



COLORADO BUFFALOES

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Chris Jenkins (left) and Wesley Gordon are anxious to suit up and play.

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Brooks: Gordon, Jenkins Hungry To Shed Redshirts

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BOULDER – For most of their young lives, Wesley Gordon and Chris Jenkins have spent their summers preparing for winter. Basketball on sweltering courts has been as much a part of their June, July and August regimens as ice cream and swimming pools.

But Summer 2013 finds both functioning at a fever pitch. Summer hoops provide a reasonable pastime, but each freely admits that their anticipation for winter hoops has never been higher. There's a rare urgency neither has experienced.

"I'm anxious to play . . . really anxious," Jenkins said the other day before an abbreviated workout at Colorado's practice facility.

Gordon's explanation of his eagerness went up a notch . . . or three.

"I'm hungry," he said. "I feel like a beast that hasn't eaten yet . . . like a giant that's been locked away in a cage and is finally getting some air."

(Can't wait to hit the "record" button in that interview following his first college start.)

You can guess the source of Gordon's and Jenkins' summer hoops hunger: they redshirted last season as CU

freshmen. Both agreed with coach Tad Boyle's decision to have them sit out, still working out with the team and continue conditioning work on road trips while the other members of their class were preparing to play.

But that didn't make their first seasons any easier. The nightly sting of not playing was present from early November through mid-March.

Said Jenkins: "It's always tough . . . you're giving up something you love."

Added Gordon: "Nobody who's a basketball player likes to sit out a year and not play. You feel like you're not doing anything."

But that definitely wasn't the case. What Gordon and Jenkins accomplished during their redshirt seasons is apparent now. The 6-8 Gordon has put on nearly 15 pounds (he reported at 225) and says with a chuckle, "I'm a well-oiled machine now." The 6-7 Jenkins, who signed in last summer at a slinky 180, is boasting about a 22-pound increase. He's by no means a hulk now, but the new poundage is noticeable, as is an increase in confidence that might match his weight gain.

When I asked Jenkins what he thought he could contribute, he answered, "Whatever they want . . . if it's playing defense and getting stops, shooting the three – anything. I'm a player. This is going to be good."

But for now, until all the freshmen settle into whatever their roles might be, the coaching staff is content to look at Gordon and Jenkins and marvel at the physical transformation between this June and last.

"You can definitely see it in their bodies; they've made a big jump," said CU assistant/recruiting coordinator Mike Rohn. "They've grown up and they needed to; they're going to be a big part of our team. They're not freshmen anymore; they've been through a lot of practices."

Rohn said a year on campus helped mature both players – particularly Gordon: "Wes was really young. He should have just been a senior in high school last season age-wise. He's real young. But in both of them, you can definitely see it in the way they carry themselves and the way they approach class and practice – just in everything really."

What's also very apparent is how a season of observation and practicing in Boyle's system enhanced Gordon's and Jenkins' respective hoops IQs.

"They know what to expect," said associate head coach Jean Prioleau. "The new guys don't know that yet. They've seen the ups and the downs of the past year; they know what it's about, how hard they need to work and that they'll be held accountable. That's very important for them. And hopefully they'll be able to lead the new guys because they're all in the same class."

That's true, if not technically so. The addition of Gordon and Jenkins to the incoming freshman class gives CU six newcomers. That's nearly half the roster, and it will place the Buffs among the youngest teams in the Pac-12 Conference. Boyle's fourth CU team will have only two seniors – Ben Mills and transfer Kevin Nelson, who sat out last season with a broken ankle.

Despite the dearth of upperclassmen, Prioleau and Rohn don't expect the Buffs to suffer. Even though they'll continue to feel their way through the program for the next several months, Boyle's four true freshmen are physically impressive and skilled.

Add their size to a CU roster that already features 6-10 Josh Scott, 6-6 Xavier Johnson, 6-6 Spencer Dinwiddie, the 6-7 Jenkins, 6-8 Gordon and 7-footer Mills, and the Buffs "can be really big at times," said Rohn. "Wes will be a 'five' a lot, a 'four' when we go really big . . . he'll play a lot more at the 'five' but he can play both and guard both."

What is TBD as it all unfolds, added Prioleau, is the most effective lineup: "As the season goes, we will make the adjustments and see what does and doesn't work. But we can do a lot of things – we can have a really big team or a small team. It's good to have that choice."

One of the Buffs' standing goals through the summer and into the season will be accounting for the near dozen

(11.2) rebounds averaged last season by Andre Roberson, who elected to skip his senior year and is awaiting the NBA Draft later this month.

Gordon, of course, factors prominently into that plan, and Rohn offered this anecdote that should ease any growing board anxiety among Buffs fans: "We 'stat' every practice the whole year and there was only one guy who out-rebounded Wes in practice last season – and he's not here anymore. That's just practice stats, but still . . .

"Obviously, 'Dre was ahead of him, but he was ahead of everybody in the country, too. Wes was right there too this spring when we 'stat-ed' our short spring work with the guys. In everything that was 'live,' Wes was our best rebounder. He'd better continue to do that.

"It's going to be hard to lead the nation like 'Dre did, but I think we'll be OK rebounding. It would be nice to have those 10 or 11 back (with Roberson), but everybody is going to have to jump in. We're expecting Spencer to be better (rebounder) than he has been; we'd like four or five defensive rebounds out of him a game."

Gordon says meeting the board challenge minus Roberson "will take a team effort because 'Dre was such a special rebounder. But I think if me and 'X' (Johnson) really want to get rebounds we can be equally effective as 'Dre."

Rohn called Gordon "a great passer . . . in his mind he's the best passer on the team – and he might not be far off. He's going to add so much to the offense just in terms of moving the ball and getting other guys shots. He can play within the context of the offense."

In sitting out 2012-13, Gordon believes his biggest overall improvements came in "guarding the ball and really understanding how to create shots for myself and get the ball to teammates . . . Yeah, I pride myself on my passing. I like to get people the ball and let them score."

During the redshirt year, Gordon said Jenkins improved "basically every inch of his game . . . he could become one of our top scorers because he's so long and can get to the basket and finish over people. He really understands the game and he's a better defensive player as well."

Said Jenkins: "I got to be more focused on the program, watching Spencer and 'Ski' (guard Askia Booker) and everybody else. I got more experienced even if I didn't play a game."

The season "off" spent together cast Gordon and Jenkins in unexpected roles. They became workout partners on road trips, bench mates on game night.

"Our relationship got a lot closer," Gordon said. "Nobody really understood us except us."

"Yeah, we developed a really nice chemistry with each other, off and on the court," Jenkins said. "In our workouts, it was just us and off the court we hung out with each other."

That first-year bond is strong enough that they likely will hang with each other this season, too. But there will be one huge difference: Come tip time, they are counting on playing – not sitting.

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