

Men's basketball: CU Buffs' Harris-Tunks set for final home game

By Ryan Thorburn Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

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Before Shane Harris-Tunks heads back Down Under, the Buffs need the program's Australian import to give them some quality March minutes under the basket.

The 6-11 redshirt junior will participate in a "Senior Day" ceremony on Saturday before Colorado hosts Oregon State in the regular-season finale at the Coors Events Center (2:30 p.m., Pac-12 Network).

Harris-Tunks, the last remaining Jeff Bzdelik recruit at CU, plans to forgo his final year of eligibility and possibly play professionally back home.

With 6-7 forward Andre Roberson, the nation's leading rebounder, out indefinitely with a viral illness, Harris-Tunks will be needed to help Josh Scott and Xavier Johnson deal with the Beavers' talented front court of 6-10 Eric Moreland, 6-8 Devon Collier, and 6-7 Joe Burton.

"It's always nice when people are counting on you," said Harris-Tunks, who had four points and two rebounds in 17 minutes off the bench during CU's 76-53 victory over No. 19 Oregon on Thursday. "We'd love to have Andre out there and he'd love to be out there with us, but you can't control everything."

CU head coach Tad Boyle remains hopeful that Roberson will be able to play in the Pac-12 Tournament next week.

"He's feeling better," Boyle said after Friday's practice. "That's encouraging."

Sabatino Chen, a Boulder native and former Monarch High School standout, will also be playing his final home game for the Buffs.

The 6-4 guard started against Oregon and finished with six points, three rebounds, one steal and one assist in 32 minutes.

"I always knew that Sabatino was a big-time energy guy and a guy that would do whatever it took to help his team win," said Boyle, who recruited Chen when he was the head coach at Northern Colorado. "He has turned out to be a better shooter than I imagined. He has really worked on that. Sabatino has turned himself into a legitimate three-point shooter, he makes things happen offensively, and he's a rock-solid defender."

Harris-Tunks played as a true freshman under Bzdelik and tore an anterior cruciate ligament during Boyle's first practice at CU.

Boyle frequently talked about what the 2010-11 team, which won 24 games and made it to the NIT semifinals with Cory Higgins and Alec Burks leading the way, might have been like with a healthy Harris-Tunks, who is a good team defender and screen-setter on offense.

"I look back and kind of wonder what could have been had I not been hurt my sophomore year," Harris-Tunks said. "But you look back and see all the amazing experiences I've had as well and it has been awesome for me."

Chen was redshirting when Harris-Tunks was rehabbing his knee injury. They will both graduate in May after possibly having roles on two CU NCAA Tournament teams.

Beating the Beavers (13-17, 3-14) would also tie the 2012-13 Buffs with Chauncey Billups' 1996-97 Buffs for the most regular season wins in program history at 21.

"I've been here and seen this program develop and been a part of it. It's something I'll take away for the rest of my life," Harris-Tunks said. "It's my last game in this building, hopefully we'll get into the NCAA Tournament and not the NIT. It has been the ultimate experience."

As it turns out, CU's controversial loss at Arizona in the Pac-12 opener -- when Chen's game-winning 3-pointer at the end of regulation was taken away by officials -- will come into play on the final day of the regular season.

The Buffs (20-9, 10-7) can still earn the No. 4 seed at the Pac-12 Tournament with a win and an Arizona loss to Arizona State.

Had Chen's basket been counted, CU would only need to beat Oregon State to earn a bye at the conference tournament.

The last thing Boyle wants to do is dwell on the past or Roberson's absence.

"The thing we have to understand with Andre being out is we have to cherish the opportunities you have every day because it could be taken away in a heart beat," Boyle said. "Hopefully that is a lesson our guys have learned."

Follow Ryan on Twitter: @RyanThorburn

CU men's hoops preview

SATURDAY: The Colorado Buffaloes (20-9, 10-7) finish the regular season against Oregon State (13-17, 3-14) at 2:30 p.m. the Coors Events Center.

BROADCAST: Television on the Pac-12 Network with Rich Cellini (play-by-play) and Dan Belloumini (analyst). Radio on KKZN (760 AM) with Mark Johnson (play-by-play) and Chad Brown (color). Follow on Twitter: @RyanThorburn.

CU STORY LINES: The Buffs can still earn the No. 4 seed and a bye in the opening round of the Pac-12 Tournament with a win and an Arizona loss to Arizona State. ... CU is coming off a 76-53 victory over No. 19 Oregon. Xavier Johnson scored a career-high 22 points and Spencer Dinwiddie added 17 points to make up for the absence of Andre Roberson who is out indefinitely with a viral illness. ... Sabatino Chen and Shane Harris-Tunks will be playing their final home games at the Coors Events Center. Chen, a former Monarch High School star, is the only senior on the roster. Harris-Tunks, a redshirt junior, will graduate on May and does not plan to use his final year of eligibility. ... CU's RPI jumped up to No. 24 after the sweep of the conference-leading Ducks.

OREGON STATE STORY LINES: The Beavers' losing streak is now five games after a 72-61 defeat at Utah on Thursday. Oregon State's only lead in the game was 1-0 and its largest deficit was 19 points in the

middle of the second half. ... The Beavers are now tied with Washington State for last place in the Pac-12, which means CU could have to play Oregon State again at the conference tournament next Wednesday in a No. 5 vs. No. 12 matchup. ... The Beavers (RPI 194) are 0-8 against top-50 RPI teams and 9-3 against sub-150 RPI teams.

KEY STAT: CU has three 20-win seasons under Tad Boyle after producing four 20-win seasons the previous 110 years.

COACHES: Boyle is 68-35 in his third season at CU. Craig Robinson is 77-88 in his fifth season at Oregon State.

SERIES: CU leads 8-3, including a 72-68 win on Feb. 10 at Corvallis. The Buffs are 6-0 against Oregon State in Boulder.

PROBABLE STARTERS: Colorado -- G Sabatino Chen, 6-4, Sr., 4.5 ppg, 2.3 rpg; F Xavier Johnson, 6-6, Fr., 8.8 ppg, 4.8 rpg; F Josh Scott, 6-10, Fr., 10.9 ppg, 5.4 rpg; G Spencer Dinwiddie, 6-6, So., 15.3 ppg, 3.1 apg; G Askia Booker, 6-1, So., 12.7 ppg, 2.2 apg. Oregon State -- F Devon Collier, 6-8, Jr., 12.8 ppg, 6.1 rpg; C Joe Burton, 6-7, Sr., 11.2 ppg, 6.5 rpg; G Ahmad Starks, 5-9, Jr., 10.7 ppg, 2.3 apg; G Challe Barton, 6-3, So., 2.8 ppg, 1.1 rpg; G Roberto Nelson, 6-3, Jr., 17.8 ppg, 2.4 apg.

UP NEXT: The Buffs will open the Pac-12 Tournament next Wednesday or Thursday at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas.

CU Buffs hope Andre Roberson returns for Pac-12 Tournament

By Tom Kensler The Denver Post The Denver Post

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BOULDER — Dealing with an illness, junior forward Andre Roberson participated only in some shooting drills Friday with his Colorado teammates. But coach Tad Boyle said he is optimistic the nation's leading rebounder will be able to play at some point during the Pac-12 Tournament next week in Las Vegas.

Don't look for Roberson to suit up for Saturday's regular-season finale against Oregon State (13-17, 3-14 Pac-12) at the Coors Events Center. After feeling below par last week, Roberson sat out Thursday night's blowout win over Oregon.

"Andre is feeling better," Boyle said Friday. "That's encouraging. That's the biggest sign of recovery. He's got energy back and he's feeling better and we're waiting for him to get cleared by doctors.

"I'm hopeful we'll have him back for the conference tournament. I feel good about that. I don't know, but I feel good about it."

CU officials are calling Roberson's malady a "viral illness." The Boulder Daily Camera reported, via a source, that Roberson has mono- nucleosis. It would not be surprising if the school was reluctant to report a diagnosis of mono for fear of how that might be viewed by the NCAA Tournament selection committee. The committee can, and does, devalue teams that will have a key player unavailable for the NCAA Tournament.

There is no way to predict what the selection committee might do in this situation, if anything. Colorado (20-9, 10-7) otherwise would appear to be a virtual lock for the NCAA Tournament.

The Buffs entered the weekend ranked 24th in RPI (a computer-based power ranking used by the selection committee), have a strength of schedule rated the nation's 14th toughest and are 7-6 against top-50 RPI teams — all impressive numbers.

Colorado showed Thursday night that it could win without Roberson, and in impressive fashion. CU routed No. 19 Oregon 76-53.

If Roberson can show at some point during the Pac-12 Tournament that he is close to regaining his form, Colorado's place on the NCAA Tournament bracket may not be affected. The Buffs could slip several seeds if Roberson is unable to play next week in Las Vegas and his availability remains in question.

Boyle said all-out hustle Thursday enabled his team to stun Oregon without Roberson, who averages a double-double of 10.8 points and 11.5 rebounds.

"We got the 50-50 loose balls," Boyle said. "We got rebounds from a lot of different guys."

Colorado will honor guard Sabatino Chen and center Shane Harris-Tunks during "Senior Day" activities Saturday. Harris-Tunks is a fourth-year junior. But he is on track to graduate in May, and it was announced Thursday that he has decided to forego his final year of eligibility.

Harris-Tunks, averaging 1.3 points and 1.5 rebounds from off the bench, said he may give pro ball a try in his

native Australia.

"It's been an awesome experience playing for CU," Harris-Tunks said, "and hopefully (Saturday afternoon) is another one."

Chen, a Boulder native who played high school ball at Monarch in Louisville, began his college career at the University of Denver.

In two seasons at CU, he has evolved from a 10-minute-per-game sub last year to part-time starter this season. Boyle describes the 6-foot-4 Chen as the team's "energy guy, glue guy."

"It's been fun to see us develop into a 20-win team three years in a row," Chen said. "When I'd go to CU games while I was in high school, it wasn't like that."

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