

Long way pays off for CU Buffs assistant

Long promoted after two years as volunteer on Bzdelik`s staff

By Ryan Thorburn Camera Sports Writer
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Drew Long paid his dues.

And now Colorado`s new assistant coach is actually getting paid.

After Jeff Bzdelik was hired, Long -- a 2004 Northwestern graduate who played for Bill Carmody -- decided to leave his job as an assistant at Southwestern University, a Division III school in Georgetown, Texas, and move to Boulder hoping the CU staff would give him a chance.

"Drew just appeared at the door," Bzdelik said. "I spent six years at Northwestern (as an assistant) and he came very highly thought of and recommended by people that I still know at Northwestern."

Long joined the staff two years ago as a volunteer assistant and video coordinator. He modernized CU`s film room, and Bzdelik was impressed enough to promote him to full-time assistant this fall to fill the vacancy created when veteran Big 12 assistant Charles Baker left the program after the 2008-09 season.

Long said his parents helped support him financially during his volunteer days and nights at the Coors Events Center. He also worked part-time at the print shop on the CU campus doing graphic design work, a relationship that has helped the men`s basketball program improve the quality of its printed recruiting materials.

"I was lucky in the fact that my parents were great about it. They knew this was my passion and this is what I wanted to do and they helped me get by that first year," Long said. "I ate a lot of hot dogs and Ramen noodles and things of that nature."

Long's decision to chase his professional dream also changed his personal life dramatically. He married Melissa Schau, who worked as the athletic trainer for CU men's basketball during the 2007-08 season, and the couple had their first child, Alice, in March.

"When I came here I was single and that was a big driving factor in leaving Texas, I wasn't tied down at all. It's kind of funny how things worked out," Long said. "I met my wife here and things have been great and we've been blessed with a seven-month old healthy daughter. Things are heading in the right direction."

After breaking down all of the unsightly film from a pair of 20-loss seasons, Long is convinced - like Bzdelik and the rest of the staff - that the Buffs are ready to make some significant progress on the scoreboard this season.

There is some experience on the roster now with Cory Higgins, Dwight Thorne, Levi Knutson, Casey Crawford and Trent Beckley entering their third seasons in the system. Nate Tomlinson and Austin Dufault started as true freshmen last season and are expected to play at a much higher level now. And newcomers Marcus Relphorde, Alec Burks, Keegan Hornbuckle and Shane Harris-Tunks should impact the program right away.

"We're happy with the guys that we have. I think we have the right guys in the right spots and we've built that depth," Long said. "We're excited to see what the young guys can do. They've brought a different level of athleticism that we haven't seen the last couple years. And in this league that's invaluable because you're playing against great athletes all the time."

Since Long is only 28 he is perhaps able to communicate with today's players on a more personal level than the head coach.

"It has always been a goal of mine to get to an assistant level. I played and got to see that side of it as a player, but it's always interesting to see the other side of it and try to build those relationships with the players," Long said. "I feel like I'm close enough in age that our players can relate to me fairly well."

Long might be getting paid now, but CU is receiving good value with the new assistant's work ethic. He will still handle all of the video coordination in addition to the coaching and recruiting duties that have been added to his plate.

"Drew was an excellent player at Northwestern and he has a great basketball mind," Bzdelik said. "He came out here and volunteered, worked for free for more than a full year, and came to work every day with a great attitude. He has done everything we've asked him to do. He has a great knowledge of the game and great experience as a Big Ten player. He's an excellent teacher on the court. Through his work and knowledge and teaching ability he has gained the respect of the players."

The Buffs open up the season on Nov. 13 against Arkansas-Pine Bluff at the Coors Events Center.

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Twenty questions with Shane Harris-Tunks

CU:I chats with CU's big man from down under

By Cheng Sio on November 3, 2009

With the arrival of freshman center Shane Harris-Tunks, the number of Australians on the Colorado Buffaloes men's basketball team has doubled.

Harris-Tunks stands at 6-feet, 11-inches and he's listed as the tallest player on the team. His size and international experience will be needed as the Buffs finished last in the Big 12 Conference in both rebounding and blocked shots last year en route to a 9-22 season. Rebounding was a hot topic of head coach Jeff Bzdelik at media day a few weeks ago.

Harris-Tunks sat courtside with CU Independent sports editor Cheng Sio for 20 questions, 10 days before the team's season-opener against Arkansas-Pine Bluff.

CU Independent: Why did you decide to leave Australia to come play basketball at the University of Colorado?

Shane Harris-Tunks: Well, that's kind of the next step for us coming from Australia. It's either play professionally out of high school or come here and get a degree and play against some of the best players in the world in our age group.

CUI: What are your basketball dreams and goals?

SHT: Hopefully, I want to try and play professionally for as long as I can because it's what I love to do. If that doesn't happen, I'd like to be able to coach somewhere. I would love to stay in basketball but at the same time, I have to work on fallback options in class to make sure if that doesn't happen for me, then there's something else there.

CUI: What is your most memorable basketball experience?

SHT: I've had a lot of experiences with basketball, but I think one of my most memorable ones was with the junior Australian team. We won the bronze medal at the William Jones Cup in Taipei, Taiwan. We hit a three-pointer at the buzzer to win the game. That was a pretty big moment. We were playing the Qatar national team, so it's a pretty big win.

CUI: What is your most embarrassing basketball experience?

SHT: I think it's just simple things like missing an open dunk.

CUI: Have you missed an open dunk before?

SHT (laughed): I have.

CUI: Describe yourself in one word.

SHT: Tall.

CUI: In reading your biography, it seems you have traveled the world. What has been your favorite place to visit?

SHT: I loved Venice when we went to Italy the second time. That was just beautiful. We went there for basketball, but we were around the area of Venice for about three weeks.

CUI: Did anything out of the ordinary, such as getting lost on campus, happen to you on the first day of school?

SHT (chuckled): No. I had a map, so I was pretty well off. I had a map and I had gone through it, so I knew where all my classes were.

CUI: How does Boulder differ from Australia?

SHT: I think it's very similar to Australian culture here. The main difference is the snow. It doesn't snow where I'm from. I think when it did snow, that really made me feel like, 'Wow, I'm in another country.' Before that, it just kind of felt like I just joined a new team."

CUI: What goes through your mind when you see the Rocky Mountains?

SHT: I think I take it for granted now. I haven't been here that long, but they are beautiful. I've walked up a couple of the smaller ones and it's a great view. It's just a nice backdrop to campus.

CUI: Point guard Nate Tomlinson is a fellow Australian on the team. Do you two talk about your homeland?

SHT: We don't really seek out to talk about Australia and reminisce about things, but every now and then, Nate might say something some of the other boys won't know what he's talking about except me. Then we have to explain it to them.

CUI: What do you and Tomlinson say that some on the team might not understand?

SHT: Just simple things like Americans might say trash can and we'll say rubbish bin.

CUI: What is the biggest and hardest adjustment you have had to make since moving here?

SHT: I think the hardest thing is trying to find the time to contact people back home and stay in touch with family just because of the time difference. A lot of the time when I'm free, it's when they are at work or asleep. That's the hardest thing.

CUI: What means of communication do you use to contact your family?

SHT: We mainly Skype. It's really good because you get visual, so you get to see each other.

CUI: How often would you chat with family members?

SHT: I talk to my mom mainly on the weekends just because her work kind of conflicts with the schedule during the week. Other people in my family have small businesses, so they are at their computer during the day. I can talk to them during the week.

CUI: In basketball today, there are two types of big men. There's the traditional back-to-the-basket type of player and then there are the face-up players. What kind of player are you?

SHT: I think I sit around the middle. I can step out and hit the jump shot, and I can take someone off the dribble to get to

the rim. I'm not going to make any fancy moves, but if they close out on me too hard, I can go by them. And then the same thing, I can back people down in the post. I like to think of myself as a versatile big man.

CUI: After the first day of practice, what did you realize?

SHT: After the first day of practice, I was struggling to breathe. I was adjusting to the altitude. That was my main worry. But I think basketball-wise, I just realized that the level of athleticism is a step up to what I'm generally playing against. Normally in Australia, you have one or two athletic guys on your team whereas here, you have to know where everyone is because any one can block your shot. Being 6-11, I'm not used to having to adjust my shot that often. With the athleticism here, I have to speed my shot up.

CUI: If you could pick five people to play on your basketball team, who would they be?

SHT: Honestly, I think I'll probably pick people that I'm currently playing with just because I already know them. I know we're friends and I know we're going to work together well.

CUI: Are there any five teammates you want to name?

SHT: Nate Tomlinson, Austin Dufault, Dwight Thorne II, Cory [Higgins] and then me in the five.

CUI: What is your prediction on the Colorado Buffaloes men's basketball team for the 2009-2010 season?

SHT: I think we're going to be as good as we want to be. We can't take a back [seat] because everyone is saying we're going to be last in the Big 12. We know we're better than that.

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