

Bufs' Crawford a bigger big man

CU junior added 18 lbs. of muscle in offseason

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Casey Crawford isn't the answer to Dan Hawkins' problems.

But walking around on campus, the big man -- a noticeably bigger man these days -- has the look of someone who could help Colorado's defensive line out.

Crawford has responded to a disappointing sophomore season by adding 18 pounds of muscle to his 6-9 frame since April.

James Hardy, the strength and conditioning trainer for the men's basketball program, has been pleased with how all of the Buffs have responded to his intense regiment.

Crawford's improvement in the weight room has been the most dramatic.

"Casey has put on a good amount of weight and added the most for the three lifts that we do -- the clean, squat and lift," said Hardy, who began the program in the spring a few weeks after Jeff Bzdelik's young team hit the wall at the end of the Big 12 season. "He does a great job off the court. He eats right and he has been good in the weight room."

Crawford has improved his bench press by 85 pounds and his squat by nearly 100 pounds.

The question is: Will these numbers help the statistics Bzdelik really cares about? Last season the transfer from Wake Forest averaged just 5.5 points and 1.7 rebounds for the Buffs.

"I'm a lot stronger and I can tell I'm a lot better jumping. It's just so much of an improvement from where I was last year," Crawford said. "It's going to have a tremendous impact. I'm 20 pounds heavier now, so I'll be able to keep people out of the lane and box them out better. I'm not the best jumper in the world, but I can keep them out of the lane with the body and box them out and clear them out."

"I'm a lot more forceful and a lot stronger with everything. It's going to be a big asset for me."

Bzdelik was raving about Crawford's skills as a 3-point shooter last fall and predicted his presence in the offense would create matchup problems for opposing big men and open up the lane for Cory Higgins and other guards to drive to the basket.

Crawford started off the season pretty well but quickly spiraled into a funk that cost him his spot in the starting lineup. He averaged just 14.5 minutes per game for the season and was a non-factor in Big 12 play.

"I had a really up and down year. I learned a lot from it," Crawford said. "You have to stick with it no matter how hard it gets, no matter how frustrating it gets, no matter what the situation is. The only thing I can do is go out there every day and work hard and give myself a chance to help the team. After that, it's not up to me anymore."

Bzdelik has been able to add some talent and size to the roster with the signing of junior college transfer Marcus Relphorde (6-7), freshman Shane Harris-Tunks (6-11) and freshman Keegan Hornbuckle (6-7).

Sophomores Austin Dufault (6-7) and Trey Eckloff (6-10) have also improved their strength. Trent Beckley (6-10), another player Hardy has been impressed by, is healthy after sitting out last season with a back injury.

The only player CU loses from 2008-09 is Jermey Jackson-Wilson, an under-sized and offensively-challenged forward by Big 12 standards who was asked to play the five spot last season.

The Buffs finished the forgettable 2008-09 campaign last in the Big 12 in scoring (62.9 ppg), last in rebounding (27.6 rpg) and 10th in 3-point field goal percentage (34.6 percent) during a painful 9-22 season.

"There were some long days in January and February," Crawford said. "I went through the same thing my freshman year at Wake Forest. We had a really young team and didn't have a great year. It's just one of those things you have to go through.

"It's never fun, but you get stronger by going through seasons like that."

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