

Knutson displays enviable attitude

Boyle counting on hard-working, unselfish senior

By Ryan Thorburn Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

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After an intense two and a half hour practice this week, the Coors Events Center cleared out.

Except for Levi Knutson, whose dribbling and net-swooshing still echoed through the empty gym.

Colorado has a chance to make the NCAA Tournament this season because preseason Wooden Award candidates Cory Higgins and Alec Burks are that good. But Tad Boyle knows the Buffs will only be successful if everyone on the roster plays as hard and unselfishly as Knutson.

"Levi is a guy who will do whatever you ask him to do," Boyle said. "His work ethic and competitiveness bring a lot to this team. ... He's a consummate overachiever. He's everything you can ask for as a coach."

Knutson was also a favorite of Jeff Bzdelik's, despite averaging just 12.7 minutes, 3.5 points and 1.6 rebounds pergame last season. The 6-4 guard from Littleton has played through a series of painful injuries throughout his collegiate career.

Now a healthy senior starving for a winning season, Knutson figures to be one of the first players off Boyle's bench.

"There are a lot of things I like about Levi, but No. 1 is his versatility and No. 2 is his work ethic. The guy can play any perimeter position or even at the four if we go small or get in foul trouble," Boyle said. "Levi can also make shots. When guys do focus on Cory and Alec and Marcus (Relphorde), he is going to be a recipient hopefully of some open looks and he's capable of knocking them down.

"I've asked him to be aggressive offensively. He doesn't necessarily have to make plays every time he catches the ball, but I want him to be in attack mode out there."

Knutson played on an Athletes in Action team that toured Poland over the summer. He was also able to work with CU strength and conditioning coach James Hardy on strength and conditioning instead of rehabbing injuries.

"I had a great offseason," Knutson said. "I've always tried to lead by example, but I do think some guys on our team need to be more vocal, especially with the younger guys. I think I'm definitely looking to take more of a leadership role this year."

Knutson sparked CU with 13 points on 5-for-8 shooting last season during an overtime loss to No. 1 Kansas. There should be more opportunities for everyone to score in Boyle's up-tempo offense.

"There's obviously a learning curve right now putting in a new system and learning a new way to play, but everybody is picking it up very well and getting better every day," Knutson said.

Burks and Higgins, two players who are on the NBA radar, will absorb much of the media attention as the Buffs make their way through the Big 12 for the final time. That works fine for their teammates as long as CU is playing the game the right way.

And winning.

"Alec and Cory are great players and they deserve any attention they're getting. I hope they both have great years, but I think a lot of other guys are going to have to have great years as well," Knutson said. "I think we can play as a team and that's what it takes to be successful. Alec and Cory know that. Obviously, they'll be two of our biggest leaders on the floor, but you need everybody to win."

The Buffs will host Creighton for a closed-door scrimmage on Saturday at the Coors Events Center. CU's 2010-11 season

begins at home on Nov. 12 against Idaho State.

Buff love

Boyle`s team received seven points in The Associated Press preseason 2010-11 college basketball poll released Thursday.

Duke was No. 1 in the poll, followed by Michigan State and Kansas State. Other Big 12 schools in the top 25 include: Kansas (No. 7), Missouri (No. 15) and Baylor (No. 16). Texas was just outside the top 25 in the 27th spot with 107 points.

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OCTOBER 28, 2010, 4:51 PM

CU men's hoops practice an eye-opener

By **TOM KENSLE** |  No Comments

BOULDER – Being consumed with covering football, it's been difficult for me to get over to a CU men's basketball practice. But I finally made it over to the Coors Events Center and watched first-year Buffs coach Tad Boyle's early morning workout.

What an eye-opener.

First, if Colorado isn't among the best conditioned teams in the Big 12, I'll be surprised. Players were given the necessary water breaks, but there was absolutely no standing around. Practice entailed nonstop action – most of it full-court, in an up-and-down, fast-break tempo.

Also interesting was seeing Boyle conduct what I call “mini” scrimmages. It wasn't just five-on-five, shirts vs. skins. It looked like a game situation in that Boyle would huddle up with one side and plot strategy, while an assistant coach, Jean Prioleau or Mike Rohn, would take the other side. I'm not sure I'd ever seen that just a dozen days into preseason practices.

But the biggest difference from other coaches I've covered is Boyle's emphasis on defense and rebounding. That's not just coachspeak. During the scrimmaging, a team accumulated points only by making defensive stops. No points were awarded to the other side for baskets made.

Interesting.

“We're trying to change the culture to getting (defensive) stops,” Boyle told me. “That's what we want to be the most important thing to our players.”

Also, and this is a big also, any time in a scrimmage that a player fails to box out during a rebound, that player's entire team has to run wind sprints.

“The no box out is immediate punishment,” Boyle said. “It stings a little bit. If you're in the middle of a scrimmage and you've just gone up and down the court three or four times, then one of your players misses a box out – it creates peer pressure to make sure that doesn't happen again.

“The two things we're stressing every day is getting stops and rebounding the basketball.”

Anytime a new staff takes over and installs a new system and new mentality there is so much to go over, Boyle said.

“You add a little bit more each day,” Boyle said. “But you want to get good at something. Right now we're focused on our half-court defense, our transition offense and our half-court offense.”

A few other early observations:

**** Junior point guard Nate Tomlinson isn't allowing redshirt freshman Shannon Sharpe to take his job without a fight. Tomlinson has a big advantage in experience.**

****Sophomore center Shane Harris-Tunks has added about 25 pounds and is up to 250. I should be much more difficult for opponents to push him around.**

****Freshman center Ben Mills is a legitimate 7 footer and he can get up and down the floor. Even after putting on some weight, he's still just 215 pounds. But his potential, you could say, has a very high ceiling.**

****The other freshman, 6-7 forward Andre Roberson, isn't afraid to battle on the boards although, at 195 pounds, he will be at a size disadvantage against Big 12 frontcourts.**

The season opener is Nov. 12 against Idaho State.

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[9]

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