

Rebounding specialist could go in second round of Thursday's NBA draft

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In predicting Andre Roberson's pro potential, the main criticism pundits and fans have of the former Colorado star is that he's not polished enough on the offensive end to make it in the NBA.

Two of ESPN's top analysts, however, see Roberson as having the potential to play for a long time in the NBA.

On Thursday night, the NBA will hold its annual draft. Roberson, who skipped his senior season at Colorado to enter the draft, is hoping to hear his name called at some point during the two-round, 60-selection event.

Various mock drafts around the web have Roberson, a 6-foot-7 forward, going anywhere from early in the second round to not being draft at all. ESPN's Chad Ford and Jay Bilas are confident that Roberson will be selected.

"I can almost guarantee you that guy is going to get drafted because all the statistical analysis says he should be a really good NBA player," said Ford, an NBA Insider for ESPN.

Ford and Bilas, a college basketball analyst for ESPN, both pointed to Roberson's exceptional rebounding ability.

"He can really rebound," Bilas said. "Rebounding has always translated really well. Some data points don't transfer as easily. Rebounding does. Guys that rebound at a high rate in college usually rebound at a high rate as a pro. I think he can do that."

Ford agrees with Bilas that rebounding is a skill that seems to translate better than any other from college to the NBA. That gives Roberson a good shot to make it.

"He is an amazing rebounder," Ford said. "He's 6-foot-7 and he rebounds better than most 7-footers."

According to Ford, the advanced analytics used by NBA teams -- it's basically NBA's answer to Moneyball -- suggest that Roberson could be a steal in the second round.

"Roberson is one of the most interesting players to me because while his stats don't necessarily always scream off the page, the advanced analytics guys -- and many of these (NBA) front offices are going that direction -- they absolutely love him as a player," Ford said. "Our own Kevin Pelton, who runs the statistical model, had him ranked the No. 3 player in the draft."

"What you're going to see is, as soon as we hit the second round, any of those teams that really heavily rely on those models, they're going to snatch him up."

Offensively, Roberson averaged just 10.9 points per game last season in helping the Buffs go

21-12 and reach the NCAA Tournament. But, his 11.2 rebounds per game ranked second in the country, and he was named the Pac-12 Defensive Player of the Year.

At 6-7 and about 205 pounds, Roberson has the body and the game that reminds Ford of a very unique player from the past.

"He should be watching tape of Dennis Rodman right now because he's got skills like that," Ford said. "It's not just that (Roberson) is athletic; he has a great sense of timing for rebounding."

Rodman, who was about 6-8, 210, played from 1986-2000. While he averaged just 7.3 points per game during his career, he pulled down 13.1 rebounds per contest -- the best average of any player of the past 30 years. He led the NBA in rebounding seven years in a row, won five NBA titles and is now a member of the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame.

Bilas said he believes Roberson left college too early, but said "he's a good prospect."

"If you can rebound at that level, he's going to have a long career," Bilas said. "There's a place in the NBA for specialists and if your specialty is going after the ball, you don't have to be able to score. As long as you're not a liability out there defensively or on the offensive end, then that one skill makes you a really valuable commodity."

Of course, Roberson would hope to develop his game offensively, but Ford said Roberson ought to take advantage of the unique skills he does possess.

"I know he tried to show this year that he is a small forward and he can do all that," Ford said. "He can't do all that. He can't do that at the NBA level; he couldn't really do that at the college level. But, he can be a niche player in the league."

"In the NBA, do what you know. There are so few players in this league that can do everything. Everybody else gets to the league by doing what you know."

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Klee: If Buffs are right, a future NBA draft could include Sierra's Wesley Gordon

By **Paul Klee** (/author/paul-klee) Published: June 26, 2013 | 8:45 pm • 0

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So, whatever happened to that Wesley Gordon kid from Sierra High School?

"Wesley? He's a great talent. He's got the most NBA talent on the team," Colorado Buffs teammate Spencer Dinwiddie told me in a statement sure to raise some eyebrows.

"I've made that very clear. I believe in Wesley wholeheartedly. I can't wait to see what he can do for us next year. The sky's the limit for Wesley."

The NBA draft is Thursday night. The basketball eyes of Boulder are on Andre Roberson, the forward who left school to enter the draft after his junior season.

Roberson was the Pac-12 Defensive Player of the Year and a menacing piece of a Buffs roster that reached the NCAA Tournament for the second straight season.

Now Roberson is gone, a year too soon. So why was Buffs coach Tad Boyle all smiles when I tracked him down at the U.S. Olympic Training Center?

"We're in good shape," Boyle said.

Here's why: the Buffs have recruited well enough to lose a player like Roberson, ahead of schedule, and not skip a beat. That's the mark of a basketball program with staying power.

If the Buffs become the program they want to be - "A sustainable Top-25 program every year," Boyle said - early departures are part of the deal.

I expect Dinwiddie will develop enough to leave after next season, his junior year.

Dinwiddie is a 6-foot-6 guard. During the World University Games tryouts this week, I watched him play and defend three positions. His versatility intrigues NBA personnel, and Boyle knows it.

"For us, we're recruiting as if we're going to lose Spencer next year," Boyle said. "That's a distinct possibility, as well. You have to prepare for all those types of situations."

Dinwiddie also gives hope to all the tiny ballers who dream of making it to the big time. Entering his freshman year of high school, Dinwiddie was 5-7, 117 pounds.

"It's hard work. But honestly, no one can say, 'Hey, I'm going to grow a foot taller.' It doesn't happen that way," Dinwiddie said. "I have to thank God for the physical aspect of my game."

And if the Buffs' evaluations of Gordon are accurate, that's another potential NBA talent to watch out for.

Gordon is listed at 6-8, 225 pounds. Since he was redshirted as a freshman, there was the assumption Gordon might be in over his head by choosing to play in the Pac-12.

That's a common misconception with redshirts.

Coaches don't redshirt kids because the kid isn't good enough to be a part of their program. They redshirt kids because they will be. A redshirt extends their scholarship life to five years; why would they keep him around that long if he doesn't factor into their future plans?

"Wesley Gordon's going to be good next year for us. And we're counting on him," Boyle said.

Here's the question with Gordon: Is he motivated to be better than average?

"One of the reasons for redshirting him was because we knew there was a chance Andre would move on (to the NBA draft)," Boyle said. "We knew that was a distinct possibility. That opens up a lot of opportunity for Wesley as a redshirt freshman."

Gordon has a real shot at becoming a starter for the Buffs as a redshirt freshman.

That's because Roberson, who would have been the starter at forward, is gone.

I still take a romantic approach to the NBA draft. When you've seen the roots and neighborhoods that produce many of the players who will take the stage, it strikes you as a small miracle they made it this far.

Roberson left CU because his family believes he will earn a first-round selection and the guaranteed money that comes with it. The Buffs gave their best pitch to lure him back, even meeting with his family during the NCAA Tournament in Austin, Texas, near his hometown.

"I thought we had a productive meeting," former athletic director Mike Bohn told me in May. "In the end, they decided they wanted to go."

I haven't spoken to an NBA scout or college coach who believes Roberson will be one of the 32 picks in the first round. Here's hoping they are wrong.

The easy, selfish route is to bash Roberson for making a decision that could hurt his future more than CU's. But I have a hard time criticizing a 21-year-old for this:

"He's chasing his dream," as Dinwiddie put it. "You can't knock a man for chasing his dream."

The dreams of Roberson's former teammates might come true sooner than expected.

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