

Higgins making his point

Recent CU player may catch on as PG at next level

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Alec Burks has potential and upside.

These are the over-used words NBA scouts and draftniks use to describe athletic underclassmen who leave school early and project as possible professional stars down the road.

Cory Higgins has a college degree and is out of eligibility.

If the recent Colorado graduate were looking for a job in the real world his loyalty, work ethic and experience would be valuable assets.

When it comes to the NBA Draft, however, seniors are typically passed over for the one-and-done and foreign prospects dripping with the aforementioned potential and upside.

Burks, who put together an impressive highlight package during his two seasons running with the Buffs, is expected to be a lottery pick on June 23 when the draft is held in New Jersey.

Several of the latest mock drafts have the 6-foot-6 shooting guard being taken off the board as one of the first 10 picks.

Higgins, a four-year starter who leaves CU tied with Richard Roby for the program's all-time scoring mark, might not hear his name called at all on draft night. If the 6-5 guard is selected it will be in the second round where contracts are not guaranteed.

But no player in this year's class is as prepared to take the road less traveled to the NBA as Higgins.

"Everybody's road is going to be different," Higgins said during a recent interview with the Camera. "I'm going to take it wherever it goes."

Higgins' father, Rod Higgins, is a former NBA player and the general manager of the Charlotte Bobcats. Cory Higgins grew up around stars, including Michael Jordan, and has played against great players for years.

"My dad just told me to keep working no matter what," Higgins said. "A lot of people are going to tell you no."

Four years ago Higgins was the first recruit to tell Jeff Bzdelik yes. After three losing seasons at CU, he was able to enjoy a 24-win season that included a trip to the National Invitation Tournament Final Four at Madison Square Garden under first-year head coach Tad Boyle.

Bzdelik, a longtime NBA scout and former Denver Nuggets head coach, believes there is a place for Higgins in the NBA.

"In Cory's case being at the right place at the right time is vitally important," Bzdelik, now the head coach at Wake Forest, told the Camera earlier this month. "He can be a serviceable point guard. Cory has a high basketball IQ, he's athletic, he can score in a variety of ways, he understands the game, and he will be a great asset for a team. It will come down to roster space and fulfilling a need."

Higgins played some point guard for the Buffs during his career but did most of his damage in the Big 12 as a wing. He owns the CU record for games played, starts, minutes and free throws made.

"I'm hearing that I just need to hone my point guard skills and I should be OK," Higgins said. "It helped a lot (to play point at CU) because some teams got to see me at the position and envisioned me making that leap."

Before the Big 12 Tournament, Iowa State head coach Fred Hoiberg, a 10-year NBA veteran and a former executive with the Minnesota Timberwolves, predicted that Higgins would join Burks at the next level.

"I do (think Higgins will get drafted). He can play two positions. He's got very good size for a point guard," Hoiberg said. "And he can create his shots. He does a terrific job of getting to the free-throw line. That's something that in the NBA ... that's a luxury to have, a guy that can create contact and get to the line."

Higgins -- the only player in CU history with at least 2,000 points (2,001), 500 rebounds (547), 300 assists (320), 150 steals (192) -- is currently training in Las Vegas at the same facility Chauncey Billups uses.

Higgins worked out for the Pistons in Detroit on Wednesday and has workouts scheduled with the Cleveland Cavaliers, Los Angeles Lakers and Los Angeles Clippers in the days ahead.

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