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Dufault eyes Czech Republic basketball postseason

Though its Austin Dufault's first season playing professional basketball in the Czech Republic, he quickly learned the game can also be a business.

By: [Royal McGregor](#), The Dickinson Press

Though its Austin Dufault's first season playing professional basketball in the Czech Republic, he quickly learned the game can also be a business.

The Colorado University and Killdeer High School graduate made the transition from BK Prostějov to NH Ostrava after a mid-January transfer.

However, Dufault's sights are now set on entering his first postseason tournament in a best-of-five game series against BC Kolin beginning Saturday.

"It has definitely been a learning experience," Dufault said in a phone interview on Monday. "Basketball in Europe is a lot different than in the United States."

Dufault, who played in front of 20,000 fans at times while at Colorado, is now playing in front of a couple thousand spectators. Nonetheless, he said the arena fills up and the fans are loud.

"A lot of the teams in the Czech league are in smaller towns and it almost has a high school or small college feel to it," he said. "The arenas are smaller. You don't play in 10,000- to 12,000-seat arenas, but they fill them up with fans and the fans are loud. They beat on drums, so it's whole different experience than playing in the Big 12 and the Pac-12. It's just a fun experience to have."

In 12 games with NH Ostrava, Dufault is averaging 12.7 points, 5.9 rebounds, 1.7 assists and 1.2 steals per game. During the first 19 games of his season with BK Prostějov, he supplied 15.7 points, 5.4 rebounds, 1.6 assists and 1.4 steals per game. He even played in the National Basketball League's All-Star Game.

Dufault knows his role on the team is to score and rebound. He has done both.

He's shooting 48 percent from field including 35 percent from 3-point range. He's also taking frequent trips to the free-throw line, going 93 of 129 (72 percent).

"It's definitely a big responsibility, but that's one of the things when (Czech Republic teams) sign American players, is bringing them over to be scorers and playmakers for the team," Dufault said. "You have to come over here with the mindset that you are going to be one of the guys looked at to step up every game and be the main focus both offensively and defensively."

"Your job kind of depends on how well you can play. There's a lot of Americans that would be happy to have the opportunity to play in Europe and are looking to take your job. Every night you have to go out, play as hard as you can and help your team out anyway you can."

Since joining NH Ostrava on Jan. 12, he's played against his former team BK Prostějov twice. Both times, Dufault scores 23 points — which is tied for his season-high — on his former team. He said it was strange playing against his former team for the first time. But once the first jump ball was called, it was all about taking care of business.

"It was kind of difficult, because I made some pretty good friends on the team I originally started out with," Dufault said. "I have a lot of respect for the coach there and all the players. They were a great group of guys to play with. It was just a better opportunity for me to switch teams and play with the team I'm with now. It was a little weird and it taught me a lot about the business side of playing professional basketball."

Dufault has played in the NCAA, NIT, Pac-12, Big 12 Tournaments with the Buffaloes during his four-year collegiate career, but this will be the first time he'll play a best-of-five series during the postseason. One thing all those college tournaments had in common is they're single-elimination.

"This going to be a whole different experience, because we have to play a team and beat them three times," Dufault said. "It will be a fun experience. It's professional playoff basketball, so it will be exciting. I'm looking forward to it."

During Dufault's four-year career at Colorado, he set school records, including most games played in a career at 136 and most career conference games 66.

Though Dufault has now graduated with a degree in psychology and is halfway around the world, he has his girlfriend, Lauren Sanford, in Ostrava as someone he can look to after practices or games. He said it's nice to have Sanford there to talk to and travel with throughout the Czech Republic. The two have a blog — austinandlauren.tumblr.com — which they update regularly with their experiences in the east European nation.



"It's a lot different from playing basketball in college, because you have your friends and teammates," Dufault said. "Over here you have a lot more free time to yourself. Luckily, I have my girlfriend living with me over here, so that's really nice to have an outlet I can come home to every day."

Dufault's ultimate goal — to play in the National Basketball Association — hasn't changed. While the next step on his basketball journey has yet to be determined, his main focus right now is playing well in the postseason.

"I don't think I've played the best basketball I'm capable of playing yet," Dufault said. "I just want to continue to improve, day in and day out, year after year. I just want to continue to become as good as a player as I can. Whether that's playing at a high level in Europe or making it back to the NBA, that's definitely a goal of mine. I want to compete at the highest level that I can."

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