

CU Buffs' Austin Dufault hopes European trip helps game

CU senior-to-be played for U.S. Athletes in Action team

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Growing up in Killdeer, N.D., Austin Dufault's view of the world didn't extend much beyond his one-stoplight hometown, which had a population of 751 as of the 2010 census.

Even though the border was only a two-and-a-half-hour drive to the north, Dufault never ventured to Canada.

Now the Colorado senior's passport has finally been stamped.

Dufault, a 6-foot-9 forward, recently played on an Athletes In Action team during a two-week tour of Macedonia and Kosovo in Eastern Europe.

"It was definitely an experience like I've never had before, being across the world in a different country," Dufault said of his first trip abroad. "I've been to Hawaii, which I guess is as close as you can get to leaving the country without leaving the country."

Dufault's team, which was coached by Baylor assistant Tim Maloney, won a round-robin tournament against squads from Bulgaria, Macedonia and Poland before playing the Kosovo national team in an exhibition in the capital city of Pristina.

Interestingly, the atmosphere for Dufault and the visitors felt more like the Coors Events Center than Allen Fieldhouse.

"The sports hall there in Pristina sat about three or four thousand people. It's really old, but they had a big crowd for that game and it was on national TV," Dufault said. "When they announced our starting lineups, the crowd started chanting, 'USA! USA!' I guess we've helped them out over the years with our foreign policy and they really like our country. They love Americans over there."

Dufault played alongside some familiar faces, including Baylor's Cory Jefferson and A.J. Walton, and Kansas' Jordan Juenemann and Jeff Withey. The relatively unknown players back home were treated like celebrities over there.

"The people (in Macedonia) were friendly. They'd never seen black people before, and we had three or four guys on our team they were following around and taking pictures with," Dufault said. "We had a good following at our games, a lot of support."

Levi Knutson parlayed a similar European trip with Athletes In Action last summer into a highly productive and successful senior season. Dufault hopes to finish his CU career on a similar high note as an important piece of head coach Tad Boyle's new puzzle, which also will be missing Cory Higgins, Marcus Relphorde and NBA-bound Alec Burks.

"I think it will help a lot. I played all over, even point guard for five minutes during one game," Dufault said of his Athletes In Action experience. "It was great just to play a lot of positions on the court. And I built some confidence with my shooting and ball handling."

"It's also a religious-based trip, and they give you a lot of things to think about and to focus on to be the best you can be. The trip made me realize how lucky I am back here in the States and think about a lot of the advantages I have."

During the Buffs' 24-win 2010-11 campaign, which was capped off with an appearance at New York's Madison Square Garden as part of the NIT Final Four, Dufault tied three single-season program records for games played (38), starts (38) and fouls (112). He averaged 6.6 points and 4.2 rebounds as a junior while shooting 52.3 percent from the field.

After being forced to play center for three punishing seasons in the Big 12, Dufault might actually be able to play his natural position of forward in the Pac-12 with the expected return of 6-11 Shane Harris-Tunks from a knee injury.

"I'm very excited about Shane coming back," Dufault said. "Just as we left gym (Monday), he was in there getting shots up. It's exciting for me knowing we're going to have a big body down there and that I might possibly be able to move out of the center spot."

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