

Burks faces tough decision

CU sophomore must decide whether to leave school early for NBA

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LAWRENCE, Kan. -- Two NBA scouts from one organization that is a lock to have ping-pong balls in this year's draft lottery sat together courtside next to the Colorado bench on Saturday at Allen Fieldhouse.

When asked by the Camera who they were there to see the obvious answer was: "Kansas players ... and the Alec Burks kid."

Markieff and Marcus Morris didn't disappoint, combining for 42 points and 24 rebounds to lead the No. 1 Jayhawks' to an 89-63 thrashing of an overmatched CU team.

Burks led the Buffs with 15 points and six rebounds. The scouts believe the 6-6 guard from nearby Grandview, Mo., will be a first-round pick if he leaves CU after his sophomore season.

The NBA draft is all about potential.

The scouts also acknowledge Burks would become a much better player with another season being coached by Tad Boyle and his staff while playing in the Pac-12. NBA teams would prefer that prospects develop in college rather than on the end of a professional bench.

"I don't know too many players who haven't benefited from staying an extra year," a scout said.

This decision will not be anything like "The Decision" LeBron James made on national television last summer.

It's a private family matter.

Burks will lean on his parents, Steve and Dina, this spring when it comes time to decide whether to return for his junior season at CU or chase his NBA dreams.

The Burks all watched the Buffs' final trip to Lawrence sitting just behind Boyle's bench.

"We're going to wait until it's time and pray about it, like we do everything else," Dina Burks said of her son's future. "We'll know when it's time."

While Burks took Big 12 rivals KU and Missouri by surprise -- neither school offered the Kansas City-area prep star a scholarship -- his father has known for a while that Alec could develop into an NBA player.

"When Alec was a freshman in high school he was small, but he was always spending time in the back yard working on his game," said Steve Burks, who played at the University of Washington. "I kept telling my wife, 'There's something about Alec. He's always working on basketball and he could develop into a pro.'"

"Not only did he grow in size, but his game grew up, too. I was like, 'Man, this is going to happen.' He turned out to be a talent, he really did."

Former CU head coach Jeff Bzdelik knew he had uncovered a hidden gem on the recruiting trail the first time he watched Burks play. After choosing the Buffs over Kansas State, Burks grew about three inches before arriving on campus in Boulder.

"We felt if somebody gave him the opportunity, he could get the job done. A lot of schools, I'm not going to say passed on him, but they just didn't get an opportunity to look at him," Steve Burks said. "When Bzdelik came in he said, 'One thing I'm

going to promise you is I will give him an opportunity.'

"And that's all you can ask. We're very happy and proud of him."

Burks was named the Big 12 Freshman of the Year last season after averaging 17.1 points and 5.0 rebounds. But last April Bzdelik left for Wake Forest, and Burks was upset that assistant Steve McClain was not promoted to head coach.

Boyle traveled to Grandview after his introductory press conference to meet with the Burks family. Alec and his parents decided to trust the new head coach and he is averaging 19.4 points and 6.0 rebounds in the new system.

The latest 2011 mock draft at NBAdraft.net projects Burks as the 11th overall pick going to the Golden State Warriors.

"I'm just going to wait until the end of the year and make the decision, whatever it is," Burks said after Saturday's game. "It's very exciting because two years ago nobody knew me. Now I get to make the decision of my life."

Burks is the most talented NBA prospect to play at CU since Chauncey Billups.

And the current Denver Nuggets point guard -- who knows all about the business of the league as speculation about his inclusion in a Carmelo Anthony trade continues -- has talked to Burks about the process.

"He told me to keep working and everything else will take care of itself," Burks said.

Billups left CU after his sophomore season. He was the third pick in the 1997 NBA draft and was the most valuable player in the 2004 NBA Finals after leading the Detroit Pistons to the championship.

"Chauncey has been wonderful. Not just with Alec, but with the whole Colorado team," Dina Burks said. "He has kind of taken them all under his wing and given them guidance. He's a really good mentor, he's a good man, and he's a blessing for the university."

Dina Burks said the potential labor problems in the NBA with the league's collective bargaining agreement set to expire this summer are "not an issue" being factored into her son's decision.

For now, the Burks family is focused on the same thing as all Buffs fans: Rooting for the team to finish strong and play its way into a postseason tournament.

"Alec really enjoys Colorado, he really enjoys his teammates, he really enjoys campus life," Steve Burks said. "But in his situation, with the way he's playing, it's going to be an exciting decision."

"I'm looking forward to him continuing to play well, keeping him healthy and getting through the end of school. Then we'll go from there."

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