

Burks ready to fill big shoes for Bzdelik, Buffs

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The next Richard Roby might already be on Colorado's campus.

Jeff Bzdelik compared freshman guard Alec Burks -- a skinny, 6-foot-6 swish machine -- to the program's all-time leading scorer during a teleconference with reporters this summer.

The arrival of Missouri's reigning high school player of the year to Boulder should, if nothing else, provide a spark to a CU team that finished last in the Big 12 in scoring the past two seasons running Bzdelik's system.

Believe it or not, Dan Hawkins and Aric Goodman deserve credit for an assist on this one. Burks committed to CU a year ago after the Buffs' nationally televised overtime victory over West Virginia at Folsom Field. The Buffs next face West Virginia on Oct. 1.

"I came on my visit and I just loved it here," said Burks, who also considered playing for Kansas State. "They had a football game on ESPN and we won and everybody rushed the field. I wanted to be a part of that experience, so I committed here."

Burks averaged more than 23 points per game and shot 54 percent from the field as a senior at Grandview (Mo.) High School last season. He led his team to the Class 5A state championship game and scored 33 points on that stage.

Had Burks not committed to CU last fall, there is no doubt other programs would have been recruiting him heavily last winter. The talented prospect has grown over two inches since storming Folsom Field with Cory Higgins and his future teammates during his official visit.

"I improved my overall game last year. I was just more aggressive and got better," Burks said. "I grew up and tried to get my game ready for college."

Bzdelik said he believes all five of his newcomers will contribute this season. Burks is capable of scoring from just about anywhere on the court, but if the true freshman wants serious playing time in the Big 12 he'll have to dedicate himself more on the defensive end.

"He's definitely very skilled. He can score the basketball," sophomore point guard Nate Tomlinson said. "If he can take his defense to a new level and get in the weight room like all of us have to, he's going to be a very good player for us."

Dwight Thorne, the only senior in the program, is the likely starter at the shooting guard position after averaging 12 points and shooting 40.9 percent from behind the 3-point arc last season.

But Burks — like Shannon Sharpe at point guard, Keegan Hornbuckle and Marcus Relphorde at forward and Shane Harris-Tunks at center — will provide the veteran Buffs who have suffered through back-to-back 20-loss seasons with some much-needed competition in practice.

"Tough," is how Burks described the workouts CU has been conducting this month. "We're here early in the morning, they're making us better though. It's something I've never seen before in my life. ...

"I need to work on my defense, that's what they tell me. My offensive game is already here and ready."

Bzdelik concurs.

"Without question," CU's third-year head coach said when asked if Burks will have a major impact on the team if he picks up his defensive game. "Alec can score not only for himself but for others because he's a very willing passer and creator."

Roby finished with 2,001 points during his CU career. Bzdelik took over the program during his senior season and had

trouble finding an adequate replacement last year.

Perhaps the program's next prolific scorer has arrived.

"I guess that's a good thing," Burks said of his coach mentioning him and Roby in the same sentence during the offseason. "I don't know too much about him, but he's the all-time leading scorer here. I can score however you want, too. I can score."

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