

CU's Dufault working to fill Harris-Tunks' shoes

Forward garners teammates' respect for work ethic

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ATHENS, Ga. -- When Shane Harris-Tunks' knee gave out, Austin Dufault's heart sank.

"We're pretty close," Dufault said. "It was a really hard practice the day after Shane went down, just thinking how bad I wanted him to be out there."

Other than Wooden Award candidates Cory Higgins and Alec Burks, there wasn't a player Colorado's new coaching staff was counting on more this season than Harris-Tunks. The 6-11 center had added 25 pounds of muscle and was poised for a breakout season in the paint until tearing an ACL during practice last month.

Now Dufault -- a 6-foot-9, 225-pound forward -- must return to his old role of picking fights under the basket with the other team's bouncer-sized post players.

During CU's 83-74 loss at Georgia on Tuesday night here at Stegeman Coliseum, Dufault scored 13 points and grabbed five rebounds. But the Bulldogs outscored the still under-sized Buffs 36-26 in the paint and out-rebounded them 40-35.

And that was with preseason SEC Player of the Year Trey Thompkins (6-9, 247) sitting out with a sprained ankle.

"When Shane was healthy I was playing more on the perimeter, but I will do whatever I have to do to help this team win," Dufault said. "Shane's the first person that would tell me to man up and get it done down there. I just have to play hard and keep him in mind."

Georgia senior Jeremy Price (6-8, 264) scored 17 points in 17 minutes on 7-for-9 shooting.

"Austin's going to be over-matched physically almost every night out," CU head coach Tad Boyle noted. "But he has gotten to be a much better post defender just in the last month and a half. I'm proud of him for that and if that continues we'll be fine."

"Offensively, he got some rebounds and we're going to need him to play well for us to be good. It can't be just Cory and Alec, it has to be everybody. I like the balance of this team."

Dufault has averaged 11.0 points and 4.0 rebounds through two games. True freshman forward Andre Roberson has really helped out on the glass and looked like a star in the making with 18 rebounds in two games.

Backup forward/center Trey Eckloff (6-10, 235) has played a total of only six minutes and clearly has some work to do in practice to earn the staff's trust. Ben Mills, a 7-foot freshman, did not take the warm-ups off against Georgia.

"Austin gives us everything he has every night out. He's always the smallest guy in his matchup, but he's always going to give more effort and have a bigger heart," Higgins said. "Austin has been playing great and he gives us everything he has."

After averaging 8.2 points and 3.7 rebounds as a freshman, Dufault slumped to 5.5 points and 3.1 rebound as a sophomore. He looks much more comfortable in Boyle's system than he did during last year's struggle under Jeff Bzdelik.

"Coach gives us a lot of freedom as long as we play hard. That's something that gives me a lot of confidence because he has confidence in me," Dufault said. "He wants me to be a scorer down on the low post for us this year, which is really refreshing. That's something I've enjoyed is Coach's overall attitude."

If all of the Buffs can match Dufault's effort, the team still has a chance to make the best of a tough situation and reach its goals for the season without Harris-Tunks.

"He's doing the best he can," Burks said of Dufault. "He works hard to help us out, and I respect that."

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