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**Three CU MBB student-athletes at Whittier International School in Boulder.**  
Photo Courtesy: Asher Vandevort



## Chen, Dinwiddie, Mills Surprise 5th Grade Grads

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**BOULDER** - On Friday afternoon at Whittier International School in Boulder, a student-staff basketball game became a fifth grade class' dream come true.

Each spring at Whittier, the fifth graders prepare months in advance for an end-of-year basketball game against their teachers, arranging times after school to practice and set up game plans. The teachers, however, just show up on game day and "wing it" — and usually get blown out of the water.

School principal Becky Escamilla said the teachers needed some help this year to stay competitive — so when Colorado men's basketball players Sabatino Chen, Spencer Dinwiddie and Ben Mills said they'd be willing to join in on the event, the staff had no qualms.

The student-athletes' visit was a "top-secret" event, a surprise to both the fifth-graders and the students from other grades who had come to the gym to spectate. The students were understandably shocked and star-struck when the CU Fight Song started playing on the loudspeaker at the halfway point of the game, and three of their local idols came running through the gym door and onto the court.

"Some of our kids started crying, they were so excited," Escamilla said. "At first I think they were so surprised and dazzled by real CU basketball players, and how tall they were compared to a fifth-grader."

Dinwiddie said the energy level, in that small gym with hundreds of screaming kids, rivaled that of the Coors Events Center during a home CU basketball game.

The players quickly joined the teachers' squad, increasing the competitiveness on the court and the already-raucous noise level inside the gym. After a few minutes, though, the players switched forces, throwing on adult-sized Whittier Wildcats T-shirts to match the students.

"[The student-athletes] were hilarious and warm, and great sports," Escamilla said. "They were so supportive of the kids, they kept throwing the balls to them and dazzled us with their incredible moves."

In the last play of the game, Chen dunked on the 9-foot baskets in the elementary gym on an assist from Dinwiddie — and the crowd went wild.

"My favorite moment might have been Sabatino's last-second alley-oop dunk," Mills said. "That was pretty cool."

Following the students' hard-earned victory and a singing of the Whittier Wildcats Fight Song, the rest of the school filed out of the gym, leaving just 70 fifth-graders and the student-athletes.

The athletes had coordinated with the CU Athletics Leadership Development Program to prepare speeches about what the children should consider as they begin a new phase of their lives in middle school.

Dinwiddie started with a discussion about leadership, especially the need to know oneself and be comfortable in one's own skin before stepping in as a leader of others.

"I talked about the less glamorous aspects of leadership that people don't like to talk about," Dinwiddie said. "You have to be the example that you want to require from people."

Next, Mills spoke about the value of mentorship, reminding students to ask for guidance from adults in their lives as they enter a new chapter and a new school.

"I gave a speech about the importance of finding a mentor in your life, how it's important to have one or multiple people in your life that can help guide you down the right path and be there for you in hard times," Mills said. "Because that's key to being on the right track."

Finally, Chen, the 2012-13 squad's lone senior, talked about commitment and the importance of becoming involved in activities outside of school.

"I basically just told them that middle school is a good time to try out activities like sports, track or Spanish," Chen said. "I told them to try as much as they can to find out what they like doing, and just keep going for that."

Escamilla said Chen's speech was especially empowering for the students because of the senior's identity both as an athlete and an academic scholar, a mathematics major.

"[Chen] is not only an athlete and a really talented guy, but he's also an academic scholar, so they were impressed with that," Escamilla said. "[The student-athletes] hit the big points about making good choices, being good sports and working hard, and most of them talked about, 'Sure, I grew really tall, but this also took a lot of work.'"

Mills said the young students seemed receptive to the messages within each of the speeches.

"When we were all talking up there, I think they were interested in what we had to say and listening," Mills said, "And I think they took it to heart and kind of opened up."

The afternoon concluded with a question-and-answer session in which the fifth-graders asked the student-athletes everything from what it's like to be a mathematics major to the size of Ben Mills' shoes.

Escamilla said she would be happy to have the student-athletes visit again, although the “top-secret” grand entrance was a once-in-a-lifetime moment.

“I know we can’t pull off a surprise again,” Escamilla said. “But [the student-athletes] represented the university in an incredible way. They were polished and of course super talented, and they were humble, they didn’t act like they were superstars.”

As for the young Whittier graduates, the experience of hitting the court with a real CU Buff will never lose its magic.

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SHOW MENU



## Colorado's Roberson declares for NBA draft

By Tim Griffin, Staff Writer

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After waffling for the past several weeks, Colorado forward Andre Roberson surprisingly declared for the NBA draft.

Roberson, a 6-foot-7 former Wagner High standout who ranked second nationally in rebounding and was the Pac-12's Defensive Player of the Year this past season, announced Sunday he would skip his senior campaign.

Most draft analysts have Roberson pegged as a second-round pick. His draft status skidded as his offensive skills stagnated, even as he developed into one of the nation's top rebounders and defenders.

Some NBA scouts are leery about him because of his shooting and ball handling. Roberson averaged 10.9 points per game for the 21-12 Buffaloes, shooting 48.6 percent from the field and 55.1 percent from the foul line. He also led the team with 74 turnovers.

But Roberson has an innate knack for limiting offenses, both in blocking shots and man-to-man defense. He was responsible for defending Colorado's top opposing threat, whether they were a forward, guard or center. He led the Buffs in blocks, rebounds and steals in all three of his seasons.

Scouts have compared him to Los Angeles Clippers forward Matt Barnes because of his workman-like defensive skills but limitations on offense.

Another factor that could have played a part in Roberson's decision is the relative strength — or rather weakness — of this summer's draft. The collection of talent isn't expected to come close to the prospects available for 2014, considered to potentially be one of the best draft classes in recent history.

Roberson had a close relationship with his coach Tad Boyle, who made him his first recruit at Colorado.

“We support Andre and want what's best for him and his family,” Boyle said in a statement released by the school. “We wish him the best.”

Together, they led the Buffaloes to back-to-back NCAA tournament appearances for the first time since 1962-63 and three consecutive 20-win seasons for the first time in school history.

And with three other starters returning, Colorado was poised to perhaps contend for its first Pac-12 regular-season title.

His sister Arielle, a forward, will begin her sophomore season with the Buffs with the promise of

possibly becoming one of the best players in the Pac-12.

But it looks like big brother will have to be content in following her career from whichever NBA city he happens to be in — if he's fortunate enough to make a team.

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