

# Boyle relying on Higgins to set tone for Buffs

## CU senior a natural leader

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KANSAS CITY, Mo. -- Jeff Bzdelik's first recruit at Colorado was also Tad Boyle's first recruit.

After meeting with the Buffs for the first time in April before his introductory press conference as their new head coach, Boyle asked Cory Higgins for a favor.

"He pulled me aside the first time he was introduced to us and asked for my help in keeping everybody together," Higgins said during the Big 12 basketball media days at the Sprint Center. "He and I both knew that if we did keep everyone together we'd be something special this year."

Boyle also flew here and drove to nearby Grandview, Mo., to meet with Alec Burks' parents. Suddenly, the reigning Big 12 Freshman of the Year, who was very outspoken about wanting Bzdelik assistant Steve McClain to get the job, was on board.

"Maybe for a couple days," Higgins said when asked how long the disappointment of Bzdelik's departure for Wake Forest lasted. "I think I've learned to roll with the punches. You can't dwell on the past, you have to look forward. I think that's what I did with coach Boyle."

In fact, all of the Buffs -- except Keegan Hornbuckle, who transferred to UC Santa Barbara -- bought into Boyle before the moving boxes were unpacked.

The first-year coach credits CU's four-year star player.

"Cory has been critical and will continue to be critical. When we traveled out here (for media days) I talked to him about that," Boyle said. "He's our leader, he's a guy our players respect, he has earned that respect, and he is going to have to be our voice in the locker room."

"You have to have that guy as a coach that you can go to and kind of get a feel for your team and a pulse on your team."

Boyle won't just be listening to Higgins' opinions. He will be also be studying the preseason All-Big 12 first team selection's body language during the conference grind in January and February.

"I told Cory, 'I'm going to look at you and how tired you are to see if we need an extra day off,'" Boyle said. "He brings it every day. He hasn't had a bad practice yet. Cory is critical to our success this year in more ways than just points or assists or steals."

Higgins has led the Big 12 in steals the last two seasons and was the conference's fourth-leading scorer (19.4 ppg.) during his junior campaign. Boyle said if the Buffs would have finished higher in the standings last season the steady 6-5 guard would have been first-team All-Big 12 instead of being on the third team.

The only postseason honor Higgins cares about is receiving an invitation to the NCAA Tournament. In order for the Buffs to do that, the senior from Danville, Calif., will have to lead a talented and more experienced roster to a top-six finish in the Big 12 before the program heads to the Pac-12.

"That would mean everything," Higgins said. "Coming in as a freshman, I wanted to be one of the guys that really turned Colorado basketball around. That's what I want to be remembered by."

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KANSAS CITY, Mo. — During my three previous visits to Big 12 basketball media days there was never much of a crowd around Jeff Bzdelik and the Colorado players he brought on the trip.

And when reporters did interview Jeff it was usually to get his opinion as a former NBA head coach and scout on players like Blake Griffin or Michael Beasley.

This year there was actually a lot of interest in CU basketball. The fact that the team is expected to be much improved and the program's pending move to the Pac-12 obviously contributed to the buzz around the Buffs.

There is also lot of respect amongst longtime reporters who work in this basketball hotbed for Tad Boyle — despite the fact that he was introduced as Ted Boyle by the press conference moderator — from his playing days at Kansas and stint as an assistant coach at Wichita State.

“Tad is a wonderful person and a guy that definitely knows basketball. I do think they're going to be a very tough opponent for everyone. They were a year ago. I mean, no one looked forward to it,” Texas head coach Rick Barnes told me. “I think he'll put his own stamp on it real quick. I think he'll probably build on some of the things Jeff did with the entire program. But I think in terms of what goes on out on the court, there won't be any question it will be his basketball team.”

Cory Higgins said it's nice to be on a CU team that actually has some realistic postseason expectations.

“It's completely different,” Higgins said of the changes in the basketball culture at the Coors Events Center from when he first stepped on campus as a freshman. “I feel now it's a real basketball program. I think in the past people were just trying to get it to where it should be. This is the first year I've came in and feel like it is where it needs to be. It's going in the right direction.”

On a side note, if you're a CU fan and have never attended the Big 12 Tournament, I highly recommend you attend the event this year in Kansas City before Boyle and Co. move to the Pac-12.

Great environment, great food, and the Buffs should finally be an interesting story in March.

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