

## Men's basketball: CU Buffs counting on Xavier Johnson to help fill void

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There were plenty of times last year when a shot would go up and Xavier Johnson and several of his Colorado teammates would turn and head down the court.

Either it was going in the hoop, or Andre Roberson would snag the rebound, they thought. Roberson, after all, did finish second in the country with 11.2 rebounds per game.

"You're so used to Andre getting the board every time, so you were able to just go ahead and leak out and run the fast break," Johnson said.

That won't happen anymore, as Roberson has decided to skip his senior season and declare for the NBA Draft. Now, the Buffs are going to need Johnson and others to get those rebounds.

Josh Scott, who was second on the team with 5.7 boards per game, and Wesley Gordon, who redshirted last year, are also among the Buffs that will be counted on to fill the rebounding void.

"Now there's an extra 11-12 a game to get and I think Xavier Johnson, as much as any player on our team or coming onto our team, has an opportunity to really step his numbers up, in terms of rebounding," CU head coach Tad Boyle said.

"We're going to replace Andre's rebounds by committee, but I think Xavier Johnson is a big member of that committee."

A 6-foot-6 forward from Los Angeles, Johnson had a great freshman year this past season. He played in all 33 games, starting 18 for the Buffs (21-12), who reached the NCAA Tournament for the second year in a row. He ranked third on the team in rebounding (4.8 per game), while also finishing fifth in scoring (8.9 points per game).

"I stepped up big time towards the end of the year -- starting in (Pac-12 Conference play)," said Johnson, who posted 10.3 points and 5.7 rebounds in Pac-12 games. "That's when I was needed most, so I was able to step up and play for my teammates and just get better."

Boyle said Johnson came to the Buffs with the physical tools to compete immediately and that proved to be the case. As the year went on Johnson became much better defensively and he shot well from the perimeter, hitting 43.9 percent of his 3-pointers (25-of-57).

"He really grew and developed as the year went on," Boyle said.

Johnson said defense was the key for him having such a good freshman year.

"Everybody comes in nervous as a freshman; they're not sure what's going to happen and if they're going to play or not," said Johnson, who added that he had a great year academically, as well. "I just let my defense take care of that, because that's what coach preaches. I just defended, I was able to get more minutes and then I was able to score more."

"It was great, just knowing the coach can rely on you as a freshman already. That just shows great optimistic things for the future. Next year should be even better."

That's the goal, anyway. Johnson is looking forward to improving his game over the summer. In addition to defense and rebounding, the Buffs would like to see Johnson improve his ball-handling skills and get better at controlling his emotions on the court.

As far as Johnson is concerned, whatever will help the Buffs get better, he'll do it.

"It was a great year that we had, but being one and done in the NCAAs isn't anything anybody wants," he said. "I'm looking to get better already. I'm in the gym every day for about three hours. I've got to get better."

If he does, the Buffs will have a much smoother transition to the post-Roberson era.

"He's going to have a great career at Colorado," Boyle said. "He started off that way as a freshman and now he needs to continue as a sophomore. There's no question in my mind that he will."

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