

Buff Beckley anxious to hit boards

CU big man believes he can help CU rebound

By Ryan Thorburn Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

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What's the key to the Colorado men's basketball season?

Cory Higgins' all-around game, Dwight Thorne's jump shot, the development of Austin Dufault and Nate Tomlinson, and the immediate impact of Marcus Relphorde and Alec Burks are all on the list.

But don't forget about Trent Beckley. The former walk-on from Vail is back with a vengeance.

Beckley, a 6-10 redshirt junior, should be able to at least help the Buffs become a more physical team and a better rebounding team.

"We have people who can score, we have people who can pass, now it comes down to getting rebounds, especially in the Big 12," Beckley said. "We're going to face teams in non-league play that we can match up height-wise with, but when it comes to the Big 12 everyone is just so much bigger. We have more size, now we have to get down to the fundamentals and get things done."

Jeff Bzdelik agrees. The third-year CU head coach is no longer concerned with talent and depth on the roster and says the Buffs will be fine ... if they can at least hold their own on the glass.

"Rebounding was definitely an issue last season and it was hard to be on the bench watching your teammates getting out-rebounded and out-hustled, knowing that's

what I bring to this team is the enthusiasm," Beckley said. "I'm not saying they didn't go about it the right way, but that's kind of what I bring is the intensity and energy. Sometimes we lacked that."

Beckley watched CU's 9-22 season in agony. He missed the entire 2008-09 campaign with a scary back injury (stress fracture in his lumbar spine) that required surgery.

"It was pretty serious. I was out for nine months in a full body brace, which went pretty much from my neck to my knee," Beckley said. "It was mentally harder than physically, just dealing with not being able to play. Especially because I really felt I could have helped and it was a frustrating year for me to watch."

Beckley was finally cleared to hit the hardwood at full speed again in April. He has added some extra muscle -- mostly upper body because he's not allowed to do squats and cleans -- to his already thick frame and has made a difference in practice.

"Trent brings a different type of attitude to the big-man core, a will and a want-to," Thorne said. "He's very big and he plays very fierce. He just needs to calm himself down and go out and do it on the floor."

Beckley played sparingly during his first two healthy seasons at CU, but it sounds like he will be counted on in the rotation until Casey Crawford plays up to his talent level and Trey Eckloff and Shane Harris-Tunks develop into Big 12-caliber big men.

"Trent has great passion, a huge body, he's someone people forget about when they talk about our basketball team," Bzdelik said. "He's a five-foul guy with a wide body who plays with passion and can hold and contain position in the post. And he can rebound."

"It's just a matter of playing under control. That's his area of need, so to speak."

Beckley, who worked out with former CU standout Stephane Pelle over the summer, said it's hard not to get worked up about playing basketball after sitting out a year.

"I'm blessed to be back. I'm excited, I feel great, and I'm ready to help and contribute to the team," he said. "Sitting there on the bench I

really built up a lot of energy and in the summer I let it go and worked out every day and really worked on my game a lot."

Beckley, now in his third season playing or studying Bzdelik's system, plans on helping the Buffs on the offensive end of the court, too.

"My teammates are displaying confidence in me now. They're giving me the ball down on the block and they know I can score if I have deep position," he said. "In the three previous years, if I was the last option they'd give it to me. But now they've seen what I can do down there and they will give it to me. And defensively, they know they need to box me out."

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NCAA Basketball: Bzdelik's Buffs may be in for another rough season

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By **ARNIE STAPLETON**
AP Sports Writer

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BOULDER | Jeff Bzdelik can't seem to catch a break — or maybe he's just gathering too many of the bad variety.

The Colorado basketball coach lost his prized recruit, athletic freshman guard Shannon Sharpe, to a season-ending knee injury during preseason workouts.

Sharpe, a tenacious defender who was expected to split point guard duties with Nate Tomlinson, injured his left knee last month, requiring a microfracture procedure that will sideline him for the entire season and maybe longer.

The 6-foot-1 guard from Corona, Calif., averaged 17.9 points, 7.9 boards, 7.7 assists and 3.2 steals in his senior season at Centennial High School in 2007-08 before spending last season at a prep school in North Carolina, where he didn't play ball.

"Shannon's injury has been difficult for all of us to deal with because our strong feelings for him as a terrific young man and for what he would have meant to our effectiveness as a team for this season," Bzdelik said. "However, he will come back even stronger for next season and that bodes well for our future. It is now up to others to contribute more, and I strongly believe in my players to rise to the occasion."

It seems the Buffs are always talking about next year.

Bzdelik is entering his third season with the Buffs, who open Nov. 13 against Arkansas-Pine Buff and are again expected to be the cellar dweller in a stacked Big 12. The team has only one senior, guard Dwight Thorne III.

Bzdelik is 21-42 at Colorado, including 4-28 in conference play, since supplanting Ricardo Patton after a successful stint at Air Force.

"A couple years ago when I took this job, I said very clearly that we couldn't wave a magic wand and have this happen overnight," Bzdelik said. "Coach Patton did a wonderful job when he was here. I think the last year or two, he probably lost his spirit a little bit.

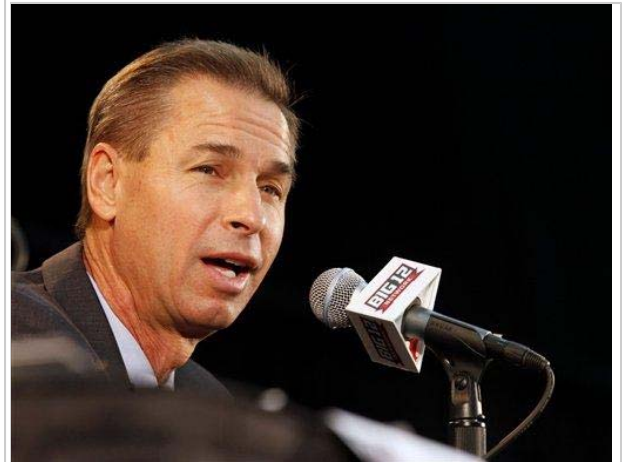
"Things just unraveled in a way from a GPA standpoint, from a citizenship standpoint and from a competitive spirit standpoint that put us in the state we were in."

He said last year's team with just one senior and one junior wasn't deep enough.

"We weren't strong enough and we weren't mature enough to close out games," Bzdelik said. "The competitive spirit was awesome. We lost 11 games by an average of 4½ points per game. They never wavered with their commitment on and off the court in terms of pursuit of excellence."

As an example of that, Bzdelik pointed out that the team set a record for the best GPA in Colorado men's basketball history.

"Our citizenship is awesome," he said. "As we approach this year, I feel we're poking our head out on to the horizon out of



Colorado coach Jeff Bzdelik talks to the media during men's Big 12 Conference college basketball media day Thursday, Oct. 22, 2009 at the Sprint Center in Kansas City. (AP Photo/Charlie Riedel)

this deep hole that we had dug ourselves into."

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