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cu basketball

CU star Burks looking for a sign from NBA

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

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BOULDER — At the college level, 6-foot-6 Alec Burks has shown he can jump out of the gym. Now the Colorado sophomore guard must decide whether it's time to make the big leap to pro basketball.

The countdown clock is ticking so loudly it's a wonder Burks can sleep at night. Next Sunday is the deadline for college underclassmen to declare for the 2011 NBA draft. Burks said he plans to make a decision by Wednesday or Thursday.

"It's a big decision," Burks said. "I love college. I love being out there with the guys. You only get one chance at college. But the NBA would be fulfilling a dream. It would be a great feeling to play against the best every night."

If there were betting odds on this, the odds would lean heavily toward him giving up his final two years of college eligibility to turn pro. Burks said if he gets an indication he likely will be selected among the top 15 picks, he is gone.

Most mock drafts have him going higher than that. [NBADraft.net](#) projects him at No. 10; [Draftexpress.com](#) lists Burks at No. 13.

Perhaps more telling was a recent article written for [NBA.com](#) by David Aldridge, a longtime pro basketball analyst. Aldridge wrote that the

league-wide consensus has Burks rated as the top prospect at the 2-position (shooting guard), just ahead of Washington State junior Klay Thompson.

NBA rules prohibit teams from speaking directly to undeclared underclassmen. Colorado coach Tad Boyle is fielding all the calls and passing along the information to Burks.

Boyle said NBA scouts and general managers speak about ranges and generalities regarding a player's pecking order in the draft. Much of the conversation is to remain confidential.

"What I can say," Boyle said, "is the NBA guys love Alec's athleticism. They love the fact that he can get to the basket virtually anytime he wants to. The thing about Alec is, he has a great combination of proven production at the top level of college basketball, averaging 20 points per game in the Big 12, one of the top leagues in America.

"But he's got big-time potential as well. His ceiling is very high. He's going to be a much better player two or three years from now than he is today. He's a better player now than he was 12 months ago. So he's got production and potential. Some guys are production at this level but no potential. Some guys are all potential and

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no production. Alec has the combination of both. That makes him pretty special."

College underclassmen who declare for the 2011 draft without hiring an agent can withdraw by May 8 to retain their amateur eligibility. Burks said he will not use that escape clause to test the waters.

"I feel like if I decide to go in, I'm going to go all in," Burks said. "If I go in, I'm going to go in with my foot in the door. I'm not going to go in with half a foot. If I have the confidence to make that decision, I feel like I'll be all into it. If I have any doubts, I'll just come back to school and won't even put my name in."

The possibility of a lockout by NBA owners on July 1 if a new collective bargaining agreement is not reached apparently will have no bearing on Burks' decision.

NBA players, including new draftees, are not paid during a lockout. Burks said he is aware that, if he turns pro and hires an agent, his agent could borrow a large sum of money for him through a line of credit with a financial institution, based on Burks' future income potential.

"The (potential of a) lockout doesn't affect me at all," Burks said. "It might affect somebody else's decision, but it's not going to affect mine. I feel like the dream is to play in the NBA. I love this game so much. I have the time to succeed. Money will come regardless."

Boyle said he agrees with Burks on not allowing the potential of a lockout to enter into his decision-making.

"Nobody knows what's going to happen with a lockout, so it can't have a bearing on what Alec decides," Boyle said. "What I've told Alec is, there are so many people with so many opinions about where he's going to be drafted, if there will be a lockout and, if so, how long would it last? Those are all unknowns."

"That's why he has to make the decision in his heart as to what's best for him. I told Alec that whatever decision he makes, we're going to support him."

Burks was asked why he has pinpointed draft position No. 15 as his line of demarcation.

"If they say I'm probably going 18th or toward the end of the first round, I can stay in school and become a top-10 (for the 2012 draft)," Burks said. "If it's 15th, I'll put my name in the draft so I can work (in tryouts with NBA teams) to get my name higher than that. It's a tough decision. But 15 is the highest I'd decide to go."

Many CU fans believe it is a foregone conclusion that Burks has played his final game as a Buffalo. In numerous tweets, Burks has written about looking forward to taking care of his mother financially. Dina Burks has sometimes worked multiple jobs in the Kansas City, Mo., area to support the family, Alec said.

Although Burks said his father, former University of Washington guard Stevie Burks, remains part of the family, Alec mostly talks about his mother's sacrifices.

"I have seen my mom work her back off to provide for me and my (older) brother (Steve),"



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Alec said. "She went hungry so me and my brother could eat. It's my dream to pay her back. But that doesn't mean I'm going to leave school this year. She's doing all right now. So if I decide to stay another year, she'll be OK. Fans shouldn't buy into anything about (the tweets) that could mean in the future."

Burks said he has spoken with CU legend Chauncey Billups. After two seasons at Colorado, Billups left early and was drafted by Boston with the No. 3 overall pick in the 1997 draft.

"Chauncey just said, 'Make the best decision for Alec,' " Burks said. "He said don't listen to nobody, no fans, no relatives that may want something from me, nobody that has a stake in wanting to see me again in a Colorado uniform."

"A guy like Jared Sullinger (of Ohio State). He probably shocked the nation by saying he's coming back to school. But you have to make the best decision for yourself. That was the best one for him. I'm hoping to make the best decision for me."

Is Burks ready for the NBA? In today's world, that's almost irrelevant. To a large extent, NBA teams draft on potential. Does Burks understand the challenges he would face as an NBA rookie? Probably not.

There are countless examples of rookie struggles. Patrick Patterson, a 2010 first- round pick from Kentucky (No. 14, Houston Rockets), spent a substantial amount of time in the NBA Development League this past season. The Indiana Pacers left former Fresno State standout Paul George (10th pick) at home during a road trip so George could improve his attitude. Ex-Butler standout Gordon Hayward (No. 9, Utah) didn't see a ton of playing time for the Jazz until late in the season.

"It's a harder jump than most college players think it is," an NBA source told The Denver Post. "You'll see a guy at the end of an NBA bench . . .

he was somebody's All-American in college."

Burks said he is trying to remain a regular student by attending classes and not allowing his upcoming decision to preoccupy his life.

But how could it not?

"Alec has handled this as well as anybody I could expect to handle it," Boyle said. "But to say it isn't hanging over his head, I think, would be naive. Alec has put himself in a position where he has a pretty big decision to make."

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Alec the great

A look at Alec Burks' two years at Colorado:

CU career scoring average (19.0) ranks behind only Cliff Meely (24.3) and Shaun Vandiver (20.6).

Holds CU freshman (512) and sophomore (779) scoring records.

His 779 points in 2010-11 set a CU single-season record.

With 20.5 points per game, he became the first

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player to average 20 or more in a season since Donnie Boyce (22.4) in 1993-94.

In 2010-11, he became the first CU player in school history to reach 770 points, 240 rebounds and 100 assists in the same season.

Ranks seventh all time in CU free-throw percentage (.804).

As a 6-foot-6 guard, he led CU in rebounding (150) as a freshman and was second (247) as a sophomore.

Only Big 12 player (2010-11 conference games only) to rank among top 12 in points, rebounds and assists.

One of two unanimous selections on the 2010-11 all-Big 12 first team, along with Kansas State senior Jacob Pullen; named to the Big 12 and NIT all-tournament teams; top-30 finalist for the Wooden and Naismith national player of the year awards.

Source: CU sports information

Sure bets and longshots

A look at the college underclassmen who have officially declared for the NBA draft. They have until May 8 to withdraw and not lose their NCAA eligibility:

Player Ht. Wt. Pos. School Cl.
 Laurence Bowers 6-8 190 SF Missouri Jr.
 DeAngelo Casto 6-8 245 PF Wash. St. Jr.
 Kim English 6-6 200 SG Missouri Jr.
 Ashton Gibbs 6-2 195 PG Pittsburgh Jr.
 Augustus Gilchrist 6-10 240 PF South Florida Jr.
 Tobias Harris 6-8 210 SF/PF Tennessee Fr.
 Tyler Honeycutt 6-7 195 SF UCLA So.
 Tu Holloway 6-0 185 PG Xavier Jr.
 Scotty Hopson 6-7 205 SG Tennessee Jr.
 Kyrie Irving 6-2 175 PG Duke Fr.
 Reggie Jackson 6-2 180 PG/SG Boston Coll. Jr.
 Terrence Jennings 6-10 225 PF Louisville Jr.

Orlando Johnson 6-5 220 SF Santa Barbara Jr.
 Enes Kanter 6-11 261 PF/C Kentucky Fr.
 Malcolm Lee 6-5 180 PG UCLA Jr.
 Kawhi Leonard 6-7 220 SF San Diego St. So.
 Travis Leslie 6-4 210 SG Georgia Jr.
 Shelvin Mack 6-2 190 PG/SG Butler Jr.
 Darius Morris 6-4 190 PG Michigan So.
 Marcus Morris 6-9 235 PF Kansas Jr.
 Markieff Morris 6-10 245 PF Kansas Jr.
 Jereme Richmond 6-7 205 SF Illinois Fr.
 Carlton Scott 6-8 218 SF/PF Notre Dame Jr.
 Josh Selby 6-3 183 PG Kansas Fr.
 Iman Shumpert 6-5 210 PG/SG Ga. Tech Jr.
 John Shurna 6-8 210 SF Northwestern Jr.
 Chris Singleton 6-9 221 SF/PF Florida St. Jr.
 Greg Smith 6-10 249 PF/C Fresno St. So.
 Isaiah Thomas 5-10 170 PG Washington Jr.
 Trey Thompkins 6-9 245 PF Georgia Jr.
 Tristan Thompson 6-9 230 PF Texas Fr.
 Nikola Vucevic 6-10 240 PF USC Jr.
 Kemba Walker 6-0 179 PG UConn Jr.
 Derrick Williams 6-9 235 PF Arizona So.
 Jordan Williams 6-10 260 PF Maryland Jr.
 Brandon Wood 6-2 190 PG Valparaiso Jr.
 Source: nbadraft.net

What scouts see in Burks

An NBA scout gives his take on Colorado sophomore Alec Burks:

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Pluses: "He certainly has the athleticism to play in the 2-spot (shooting guard) in the NBA. He has excellent size and length for that position. He is a better-than-average passer for that position."

Concerns: "He is a below-average jump shooter at that position, especially relating to range. He needs to improve that in his game. And there are questions about his effort at the defensive end of the floor and in practice."



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