

Defensive boost on way for Boyle's Buffs

Freshmen Mills, Roberson aim to chip in for CU right away

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Tad Boyle has inherited a skilled and athletic roster.

Colorado's starting five will likely include Shannon Sharpe, Cory Higgins, Alec Burks and Marcus Relphorde. These quick and versatile players are listed at 6-1, 6-5, 6-6 and 6-7, respectively.

Last season Austin Dufault (6-9) -- by default -- was forced to play center and endured a sophomore slump, averaging 5.5 points and 3.1 rebounds.

Despite moving from 12th to eighth in the Big 12 standings, the Buffs finished 11th in defense and 12th in rebounding during the 2009-10 campaign.

"We're going to try and hang our hat on defense and rebounding," Boyle promised during a recent Big 12 coaches teleconference with the media.

Not surprisingly, the new head coach's first two high school recruits -- 7-foot center Ben Mills and 6-7 forward Andre Roberson -- were on campus last month working out. Both young players will have an opportunity to help the Buffs with the team's problem areas as soon as they get a little more meat on their bones in the weight room.

"I'm going to work hard on getting bigger and stronger so I can handle some of the big guys that play in the Big 12 and Pac-10," Mills said after a recent session with strength and conditioning coach James Hardy at the Coors Events Center. "I feel like I can help out a little bit right now. ... So far I've gained a decent amount of weight."

With the departure of big men Casey Crawford and Trent Beckley -- who both had another year of eligibility available but decided to graduate and move on -- CU will still have some size and depth issues in the paint.

Shane Harris-Tunks (6-11) and Trey Eckloff (6-10), who were also on campus spending some quality time with Hardy during the first summer session, will have to step their games up significantly if the Buffs are serious about being a part of the NCAA Tournament.

Mills, who grew eight inches from his sophomore year to his graduation at Arrowhead High School in Hartland, Wis., chose CU over Georgia Tech and Oregon State this spring. He is the first 7-footer in the program since David Harrison (2001-04).

"On my visit I just really liked the campus and every single coach I got along with," Mills said. "I could see myself learning from every one of them. It was a good fit."

Roberson, who is from San Antonio, Texas, was also recruited by Clemson, Penn State and Wichita State before committing to Boyle. His AAU team played at a tournament in Denver and made a visit to Boulder during the trip, which helped the new staff when it came down to trying to sign him late in the process.

"I can contribute a lot with my rebounding and defense and by just getting in there and banging with the guys," Roberson said. "I'll probably be more of a wing guy and play inside once I get bigger."

Roberson plans to be an understudy to Burks and Higgins as a freshman.

"I'm looking up to them right now and learning and getting a lot of experience and tips from them that will help me with my game," Roberson said. "I think we're going to have a great run this year."

Jeff Bzdelik was unable to find an answer for the Buffs' rebounding and interior defensive woes during his three seasons in

Boulder. Perhaps Boyle has landed a couple of players who can help the team in Mills and Roberson.

"It is not going to come from any one player," Boyle said. "It's got to be a group effort, a commitment by the program."

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