

## Aussie Harris-Tunks aims to fill CU Buffs' void at center

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Shane Harris-Tunks is still getting used to American rules football.

The 6-foot-11 center from Australia got his first taste of our nation's pastime when Colorado opened the season against Colorado State at Folsom Field earlier this month.

"I was a little disappointed because we didn't get the win," Harris-Tunks said during a recent interview with the Camera. "But the atmosphere the students bring was amazing."

That atmosphere does not exist at the Coors Events Center, where the CU men's basketball program has stumbled through three consecutive 20-loss seasons in front of thousands of empty yellow seats.

Jeff Bzdelik believes the program is headed for better days based on the improvements of veteran players like Cory Higgins and Austin Dufault, coupled with the infusion of five promising newcomers, including Harris-Tunks.

"He's got good size. He's an excellent defender. He's intelligent and he passes well," is how Bzdelik describes his freshman big man. "He can score a little bit, too." Harris-Tunks is a product of the Australian Institute of Sport and has international playing experience as a member of Australia's under-19 squad. He also visited Gonzaga and Vanderbilt before committing to CU last year.

"I was just really comfortable with the coaching staff (at CU). I liked the way they went about things," Harris-Tunks said. "I'm comfortable with the other athletes on the team, they're all really good guys and easy to get along with."

Growing up, Harris-Tunks used to compete against CU point guard Nate Tomlinson, who is from Sydney. He said having a fellow countryman already in the program was a bonus but not the reason why he decided to play college basketball in Boulder.

"He'll fit in nicely with us," Tomlinson said. "He's big, physical, smart and he's a really good passer. I think his presence in the five spot is something we didn't have last year."

Harris-Tunks is listed at 225 pounds. That means he'll have to spend a lot of quality time in the weight room with strength trainer James Hardy over the next few years.

Last season Casey Crawford, a 6-9 transfer from Wake Forest, didn't have the type of impact the coaching staff had advertised. But the talented forward/center has added 10 pounds of muscle in Hardy's program and now weighs 245 pounds.

"I'm working on my strength, just trying to put on some weight. In my position you've got to have that," Harris-Tunks said. "I think I'm ready to go with the pace

of the game and the smarts of the game. ...

"I think I can help right away defensively more than anything else because they've lacked that size, especially last season. They just didn't have the height to stop some of the guys they were playing against, and I think I can bring that."

This winter, even though four freshmen will be added to a young roster that includes only one senior, the Buffs are hoping to create a better atmosphere at the Coors Events Center by producing a winning season.

"They were disappointed with themselves last year, having so many close losses. They're making sure they're doing the work to get themselves over the line this year," Harris-Tunks said. "Saying that we're young, that's not really an excuse. We have the talent here to make a difference."

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