

A year in, Tad Boyle has revamped CU Buffs' basketball program

Colorado men's coach focused on building lasting tradition

By Ryan Thorburn Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

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It was only a year ago that the Colorado men's basketball program was in a state of uncertainty.

On April 13, 2010, Jeff Bzdelik called Mike Bohn to inform him that he would be accepting the job at Wake Forest after compiling a 36-58 record in three seasons at CU.

Denver Nuggets head coach George Karl dialed the athletic director to recommend Mike Dunlap.

The remaining Buffs, led by a vocal and emotional Alec Burks, made it clear that they wanted assistant Steve McClain to be promoted. Chauncey Billups also stumped for Bzdelik's top assistant.

Dunlap and McClain were both interviewed by the search committee and either candidate probably would have been a good fit at CU.

Bohn wisely made a call of his own to Greeley and asked Northern Colorado head coach Tad Boyle: "Do you want to throw your hat in the ring?"

"I've never been one of those coaches who covets another job or plans my future, because in this business you can't do that. You've just got to try to work your tail off with the job you do have and do the best you can," Boyle said on the anniversary of his interview at CU. "But human nature sometimes creeps in. Especially being a Colorado guy, you think, 'What would it be like if I had an opportunity like that?'"

"I'd be lying if I said that didn't happen, especially when Jeff was moving on to Wake Forest."

On April 19, 2010, it was Boyle who stepped to the podium as the program's 18th head coach.

There have been a couple of bumps along the road -- starting with Shane Harris-Tunk's season-ending injury last October and the humbling NCAA Tournament selection party at the coach's house in March -- but for the most part Boyle was able to make the most of the opportunity over the last 12 months.

During the 2010-11 season:

CU set a school record for victories in a season (24) and advanced to the National Invitation Tournament semifinals for the first time since 1991.

Senior guard Cory Higgins finished his career with 2,001 points, tied for first on the all-time CU scoring list with Richard Roby.

Burks set a single-season scoring record at CU with 779 points. The sophomore guard was a Wooden Award finalist and a unanimous All-Big 12 First Team selection.

Levi Knutson was the Big 12's Sixth Man of the Year and an Academic All-American. Knutson and Trey Eckloff were named to the All-Big 12 Academic First Team.

CU averaged 79.6 points as a team, the fifth-best season mark in program history.

The Buffs, who were picked ninth in the preseason Big 12 coaches poll, finished fifth in the conference standings, received three votes in the final Associated Press poll, and were 64th in the final RPI.

"With all the individual awards that were garnered by our players, I think everyone on the team put their individual goals behind the team goals. That's the thing I'm most proud of," Boyle said. "I feel like I challenged Cory Higgins to get better in certain areas, and he did. I challenged Alec Burks to get better in certain areas, and he did. I challenged all of our guys and our guys responded to those challenges.

"In today's world of me, me, me ... I think our team played we, we, we."

Boyle's first CU team racked up a record 18 home wins and created an atmosphere at the Coors Events Center rarely seen since the Billups era.

The Buffs set attendance marks for: sellouts in a season (5), all games (140,284), conference total (78,472), conference average (9,809).

"Our fans started to buy into the fact that they were participants. They weren't just spectators watching a college basketball game, they were here to cheer the team on and give us the energy to get over the hump," Boyle said. "My goal is to have the Coors Events Center sold out for every game we play. And until we're doing that we still have a lot of work to do."

Boyle has a lot of work to do during his second year on the job.

Higgins (16.1 ppg), Knutson (11.7 ppg) and Marcus Relphorde (11.2 ppg) are all out of eligibility. Burks (20.5 ppg) will let the world know this week if he will leave school after the semester and enter the NBA Draft.

Three incoming freshmen (Askia Booker, Damiene Cain, Spencer Dinwiddie), three transfers (Carlton Brown, Sabatino Chen, Jeremy Adams) and Harris-Tunks will all be worked into the 2011-12 lineup.

And the Buffs will be moving from the Big 12 to the Pac-12.

"There's a big difference between building a team and building a program. We don't want to build a team, we want to build a program that can sustain success from one year to the next," Boyle said. "It's hard to build a program when you lose four starters in one year, when you lose 80-to-85 percent of your scoring in one year, when you have seven new scholarship players that weren't playing for you the previous year. ...

"Next year is going to be a completely different team and a completely different season."

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