

Bufs like what they see in forward Harris-Tunks

Players, coaches call Australian most improved player on team

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NBA scouts will be showing up at Colorado games this season to watch Alec Burks and Cory Higgins.

Everyone who follows the program can't wait to finally see Shannon Sharpe on the court at the Coors Events Center.

The new coaching staff also inherits a skilled and experienced group of role players -- including Marcus Relphorde, Levi Knutson, Austin Dufault and Nate Tomlinson -- who have been through the Big 12 grind before.

But if you ask coach Tad Boyle, or any of the players listed above, who has been an early surprise in practice, the consistent answer is Shane Harris-Tunks.

"Shane looks like a tight end now," Higgins said. "He's physical, he's knocking people around on screens, and he's going to help us because he can defend any big man in our league."

"I think Shane is really under-rated. I think he's going to be the biggest surprise for everybody."

After averaging just 1.8 points, 1.6 rebounds and 11.7 minutes per game as a true freshman, Harris-Tunks said he added 25 pounds of muscle to his 6-foot-11 frame over the spring and summer.

That can only help the Bufs, who finished last in the Big 12 in rebounding and blocked shots last season. Obviously, those are statistics that must change in order for CU to finish in the top half of the conference standings.

"I played at 225 last year and I think the lightest guy I played against was probably 260," Harris-Tunks said. "Trying to hold them off was tough enough, let alone trying to do anything against them offensively."

Higgins (18.9 ppg.), Burks (17.1) and Relphorde (11.0) did most of the heavy lifting in Jeff Bzdelik's Princeton-style offense. Dwight Thorne, another guard, finished his senior season as the team's fourth-leading scorer coming off the bench.

Boyle's up-tempo approach will give Harris-Tunks and the other "biggs" a chance to do more than set screens and cheer from the end of the bench.

"If I had to pick a most improved player from our workouts when we started in late August to now, Shane has shown a great degree of improvement," Boyle said. "He's bigger, he's stronger, he runs well. I think getting some low-post touches and having him continue to develop his low-post game is going to really help this basketball team."

Harris-Tunks led CU in field goal percentage last season (61.1 percent). But the skilled center from Australia only took 36 shots in the 28 games in which he saw action.

"I'm looking forward to this. We have a lot more of a post emphasis this year," Harris-Tunks said. "I'm always going to be happy about that because I'll be able to see the ball a lot more."

The Bufs also return Trey Eckloff, a 6-10 junior who has played well in the past against current NBA players like Blake Griffin and Cole Aldrich.

Boyle landed Ben Mills on the recruiting trail shortly after being hired and will need every practice available to evaluate the 7-1 freshman before making a decision whether to redshirt him or throw him into the fray.

Andre Roberson, an athletic 6-7 freshman wing, is expected to help bolster CU's rebounding

. "We have two or three guys at every position now and it's always going to be a battle," Relphorde said. "We can't really take too many days off in practice now and it's going to help everybody get better."

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