

Jeff Bzdelik watched CU Buffs from afar

Former CU coach NBA fielding calls about Burks

By Ryan Thorburn Camera Sports Writer
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Yes, Jeff Bzdelik was paying attention.

And the former Colorado head coach takes a lot of pride in the success the Buffs enjoyed last season when Tad Boyle's team set a program record with 24 wins while Bzdelik was suffering through a brutal 8-24 season during his first year at Wake Forest.

Today Bzdelik's first recruit at CU -- senior Cory Higgins -- will graduate with a degree in sociology. Higgins leaves Boulder tied with Richard Roby for the career scoring record (2,001 points) and first all-time in games played, games started, minutes played, double-digit scoring games and free throws made.

"I have the utmost admiration and respect for Cory Higgins," said Bzdelik, who recently spent five days in Boulder visiting his son, Brett, a CU student. "He came to Colorado at a time when they only had won seven games and there was just a vision about facilities and the future of the program. He put his faith and trust in me and the University of Colorado, he stuck with it, and he came out with so much."

Higgins did not get to play in the NCAA Tournament, but the Buffs were able to recover from not making the field with a therapeutic run to the NIT Final Four in New York. The crowds at the Coors Events Center during the first three rounds of the postseason and throughout Big 12 play created the type of atmosphere the 6-5 guard from Danville, Calif., had vowed to be a part of before leaving campus.

"Cory is truly a great ambassador for the University of Colorado," Bzdelik said.

So is Alec Burks, even though the super sophomore is leaving CU after only two years to pursue his NBA dreams. Bzdelik recruited the 6-6 wing, who oozed talent but lacked much attention, when he was 6-3 and off the radar of Kansas and Missouri despite starring at Grandview (Mo.) High School.

"I've had numerous NBA people call me up over the last several weeks," said Bzdelik, a longtime NBA scout, assistant coach and the former head coach of the Denver Nuggets. "I know that Alec is well thought of and will do a great job as he works out and presents himself to several teams. As long as he keeps his head and his heart in the right place, he will have a very productive career."

Burks goes down as one of the most productive Buffs of all time after setting the freshman (512) and single-season (779) scoring records while averaging 19.0 points per game. Only Cliff Meely (24.3) and Shaun Vandiver (20.6) have had better career averages.

Bzdelik knew CU had landed a special talent before Burks -- a unanimous All-Big 12 first team selection and Wooden Award finalist this season -- ever stepped on Sox Walseth Court.

"The only question mark for me was how he would react under brighter lights," Bzdelik said. "It didn't take very long for him to demonstrate that. He embraced the bright lights at that level."

After a difficult season in Winston-Salem, N.C., Bzdelik believes Wake Forest is ready to make a move up the ACC standings in 2011-12.

At CU, the story line will be Boyle's ability to replace four solid players he inherited while the Buffs transition to the Pac-12. Thanks in large part to Burks and Higgins, a lot more people are paying attention to basketball in Boulder.

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