

## Alec Burks 'auditions' for familiar face

### Former CU Buffs' star displays skills for Bobcats` Higgins

Associated Press  
Boulder Daily Camera

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CHARLOTTE, N.C. -- The attention was on Rich Cho as he sat courtside Wednesday morning wearing all black taking in his first pre-draft workout since joining the Charlotte Bobcats.

And while Cho provides a different perspective in owner Michael Jordan`s front office ahead of a critical draft, the old general manager sitting next to him likely had the most insight on this day.

Few in the NBA have seen guard Alec Burks play more than Rod Higgins, who was promoted this week to president of basketball operations. Higgins` son, Cory, was a teammate of Burks at Colorado.

"He was at a lot of our games, our practices," Burks said. "I know him a great deal."

Burks and Providence guard Marshon Brooks -- both in town for a second time after injuries kept them from the court on their first visit -- headlined Charlotte`s six-player audition.

Also on hand were Michigan`s Darius Morris, Julian Stone of UTEP, LaceDarius Dunn of Baylor and Hofstra`s Charles Jenkins.

The Bobcats, who select ninth and 19th on June 23, are considering the athletic, slashing 6-foot-6 Burks with the first pick. He could perhaps fill a need for more athleticism and scoring.

"I feel like they`ve seen a lot of my game," Burks said, referencing Higgins. "It`s great to be out here in Charlotte showing them I still got it."

A Grandview, Mo., native, Burks received few college offers before landing at Colorado. But he dazzled in his two years there, averaging 20.5 points and 6.5 rebounds last season.

Coach Paul Silas said he could see playing Burks at both shooting guard and small forward. Silas indicated Burks, who has been criticized for his lack of shooting range and strength, shot well in the workout and displayed his athleticism.

"I showed them I get to the rim," Burks said. "It was a good workout."

Helping to make Charlotte`s draft decisions will be Cho, hired less than a month after he was dismissed as GM of the Portland Trail Blazers.

"I`m not the type of person who`s going to come in here and say, "Hey, this is what we need to do. Let`s change this, here,"" Cho said. "It`s going to be a collaborative effort."

Cho and Higgins were seen chatting with scouts after the Wednesday`s workout, which Jordan didn`t attend.

"He`s going to be able to give us his idea of who he likes, looking at our roster and how they would fit in," Silas said. "It just gives you another voice. A guy that`s been around, a guy that`s seen a lot of these players. I think it`s a major plus."

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## Former CU Buff Cliff Meely realized dream on draft day

### He sees 'great potential' in Alec Burks

**By Ryan Thorburn** Camera Sports Writer  
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 06/15/2011 11:32:35 PM MDT

Kobe Bryant. Manu Ginobili. Dwyane Wade.

Alec Burks will become a peer of these accomplished superstars and the rest of the NBA's shooting guards when Colorado's effectual prospect is drafted, presumably early in the first round, on June 23.

Forty years ago, Cliff Meely was the first CU prospect to find himself in such a lofty position. The Buffs' All-American forward, and all-time leading scorer at the time, was the No. 7 overall pick in the 1971 NBA Draft, selected by the San Diego Rockets.

Suddenly, Meely found himself competing against famous faces he had idolized while growing up, such as Elgin Baylor, Oscar Robertson and Bill Russell.

"The anticipation was very, very exciting," Meely recalled of his draft experience during an interview with the Camera. "When I was a kid growing up, that was what would get me going. I'd watch the games on TV, and then I'd go out and imitate the players that I'd watched.

"In my case, finishing school and coming to the end of my college career, getting drafted just sent me off on a giant dream."

San Diego, an expansion franchise, moved to Houston just before Meely's rookie season. He played in more than 300 games for the Rockets, averaging 8.7 points and 5.6 rebounds over six seasons, before finishing his NBA career with the Los Angeles Lakers.

The Rockets had some established star power -- Elvin Hayes, Calvin Murphy, Rudy Tomjanovich -- during Meely's time in Houston. Despite scoring 1,940 points in only three seasons at CU (a program-record 24.3 points per game), Meely's strong overall game was never utilized by head coach Tex Winter.

Instead, Meely's primary role was to focus on defending players like Rick Barry, Bill Bradley, John Havlicek and Gus Johnson.

"It was a letdown for me as far as what I wanted to achieve. It's bittersweet when I look back on it," Meely said. "I felt that I didn't get in the right situation, necessarily, and didn't get a chance to show the talent I had. I went to a club where we had a lot of players that could score. Me being a very good defensive player, that's what the team wanted me to focus on doing.

"I never got a chance to show the other parts of my game because of what the team demanded or needed."

Meely, a longtime CU season ticket holder, believes Burks could be a star in the NBA ... if the 6-6 sophomore lands in the right situation.

"I'm excited for him and his opportunity. I watched him play, and he has great potential," Meely said. "He worked hard to get there, and I think he has a great upside. A lot of times, it's about working hard and also what team you're picked by, if you get in the right situation. But if you just get the opportunities, great things can happen."

Legendary CU head coach Russell "Sox" Walseth used to describe his three-time All-Big Eight star as the best all-around player he coached.

"He wasn't just a great scorer, but he was a great defensive player and rebounder, too," Walseth said of Meely in a 1985

Los Angeles Times article.

Cleveland selected Notre Dame's Austin Carr with the first pick in the 1971 draft. Portland took Cal's Sidney Wicks, who would earn Rookie of the Year honors that season, with the second pick. Spencer Haywood wasn't taken off the board until the second round by Buffalo.

Meely was also selected in the first round of the 1971 ABA Draft by the Denver Rockets.

"That was exciting as well. There was also a really strong pull to go to Denver because it was just down the highway (from Boulder)," Meely said. "But I grew up watching the NBA and I just wanted to play in that league because that's what I had aspired to do."

On draft day, Pete Newell, the Naismith Hall of Fame head coach who worked as the general manager for the Houston Rockets and Los Angeles Lakers late in his career, called Meely to give him the good news.

"I would have played for nothing," Meely said. "To get paid was just icing on the cake."

Back problems forced Meely to finish his professional career overseas. He still lives the game vicariously through the Buffs every season, watching the action from the front row at the Coors Events Center and getting to know the players behind the scenes.

"Basketball is what I love, always have," Meely said. "One of the hardest things is when you can't play anymore. But I can go up to CU and see some of the best players in the country up close and personal, and also support the young men that attend school here at CU. I'm always very positive with them."

Meely, Scott Wedman (Kansas City-Omaha, 1974, No. 6 overall), Jay Humphries (Phoenix, 1984, No. 13 overall), Shaun Vandiver (Golden State, 1991, No. 18 overall), Chauncey Billups (Boston, 1997, No. 3 overall) and David Harrison (Indiana, 2004, No. 29 overall) are the only first-round NBA picks in CU history.

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# Colorado guard Alec Burks had to prove himself

By Rick Bonnell

*PUBLISHED IN: CHARLOTTE BOBCATS*

Colorado guard Alec Burks has always been an afterthought. Just ask the college coach who discovered him, because Jeff Bzdelik wasn't even there that day to scout Burks.

"I first saw Alec Burks at some camp outside Kansas City, where it was 100 degrees," recalled Bzdelik, now coaching Wake Forest. "There was one other coach in the gym, and I was there to watch some other 6-9 guy."

Bzdelik chuckles over the phone, recalling the scene: There's this long, graceful perimeter player, just blowing up this camp, and next to no one to witness it. Bzdelik reflexively turned toward the only other coach, who seemed oblivious to Burks' performance. In the recruiting business, this was a score.

Three summers later, Burks is a candidate for the Charlotte Bobcats' No. 9 overall pick. He has flaws - his shooting range isn't great and his defense is suspect - but 6-foot-6 Burks' ballhandling allows him to create consistent mid-range shots. Burks could potentially play three positions - mostly shooting guard, but also some point guard and small forward.

Bzdelik loved the idea of coaching at a college with Wake Forest's basketball tradition. His regret about leaving Colorado last summer was forfeiting a chance to keep developing Burks' potential.

The enthusiasm, when Bzdelik discusses Burks, is palpable.

"If you'd watched that first year, Alec Burks improved like no other guy I'd had," Bzdelik recalled. "His ability to drive, to finish above the rim, to see the court. He could finish with either hand and get to the foul line.

"Think about it - he started that year 17 or 18 (years old) and he wasn't one of the top 150 (freshman prospects). A year later, he's Big 12 Freshman of the Year."

Bzdelik says there's a hunger in how Burks plays that is born of disappointment. It's common for athletes to draw motivation from slights, real or imagined. In Burks' case that connection is probably more valid than most - he really was disregarded.

Asked how he ended up at Colorado, far from his suburban Kansas City home and hardly a basketball power, Burks frankly replied at the NBA Draft Combine, "Best I could do."

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"I feel like I was never recruited heavily. I felt like I had to prove everybody wrong who didn't offer me a scholarship," Burks said Wednesday, after a workout in Charlotte for the Bobcats. "That's what I did, and that's what got me to where I am today."

Bzdelik suspects that hurt will never completely go away, and that won't be a bad thing, as Burk turns to the NBA following two college seasons.



"Alec is always trying to prove, 'Hey, I'm pretty good, too,'" Bzdelik described.

Useful as that hunger can be, it occasionally clouded Burks' judgment. That freshman season in Colorado, Burks suffered a minor knee injury in a close loss to Iowa State. The next game was against Kansas, the top-ranked team in the country, with a campus just miles from where Burks grew up.

"He was so determined to play, and I refused to let him. That kid just had too great a future to risk," Bzdelik said. "Kansas is No. 1, and we lose in overtime. It was so hard to sit him down, but you have to protect them" from themselves.

Now Bzdelik is in Winston-Salem and his favorite player could end up just down the road in Charlotte. The kid everybody missed on now thinks pretty highly of himself.

"I play smooth and I'm versatile," Burks described Wednesday. "I can play inside, I can play outside, I make plays for my teammates.

"I can do it all."

**Notes:** Along with Burks, the Bobcats auditioned five other players Wednesday, most notably Providence shooting guard Marshon Brooks. Brooks said he modeled his game after Atlanta Hawks guard Jamal Crawford, and it shows. He has the same lateral shiftiness off the dribble, to create open jump shots. Brooks would definitely seem a factor for the Bobcats' No. 19 pick, should they not take a shooting guard at No. 9...

The Bobcats will hold another six-man workout today. All six appear to be second-rounders or undrafted free agents. Among those scheduled - Scotty Hopson from Tennessee, Colorado's Cory Higgins (son of Bobcats President of Basketball Operations Rod Higgins) and Belmont Abbey's Richard Barbee.



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**Story Milestone 51 of 93****Brooks, Burks glad to get second chance with Bobcats**

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CHARLOTTE — Marshon Brooks was looking forward to Wednesday's predraft [workout](#) in Charlotte for a couple of reasons.

For one thing, it was his second chance to make a first impression. An injured ankle he suffered in his first workout, for the Knicks, meant he had to delay — not cancel, he hoped — his initial chance to showcase his skills for the Bobcats, who own the Nos. 9 and 19 overall picks in the first round.



Alec Burks, right, and Marshon Brooks, left, share a laugh during a pre-draft workout for the Charlotte Bobcats. (AP Photo)

"It gave me a lot of confidence that they actually wanted to bring me back," said Brooks, the 6-foot-5 Providence product who was originally scheduled to [work out](#) for the Bobcats on June 7. "That was huge for me. I just wasn't ready to go at the time. I could have gone out there but I wanted to give Charlotte my best look."

And then there was the opportunity for a head-to-head matchup against his primary competition on Wednesday — Colorado's Alec Burks.

"You're talking about the best shooting guard in the draft, so I just wanted to see exactly where I was at, and I think I fared well," Brooks said. "His ball-handling is really good, and I think he'll be just fine getting to the paint at the next level. He has a nice mid-range game. Real good player."

Burks was also supposed to be in Charlotte for the June 7 workout, but an injured shoulder kept him from competing that day, too. "I feel like it went good," Burks said Wednesday. "I didn't make a lot of shots, but I showed them I could get to the rim, showed them a good game. It was a good workout."

Burks likely won't be on the board when the Bobcats pick at 19, which means he needed to use Wednesday's workout to prove he's worth their No. 9 pick. Proving himself is something he's used to by this point. "I feel like I was under-recruited, heavily, so I feel like I had to prove everybody wrong who didn't offer me a scholarship, so that's what I did," Burks said. "And I feel like that's what got me to be the player I am today."

Brooks, on the other hand, might be around at No. 19. He spent his workout trying to prove he could be the wing scorer the Bobcats need. "I was just trying to beat people off the dribble and show them I can get in the paint, and show them I can make the extra pass as well," Brooks said. "I guess I have the reputation that I'm a selfish player, so I want to get rid of that as well."

That selfish reputation stems from the perception that he took too many shots his senior year at Providence — his scoring average jumped from 14.2 as a junior to 24.6 as a senior, and included a 52-point outburst against Notre Dame. Considering the lack of scoring options on that young Providence squad, though, that's not exactly a deserved reputation.

"I mean, it's kinda weird to me because coming up as a kid, I played point guard my whole life, my whole entire life and I just hit a growth spurt," Brooks said. "I was recruited to Providence to play point guard. Last year, I don't know if you saw too many of the games, but I had to score. I had to score. I had to carry the scoring load or the game was going to get ugly. It was the will in me to win. When teams go on 8-0 runs or 10-0 runs, that's just ... I want to win games, so I might take a questionable shot, but I shot 48 percent from the field, so they were falling sometimes."

Baylor's LaceDarius Dunn, Hofstra's Charles Jenkins, Michigan's Darius Morris and UTEP's Julian Stone were also at the workout Wednesday. Of those players, Bobcats coach Paul Silas was particularly impressed with Jenkins, the 6-3 shooting guard who scored 2,513 points in his career at Hofstra.

"He's a hell of a shooter," Silas said. "He came off picks and when he's open mid-range, he's gonna knock it down. He hardly missed. I hadn't really seen him, but I liked him. I liked what I saw."

[Next: Jimmer Fredette takes center stage at Utah Jazz workout >](#)

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## Former CU star Alec Burks' NBA dream is almost at hand

By **Chris Dempsey**  
*The Denver Post*

Posted: 06/16/2011 01:00:00 AM MDT

Updated: 06/16/2011 10:59:55 AM MDT

LAS VEGAS — Alec Burks doesn't just dream of the moment he will slowly walk across the stage and shake hands with NBA commissioner David Stern.

He intends on living it that way.

"I'm going to try to walk as slow as possible," Burks said.

The former Colorado star broke into a smile and said, "I can't wait for that day."

That day is June 23, the NBA draft. It will be a simultaneous end and beginning for a player who just three years ago had big dreams but little else to indicate he might have a shot at pro ball.

Now he's thinking about suits, as in what to wear on stage when his name is announced and he shakes hands with Stern in New York. As much as he can, anyway, in the midst of intense

predraft workouts for NBA teams and training sessions at Impact Basketball. True to his personality — more Jack Johnson than Ice Cube — there will be no flash in the fabric.

"It's going to be dark," Burks said. "Dark color, probably black. Dark shoes, belt, a watch. All of that. I ain't never been that type of dude to try to make a statement. I'm laid back. So I'm going to be laid back at the draft."

Burks, a 6-foot-6, 193-pound guard who made the all-Big 12 team as a CU sophomore, is expected to have his name called in the lottery — one of the top-13 picks in the draft. He would be one of only five players in CU history to be drafted that high.

"I'm glad for that to happen," Burks said. "It shows that I worked hard."

### Polishing the presentation

Impact Basketball is just beyond the reach of the Las Vegas strip. Run by one of the nation's top basketball trainers, Joe Abunassar, it's a basketball lover's paradise. Pro and college athletes train there during the summer. On this day, it's a who's who of college stars from last season. Burks is joined by Kawhi Leonard (San Diego State), Kalin Lucas (Michigan State) and Jacob Pullen (Kansas State).

Burks is wearing a white T-shirt, Jordan-brand black shorts with red accents, black socks and black shoes. He's among a trio being put through

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shooting and conditioning drills on a hot morning that makes for a sweltering gym.

"Same drill, same drill! Shot fake, into shot," a coach with closely cropped, fiery red hair implores. "Now jab step and shoot."

No detail is missed. The coach corrects Burks' form on a jab-step, jump-shot drill.

"Hard jab, hard jab, hard jab," he says, his voice stern. "Work both feet."

On days when Burks is not flying across the country to work out for NBA teams, he's usually at Impact Basketball's workout facility. He arrives midmorning and stays until late afternoon. He eats lunch and dinner at the facility. Custom meals for the athletes are delivered every day. He lifts weights. If he needs extra shooting, he comes back at night and takes more shots.

"So it's like a full job," Abunassar said.

The purpose, Abunassar explained, is improving drill work and refining a player's skills to create a better presentation for NBA teams.

"Alec, as Colorado fans know, is a player," Abunassar said. "When the lights come on, when the five-on-five (play) goes, he does so many things. He can pass, he can score, he can shoot. He's hard to guard."

"What Alec needed to do in this process is get better at the drill stuff because that's what they are watching him do in the workouts. Most teams watch film; they have Alec heavily scouted. We just want to make sure when he goes into the workouts he's showing the explosiveness, the things that he showed in the game."

Burks admits that he got off to a rocky start working out for NBA teams. He wasn't pleased with how he did at his first workout, for the

Washington Wizards. Since then he's been more satisfied, he said. He has worked out for four other teams — the Detroit Pistons, Milwaukee Bucks, Cleveland Cavaliers and Charlotte Bobcats.

"I feel like I improved in each one," Burks said. "Got better in each one."

## Almost picked Indiana

A series of good decisions led Burks to this point.

Ignored by the traditional national powers when he was playing for Grandview (Mo.) High School, those choices helped Burks rise to the top echelon of college basketball in a hurry. He came to Colorado after Jeff Bzdelik, the CU coach at the time, fell in love with his skills while watching him in a summer workout following his junior season when virtually no one else knew who he was.

Some high-profile programs tried to swoop in and get Burks late in his senior year, when his talent and potential became apparent to all.

When he arrived at CU, Bzdelik gushed. "It's both on him and me to realize his potential," Bzdelik said in Burks' freshman season. "And if he works hard and stays healthy and his head and heart



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are in the right place, he has a chance to be really special."

Burks's second wise decision was staying at Colorado after his freshman season when Bzdelik left to be Wake Forest's coach. Burks nearly transferred to Indiana, where former Buffaloes assistant Steve McClain landed after not getting the CU head coaching job when Bzdelik bolted from Boulder.

"People don't understand. I was really going to Indiana to follow McClain. I really was going," Burks said. "Coach (Tad) Boyle talked to me and I made the right decision, I feel, to stay."

Burks averaged 20.5 points and 6.5 rebounds in a stellar sophomore season playing for Boyle, who replaced Bzdelik as CU's head coach.

Right decision No. 3, he said, is turning pro at this time. Burks went back and forth trying to decide whether to stay for his junior season or leave the Buffs for the NBA draft. He made up his mind the night before he announced his decision at a news conference. In the end, it was a business decision.

"I felt like some players that were behind me and in front of me, they stayed in school," Burks said. "I'm the top-ranked shooting guard prospect in the nation, everybody saying I'm a top-10 pick, so I couldn't pass that up."

"I felt like I made a great decision. I like Colorado a lot, but you can't pass up these types of situations, especially my situation."

Burks insists he will remember his time at CU as "the best two years of my life," but now he's ready for the next challenge. To succeed, he has to convince teams beyond a shadow of a doubt that he is capable of playing at the NBA level. His 3-point range is perhaps the biggest concern about his game.

"He's going to have to improve his ability to step

out even further on the floor and knock down the NBA 3-pointer," said Bucks director of scouting Billy McKinney.

But that's not the only criticism some teams have.

"People think I'm too cool with the way I play," Burks said. "I'm just a laid-back, smooth-type player. I might not look like I'm going hard, but I'm going as hard as I can. I'm going hard, but I'm smooth. So it looks like I'm not going hard at all."

"I can't help it if I was just born like that. I can't stop that. I'm not like that. I'm a smooth guy. I'm not going to be something I'm not."

Burks is being challenged for the spot as the top-ranked shooting guard on the draft board. Providence's Mar-shon Brooks and Washington State's Klay Thompson are making strong pushes to be lottery picks next week. They have received rave reviews after recent workouts for teams.

"My biggest fear is failing, being out of the league sooner than I should be," Burks said. "It's motivation. There's a lot of people out there with talent who are sitting on the corner."

"I want the longest career possible, all-star

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## Where will Burks go?

Early NBA draft projections had former Colorado star Alec Burks at the back end of the lottery. But the rise of Marshon Brooks and Klay Thompson has some draft prognosticators revising their predictions. A look at new projections of where Burks will go June 23:

**ESPN's Chad Ford:** 13th to Phoenix

**NBA.com's** Scott Howard-Cooper: Ninth to Charlotte

**DraftExpress:** 17th to New York

**NBADraft.net:** 15th to Indiana

*Chris Dempsey, The Denver Post*

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## Familiar sight: Bobcats' Higgins knows Burks

Posted 06/15/2011 02:56:00 PM |

By Mike Cranston, AP Sports Writer

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — The attention was on Rich Cho as he sat courtside Wednesday morning wearing all black taking in his first pre-draft workout since joining the Charlotte Bobcats.

And while Cho provides a different perspective in owner Michael Jordan's front office ahead of a critical draft, the old general manager sitting next to him likely had the most insight on this day.

Few in the NBA have seen guard Alec Burks play more than Rod Higgins, who was promoted this week to president of basketball operations. Higgins' son, Cory, was a teammate of Burks at Colorado.

"He was at a lot of our games, our practices," Burks said. "I know him a great deal."

Burks and Providence guard Marshon Brooks — both in town for a second time after injuries kept them from the court on their first visit — headlined Charlotte's six-player audition.

Also on hand were Michigan's Darius Morris, Julyan Stone of UTEP, LaceDarius Dunn of Baylor and Hofstra's Charles Jenkins.

The Bobcats, who select ninth and 19th on June 23, are considering the athletic,

slashing 6-foot-6 Burks with the first pick. He could perhaps fill a need for more athleticism and scoring.

"I feel like they've seen a lot of my game," Burks said, referencing Higgins. "It's great to be out here in Charlotte showing them I still got it."

A Grandview, Mo., native, Burks received few college offers before landing at Colorado. But he dazzled in his two years there, averaging 20.5 points and 6.5 rebounds last season.

Coach Paul Silas said he could see playing Burks at both shooting guard and small forward. Silas indicated Burks, who has been criticized for his lack of shooting range and strength, shot well in the workout and displayed his athleticism.

"I showed them I get to the rim," Burks said. "It was a good workout."

There's no doubt the 6-5 Brooks can score.

A possibility for Charlotte with the 19th pick,

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Brooks ranked second in the nation in scoring last season at 24.6 points a game.

Carrying a Providence team that lacked depth, Brooks scored 52 points against Notre Dame and 43 against Georgetown. But the scoring bursts also led to suggestions he's a selfish player.

"I had to score. I had to carry the scoring load or the game was going to get ugly," said Brooks, who pointed out he played point guard until a late growth spurt. "I might take a questionable shot, but I shot 48 percent from the field. So they were falling sometimes."

Brooks feels he'd fit in well with Charlotte despite the team already having a young shooting guard in Gerald Henderson.

"I'm not a shooter," Brooks argued. "I'm a scorer that draws a lot of fouls and just plays hard."

Helping to make Charlotte's draft decisions will be Cho, hired less than a month after he was dismissed as GM of the Portland Trail Blazers.

"I'm not the type of person who's going to come in here and say, 'Hey, this is what we need to do. Let's change this, here,'" Cho said. "It's going to be a collaborative effort."

Cho and Higgins were seen chatting with scouts after the Wednesday's workout, which Jordan didn't attend.

"He's going to be able to give us his idea of who he likes, looking at our roster and how they would fit in," Silas said. "It just gives you another voice. A guy that's been around, a guy that's seen a lot of these players. I think

it's a major plus."

Notes: Bobcats assistant Stephen Silas was back in Charlotte after helping run a camp for European draft prospects in Italy. "It was a great experience," he said. ... It marked the first time Morris had been in Time Warner Cable Arena since he missed a runner at the buzzer in Michigan's 73-71 loss to Duke in the third round of the NCAA tournament that ended his college career. "A lot of memories in that gym," Morris said, smiling. "I wouldn't mind going in here and practicing that shot one more time."

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## Hale Irwin experiences the Open from other side of the ropes

THURSDAY, JUNE 16, 2011

BETHESDA, Md. -- One of the most interested spectators at Congressional CC Thursday was one of the most successful U.S. Open players in history.



*Photo by Getty Images*

Hale Irwin, who won Open titles in 1974, 1979 and in 1990 became, at 45, the oldest golfer to win the championship, was with wife Sally watching their 36-year-old son, Steve, compete in his first U.S. Open.

The elder Irwin had a little numerology on his mind prior to Steve's 2:41 p.m. first round starting time. "I have 45 Champions Tour victories," Hale said. "I won my last Open when I was 45. It's been 45 years since an Irwin played an Open as an amateur."

Hale played in 34 U.S. Opens, the first as an amateur in 1966 at Olympic Club. This isn't the first time he has been on the other side of the ropes. As a 15-year-old in 1960, he attended the 1960 U.S. Open at Cherry Hills.

"I remember Ben Hogan going out to practice. He dumped out a whole bag of brand-new balls. I thought, 'Wow,' " Hale said. "I watched Dutch Harrison hit a drive off the first tee. Where mine usually started going down, his started going up. I thought, 'Is that cool or what.' "

Wearing shorts and carrying a small backpack, Hale, 66, was eager to see his son play and proud he had made it into the field. "It's a long, hard, difficult process to make it to a national championship," Hale said. "This is his first one, but I don't think it will be his last one. But we're very proud of Steve, regardless of the outcome."

-- *Bill Fields*

BY [SAM WEINMAN](#)

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## Steve Irwin follows dad Hale's footsteps into U.S. Open

By Jon E. Yunt  
*The Denver Post*

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One's initial visit to the nation's capital often includes the usual sightseeing tours: the Lincoln Memorial, the Smithsonian museums and the Washington Monument.

For former University of Colorado standout Steve Irwin — if the last name rings a bell, yes, he is the son of three-time U.S. Open winner [Hale Irwin](#) — the wonder and awe of D.C. will have to wait.

The younger Irwin, 36, qualified for his first U.S. Open, which is being held at Congressional County Club, just outside of Washington in Bethesda, Md.

"This is every golfer's dream come true," said Irwin, who is president of his father's golf course design company, Hale Irwin Golf Services. "I don't care if you are a 3-handicapper or a touring pro, this is a dream come true. It is going to be a difficult test of golf."

The tournament starts today.

Irwin chose to attempt to qualify at Oakmont Country Club in Glendale, Calif. After firing an opening-round 67 that included a blistering, 5-

under-par 31 on the inward nine, Irwin shared the lead. He started to believe his dream may become a reality.

A second-round 71 gave him a two-round total of 138, just one shot back of co-medalists Scott Pinckney of Scottsdale, Ariz., and Matthew Edwards of Las Cruces, N.M., and one shot better than the fifth and final qualifier, Brian Locke, who won a four-player playoff.

"I think everybody, including myself, started to tighten up in the second round," Irwin said. "I was fortunate; I made a couple of big putts."

Irwin sank a 25-foot par putt on the last hole to avoid a playoff.

"I was pretty confident that if I didn't make it, I was going to be in trouble," said Irwin, who regained his amateur status after an attempted professional run after his career at CU did not pan out.

Now the expectations of the family name that come with being Hale Irwin's son are back in play.

"I qualified as an amateur back in 1966; it's taken another 45 years for another Irwin as an amateur to get there," Hale Irwin said. "It was



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certainly a dream of mine as a young person, and I know it's been a dream of Steven's for a long time. I am very, very happy for him and very proud of him."

Hale Irwin, as a 21-year old amateur, made the cut at the 1966 Open at The Olympic Club in San Francisco, a tournament eventually won in a playoff by [Billy Casper](#) over [Arnold Palmer](#). Hale hopes Steve can somehow follow in his footsteps.

"We have talked about this since he was little boy, and I've only had to reiterate this is such a unique experience and one that you don't know if you are ever going to have again," said Hale Irwin. "Take advantage of the time and have fun. Having said that, fun is also playing well."

Steve Irwin spent the practice rounds this week getting used to a course he had never played. He isn't necessarily a long hitter, at least by today's standards, but all U.S. Opens put a premium more on accuracy — hitting fairways and greens — than length, although Congressional's par-71 layout measures 7,574 yards.

"I'd be lying a little bit if I told you I wasn't going to walk on the first tee and be a little awed," Irwin said. "I do think having played with some of my dad's peers will help alleviate some of those fears and put me in the right frame of mind."

Former Kent Denver High School standout Brandt Jobe, now based in Westlake, Texas, also qualified for the Open.

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