

london olympics

Former CU star Ritzenhein working way back toward Olympics

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It has been almost five weeks since Dathan Ritzenhein missed making the Olympic team in the marathon by eight seconds, a heartbreaking setback that caused him to wonder if he should give up trying to be a marathoner.

He's backing away from those thoughts now, but clearly focused on making the team for this summer's London Olympics in the 10,000 meters. The former University of Colorado star finished sixth in the 10,000 at the 2009 world championships before turning his attention fulltime to the marathon.

"Some of the things I said afterward were emotional, for sure," Ritzenhein said in a phone interview. "I ran one of my best marathons, off of very little training. So by no means am I done with the marathon. But I am more certain than I was that I'm going to concentrate on shorter distance races. The marathon will be something I'll do, but it's not going to be the sole focus of my entire training."

Ritzenhein is a former American record holder in the 5,000 meters and a three-time U.S. cross country champion, so he has speed. He made his first Olympic team via the 10,000 in 2004. He likes his chances of making the team this year in the 10,000, but concedes it won't be easy.

"The state of American distance running has advanced so much that you just can't walk onto the team anymore like you used to," Ritzenhein said. "Back in 2004 when I made my first team in the 10K, I made it by default, because I was one of the only people with the (qualifying) standard. Now there's just a whole slew of people who have it. I still think I'm one of the best runners in the world. I should have a great chance of making it."

It helps that one of his training partners in Portland, Ore., is Galen Rupp, the current American record holder in the 10,000. Together they probably will be favored to claim two of the three spots in the 10,000 on the Olympic team at the track and field trials in June.

"That's a huge benefit for me," Ritzenhein

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said of training with Rupp. "Having a good training partner just breeds success. Apart from me and Galen, there's just a great group of guys we have. The energy you feed off from each other is huge."

The New York Road Runners announced today that Ritzenhein will run the New York City Half Marathon March 18, along with Meb Keflezighi, Kara Goucher, and Desi Davila. All of them made the Olympic team in the marathon Jan. 14 in Houston.

"For me the opportunity in New York, it's a steppingstone down in (distance)," Ritzenhein said. "It has been two and a half years since I've been on the track, racing. To go from all marathons straight to being ready to do stuff in spikes in the 5K, I need to work my way down there. It's a good bridge for me to get to the speed I'm going to need be competing on the track."

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Deseret News

Utah Jazz: Alec Burks isn't complaining about playing time, or lack thereof

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OKLAHOMA CITY — Rookie Alec Burks wasn't about to make a fuss about his time on the court — or on the bench — during his recent four-game sitting streak.

"I'm good," he said when asked about lack of playing time during that week. "Just whenever I get in, I'm going to be aggressive."

Interesting choice of words — and, quite frankly, a perfect attitude for the youngster to have.

Because the 20-year-old was aggressive when he finally got in again, Jazz coach Tyrone Corbin is more convinced than ever that he needs to find time for Burks.

"I have to rethink it," Corbin said, regarding the shooting guard's diminished role.

Despite his verbal wishes otherwise, for this reason or that one, Corbin stopped putting Burks in as much. Interestingly, Burks' decreased action came after he put together three consecutive double-digit scoring games in mid-January.

After a 22-minute outing at Dallas on Jan. 19, Burks saw 13 minutes on the floor against Minnesota but then fell into the forgotten zone at the end of the bench next to Jeremy Evans and Jamaal Tinsley.

That changed, however, during Utah's three-game road trip in as many nights. He saw five minutes against Memphis, and then really caught his coach's attention with his 14-minute effort at New Orleans, when he was among the group that helped the Jazz nearly dig their way out of a 20-point hole.

At OKC, Burks saw 19 minutes, an upward tick that has to thrill the #FreeAlecBurks Twitter campaign fans.

"I want to give each of the guys minutes to develop and have a chance to get some rhythm, and he's a guy that deserves more minutes than I've given him in the past," Corbin admitted. "So we got to get it worked out."

The majority of Burks' minutes have come at shooting guard — he's played a few as point guard — so it's been a little tricky for Corbin to find chunks of time for him because of starter Raja Bell's improved play. C.J. Miles and Hayward have also gotten some two-spot time ahead of Burks.

Corbin likes that Burks has stayed focused, positive and has worked to refine his skills on both ends of the court. With practice time limited, the coach said he's going to have to allow Burks to work kinks out in games.

"He can score. He's getting better, learning how to defend and be on guy's body," Corbin said. "He's going to continue to get better at that."

Another area of Burks' game that will improve, he added, is his ability to finish.

Corbin loves his rookie's aggression when he gets the ball — something Hayward, Miles and others would be wise to emulate.

Age-wise, Burks should be in his junior year at Colorado. But he sure doesn't act hesitant to aggressively go to the hoop with seasoned veterans and NBA players in his way.

Burks fears nobody in his path.

"It's basketball," he said. "I ain't scared of nothing, so that's what I'm going to play like."

Just what the coach he continues to win over wants to hear — and see.

"He has a knack for it. He's a long, athletic kid that's a little deceptive in his moves," Corbin said. "He has a knack for getting to the basket and getting body contact."

Burks showed that at New Orleans and again in Oklahoma City where he got to the line a combined 16 times (making 11 free throws). Corbin believes those charity-strike visits will turn into and-one situations as the 6-6, 202-pounder matures and gets used to getting bodied up by bigger guys.

Burks' fearlessness is one of his greatest assets.

"That's going to be a good thing for us going forward and we're going to need it from him, and that's why I think he deserves more time on the floor," Corbin said. "With the rotations we have had in the past, it's been a little short for him, but I need to find a way to get him more time on the floor."

Burks won't complain about being a team cheerleader, but he'd obviously prefer to get into the game — and attack.

"That's how I play. I was brought up aggressive. I play aggressive," the Missouri native said. "That's how I got to this position I'm in today, so I'm going to keep playing my game."

Interestingly, Burks worked on his outside game in the offseason. He came into camp trying to prove to doubters that he could be a reliable shooter, not just a slasher-type athlete.

But he isn't relying on jumpers most of the time nowadays.

"I don't want to settle for jump shots. I like to get closer shots. I like to get to the rim," Burks said. "I ain't going to shoot that jumper until you make me ... then I'm going to shoot it."

Percentage-wise, Burks (.333) trails only red-hot Raja Bell (.418) from 3-point land.

"I can shoot it if I have to," he added with a smile, "but if I don't got to, then no reason to."

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