

Howell blog: Mills could play bigger role for CU Buffs in 2013-14

By Brian Howell, Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

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Through three seasons with the Colorado men's basketball team, Ben Mills has been a fan favorite. But, the 7-footer hasn't played a whole lot.

CU would love to see that change this upcoming season, and assistant coach Mike Rohn is working on it. Backup center Shane Harris-Tunks has graduated, leaving a great opportunity for Mills to earn the job of relieving starter Josh Scott at center.

"We always go into the year hoping we can get as much out of Ben as possible," said Rohn, who works with CU's front court players. "I think this is a year that hopefully we can make that happen and he can make it happen, because he's different than anybody we have."

Mills is the only 7-footer on the roster; Scott (6-10) is the only other player taller than 6-8. Mills is also the only scholarship senior on the roster.

So far, Mills' career has been defined by the adoration the fans have for him. The C-Unit will chant his name at home games. And, when CU basketball did its version of the Harlem Shake last season, it called the dance the "Mills Shake".

On the court, he has played in 33 games for a total of just 136 minutes. He has 40 points and 43 rebounds in his career.

Last year as a junior, he played in just seven games, for a total of 23 minutes. Harris-Tunks, meanwhile, played 279 minutes and saw action in 32 of CU's 33 games.

"That was the one thing that Shane separated himself from Ben a little bit, from the defensive point of view," Rohn said. "If (Mills) can improve on just a few little things on defense, he's going to be able to help us next year."

The minutes Harris-Tunks got last year could go to Mills if he can make some strides this summer.

"We just need him to be more of a presence on defense, stopping penetration at the rim, taking charges," Rohn said. "Being big and being a really smart defender."

CU has seen flashes of that, including a solid 5 minutes that Mills played against Arizona during the Pac-12 Tournament. He had two rebounds, drew a foul and made a free throw during those five minutes.

Rohn said the Buffs need to see more of that in practice, however.

"Ben is not bad as an offensive player, some of the things he can do," Rohn said. "He would always get in at the end of the games, and I'd always tell Ben, 'Ben, you get into games and you score and rebound. You've got to be doing that in practice.' He's got to become a better practice player in terms of his productivity."

Fans have been hoping to see more of Mills for three years now. Could this finally be the year it happens?

"He should really be a guy we can lean on," Rohn said. "The one thing he is, he is big. He needs to play more like that. I think he'll do that.

"This is a big summer for me and Ben. I just want him to be better, so we're trying a few different little things this summer."

Colorado basketball to lose assistant coach Tom Abatemarco

By Tom Kensler The Denver Post The Denver Post

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Tom Abatemarco, a member of Colorado's men's basketball coaching staff for each of the three years that Tad Boyle has been head coach, accepted an offer Thursday to be an assistant coach at Loyola Marymount, Lions coach Max Good confirmed.

"Tom will bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to our program," Good said Thursday afternoon.

"He is known as a terrific recruiter," Good added, "but also has a vast knowledge of the game of basketball. And he has a lot of energy."

Abatemarco, who has been a head coach at Sacramento State, Lamar and Drake, was in his second stint at CU, having been an assistant coach for the Buffs under Joe Harrington from 1991-94.

Abatemarco held the title of assistant coach during Boyle's first two seasons at CU but was shifted to the position of director of player development prior to the 2012-13 season, to make room for the promotion of Rodney Billups to assistant coach.

With that role in operations, Abatemarco was prohibited by NCAA rules from recruiting on the road, and it is no secret that he missed being a hands-on recruiter. As an assistant coach at Loyola Marymount, Abatemarco will be able to leave the office and recruit, which he has said is his passion.

Good said they have known each other since Abatemarco was an assistant coach under the Jim Valvano at North Carolina State in the 1980s.

Abatemarco could not be reached for comment.

Tom Kensler: 303-954-1280, tkensler@denverpost.com or twitter.com/tomkensler