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## Higgins works to boost CU

BY [KEVIN HASKIN](#)

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When Cory Higgins gets advice from NBA sources, it sometimes comes from the best.

Occasionally his godfather, Michael Jordan, checks in on Colorado's junior guard.

"He's been around my whole life -- a great guy to have around obviously," Higgins said.

Not that the modest Higgins broadcasts the relationship. Never did really, even as a kid.

"I only remember telling a few people, and everybody else found out," Higgins said.

Still, the NBA connection is a key factor in Higgins' continuing development as CU's best player. That distinction carries minimal weight since the Buffs won just one Big 12 game last season and finished 9-22 overall, the second time in three seasons they finished with fewer than 10 wins.

Higgins' father, Rod, played 13 seasons in the NBA. After he retired, he moved to the bench as an assistant for the Golden State Warriors, and Cory soon began chumming with the pros as a ball boy. Now, with Rod serving as general manager for the Charlotte Bobcats, Cory has an outlet to learn at a high level whenever he returns home.

"Cory hangs around all summer with the NBA players in Charlotte," CU coach Jeff Bzdelik said. "He works with them. He's on the court. He's in the weight room. He's watching, observing, just hanging around people like Larry Brown and Michael Jordan. He absorbs a lot and he takes it in the right way."

Building strength was one of Higgins' offseason projects.

The 6-foot-5 guard was solid enough last season to average 17.4 points while leading the Buffs 18 times in scoring. But that attracts defensive attention, especially on a last-place team with few threats.

"Ballhandling was a main focus, too, cutting down on the turnovers from last year," Higgins said of an assist-to-turnover ratio that drifted into negative numbers -- 80-to-87. "I worked on that day-in and day-out with the Bobcats coaches."

Higgins even gets some family assistance this season in Boulder. His older brother Rick transferred to Colorado from Cal Poly, but must sit out before playing as a senior for the Buffs next season.

After losing just one starter, forward Jermyn Jackson-Wilson, and adding five newcomers, Colorado will rely on more experience and depth.

The top newcomer is Marcus Relphorde, a 6-6 juco transfer who will step in as a versatile point forward.

Still, the hills in the Flatirons around Boulder aren't as steep as the challenge the Buffs face in the Big 12. Colorado kept some games close with a deliberate pace, but ranked last in the conference in rebounding average (27.6) and field goal percentage defense (.462).

"We're more motivated than ever right now about not having any respect in this league," said Higgins, "and we're tired of that. ... But we have to learn how to win."

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