transfer from Indian Hills Community College (Iowa), averaged 10.6 points and 4.2 rebounds a game last year and will likely be the sixth man expected to bring a spark off the bench for head coach Jeff Bzdelik.

The Buffs non-conference schedule will get tougher along the road, especially when they head to Hawaii for the Maui Invitational in two weeks where they are guaranteed to play Gonzaga and then either Arizona or Wisconsin.

No game should be taken lightly — just ask Syracuse. The Orange dropped an exhibition game to Division II Le Moyne on November 3. Look for the Buffs to come out strong and get off to a golden start to the new season.

Contact CU Independent Staff Writer David Starcer at David.starcer@colorado.edu.

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cu basketball

Marcus Relphorde a Buff in transition

CU coach Bzdelik thinks forward Relphorde can be a big asset this year because of his versatility.

By Chris Dempsey
The Denver Post

Posted: 11/13/2009 01:00:00 AM MST

Updated: 11/13/2009 03:02:05 AM MST



Coach Jeff Bzdelik says Marcus Relphorde might be the best newcomer for Buffs. (RJ Sangosti, The Denver Post)

BOULDER — Boulder's foothills and trails are a long way from Chicago's concrete jungle. Marcus Relphorde has had time adjusting to that.

He'll be fine. Adjusting to new surroundings has become one of the Colorado junior forward's strong suits.

When the curtain opens on Colorado's season tonight against Arkansas-Pine Bluff, Relphorde will officially be playing for his fifth coach — and fifth different system — in five years. That kind

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of yearly change either breaks a person or forces him to become a quick study.

Relphorde considers himself the latter.

"I'm used to it now, just coming into a new team, asserting myself with all of the new guys and learning a new coach's system," Relphorde

CU Basketball

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- Colorado coach Jeff Bzdelik .

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- standings, player pages and more .

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- CU sports .

said. "I've been doing it for a while."

Still, CU coach Jeff Bzdelik acknowledges, "That's tough on a young man, to every year be constantly learning a new system where he has to learn where his shots are coming from and where he can get shots for his teammates."

Five years ago, Relphorde was a senior at Homewood-Flossmoor High in Flossmoor, Ill. From there, he went to prep school for a year at American Christian School in Alston, Pa. He was

recruited to Saint Louis University by Brad Soderberg, but actually played for Rick Majerus in 2007-08.

Relphorde then transferred to Indian Hills (Iowa) CC for the 2008-09 season, where he put up 10.6 points and 4.2 rebounds per game for a Warriors team that finished 30-3.

Now he's learning the finer points of Colorado's Princeton offense-based system.

"The offense is different than the one I ran before, but I like it because it presents matchup problems for players like me that can play more than one position," Relphorde said.

Bzdelik lauds Relphorde's versatility. Teammates say they can see it on the court. Relphorde can play point guard all the way to power forward, and will be asked to do a bit of everything over the course of the season.

"He's out there guarding the four-man and at the same time he's bringing the ball up the court," guard Cory Higgins said. "So, he can definitely play all four positions. Right off the bat he's going to create matchup problems for other teams."

And he'll be counted on for leadership and production, beginning tonight. Bzdelik's team is still young and relatively inexperienced. Relphorde, for all of the changes he's had to adapt to, has played more basketball at the collegiate level than anyone else on the team.

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He is expected to start in the spot vacated by the graduated Jeryml Jackson-Wilson. Colorado returns its other four starters.

At Colorado's media day, Bzdelik indicated just how much he's going to lean on Relphorde, saying, "He's the one I expect the most out of and he knows that."

"That's something we talked about in the recruiting process," Bzdelik explained on Thursday. "Who knows what happens when the lights are turned on. But I have confidence in him, and I believe he has confidence in himself."

Relphorde said he's ready to accept the challenge, but as much as anything is just happy to be wanted.

"That's one of the reasons I came here," he said. "I knew Coach needed somebody to come in and really help the team. And I wanted to go somewhere where I would be relied on, as opposed to just being another guy on the team. I accepted the pressure and I'm ready to go out there and take care of business."

Chris Dempsey: 303-954-1279 or cdempsey@denverpost.com

How the local schools start the season

Full weekend schedule Air Force men

Today vs. Western State, 8 p.m.

Air Force women

Islander Tipoff (Corpus Christi, Texas)

Today vs. Texas A&M, 6:15 p.m.

Colorado men

Today vs. Arkansas-Pine Bluff, 7 p.m.
Colorado women

Sunday vs. Cal Irvine,

3 p.m.
Colorado State men

Travelers Tipoff (Eugene, Ore.)

Today vs. Cal-Davis, 5:30 p.m.

Colorado State women

Today vs. Montana, 7 p.m.

Denver men

Today vs. Northern Iowa,

7:30 p.m.
Denver women

Today vs. Wyoming, 5:30 p.m.
Northern Colorado men

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Rainbow Classic (Hawaii)

Today vs. McNeese State, 8 p.m.

Northern Colorado women

Preseason WNIT

Today at New Mexico, 7 p.m.

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Longmont, Colorado
 Saturday, December 26,
 2009

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Relphorde here to stay

By Justin Williams
 © 2009 Longmont Times-Call

BOULDER — Marcus Relphorde vows this to be it.

No more moving. No more transferring. No more headaches. The University of Colorado junior finally has found a home.

Relphorde, who will make his first appearance as a Buff tonight when the men's basketball team opens its season against Arkansas-Pine Bluff, is playing for his fifth team in five years, dating back to his high school days.

"It's such a relief to know I'll be in the same place for more than a year," he said. "That feels really good."

Out of high school, Relphorde signed with St. Louis. But a coaching change that resulted in a lack of playing time forced him to look elsewhere. He decided to go the junior college route for a year, helping Indian Hills Community College to a 30-3 record last season — and Division I coaches took notice of the 10.6 points and 4.2 rebounds he averaged as a sophomore.

CU head coach Jeff Bzdelik was hot on the 6-foot-7, 220-pounder's trail from the beginning.

"We saw a versatility and mental maturity that this team lacked in a lot of ways last year," Bzdelik said

So, one recruiting visit to Boulder — the Chicago-area native's first trip to the state — and an immediate love affair with the mountains later, Relphorde's mind was made up. He wanted to be a Buffalo.

"The biggest draw was my relationship with coach Bzdelik," Relphorde said. "But I also liked the people they had coming back. I felt like if they added a couple more pieces and if we could all get on the same page, we could make some noise in the conference."

That's been the goal for a while now for a program that has struggled in the Big 12, winning just four conference games in Bzdelik's two years.

Bzdelik hopes bringing in Relphorde, who figures to be among the starting five in tonight's season opener, along with the returning experience, will help steer the Buffs in the right direction.

"Since I've been here, all I've heard is, 'This isn't going to be another last year,'" Relphorde said. "I know the program as a whole in the past years hasn't



Junior Marcus Relphorde is set to make his debut with the Colorado basketball team tonight. **University of Colorado**

Arkansas-Pine Bluff (0-0) at Colorado men (0-0)

When/Where: 7 p.m. tonight at the Coors Events Center in Boulder

TV/Radio: No TV/KKZN 760

The series: CU leads 2-0. CU beat Arkansas Pine-Bluff 76-56 on Nov. 14, 2008.

Leading returning scorers:
 Arkansas-Pine Bluff — Terrance Calvin (12 points per game); CU — Cory Higgins (17.4 points per game)

Notes: CU enters its third season under coach Jeff Bzdelik. It returns four starters and nine letter winners. Freshman Alec Burk could get the start at one guard spot tonight, and transfer forward Marcus Relphorde, a junior, is expected to start at forward... Higgins led the Buffs in scoring, rebounding (5.4 per game)

done too well, and you can just tell that people are frustrated from last year.

“But I feel like everybody is doing what’s necessary to make a change in this program.”

Bzdelik envisions big things out of Relphorde’s versatility, which has allowed him to play anything from point guard to strong forward during his two college seasons. He also brings matchup problems to the perimeter, where Relphorde is likely to see some action with backup point guard Shannon Sharpe out for the season.

“The poor guy has been through five systems in five years,” Bzdelik said. “It’s been difficult to really get comfortable yet.”

Yet, Relphorde said, the transition to the Buffs’ system has been smooth so far.

“I feel like I’ve gotten pretty good at adjusting,” he said. “This one is definitely different than what I’ve been through, but what I like about it is it’s not always sets; it’s more based on reads.

“And that means, if we’re all on the same page, we should be fine.”

Playing for different teams and different coaches, Relphorde said, has made him stronger. He hopes to bring leadership and a winning culture that he says is “contagious” to the program.

But, he admits, he’s still trying to soak it all in.

“I love Boulder,” Relphorde said. “Driving into Boulder and seeing the mountains is crazy. I’ve never seen anything like that. I like the whole laid-back feel here.

“I’m really looking forward to spending more time here.”

Justin Williams can be reached at jwilliams@times-call.com.

and free throw shooting (83 percent) in 2008-09. This year’s lone senior, Dwight Thorne, led the team in field goal shooting last year, 48.1 percent. ... CU named Higgins and Thorne team captatins this week. ... Arkansas-Pine Bluff returns all five starters from last year’s 13-18 team. It won 11 SWAC games to finish fourth in its league. ... CU will wear new silver home uniforms tonight.

Patrick Ridgell