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Moving up: Dufault climbing up the ranks of European basketball scene, next stop is Germany

Austin Dufault is enjoying some down time before basketball becomes his main priority again. Once free time is over, the Killdeer High School and University of Colorado graduate is off to a new destination overseas.

By: [Royal McGregor](#), The Dickinson Press

Austin Dufault is enjoying some down time before basketball becomes his main priority again.

Once free time is over, the Killdeer High School and University of Colorado graduate is off to a new destination overseas.

After spending a year in the Czech Republic basketball league with BK Prostějov and NH Ostrava, Dufault signed to play with Germany's Neckar Riesen Ludwigsburg of the Basketball Bundesliga League this upcoming season.

"From everything I've heard and everything I've seen, Germany is a big-time basketball country," Dufault said. "The people there love basketball. There's great support for it. I'm really excited to get started there."

Dufault is currently enjoying spending time with family and friends in the United States since the Czech Republic season ended.

"My family and friends are really excited for me," Dufault said. "They were really excited about the year I had this past year and the experiences I had — both positive and negative."

Though Dufault will take the next step in his journey of eventually playing in the top ranks in the European basketball scene, he said his first year playing in the Czech Republic was invaluable.

He learned the ins and outs of what it takes to be a professional athlete and the business side of any professional sports.

"I've just learned a lot about how professional basketball works," Dufault said. "It's just like any other job and you have to show up every day and work hard. A lot of people might think playing professional basketball is an easy lifestyle, but you have to come every day and work hard. It's a very competitive business. If you want to keep your spot and your job on the team, you have come every day and produce."

"As far as skills, I've improved overall in pretty much everything from shooting to defense and rebounding. Being a professional, you have a lot of time to work on everything with your game. You don't have to worry about classes and stuff like that."

During 40 games last season in the Czech Republic, Dufault averaged 14.7 points, 5.7 rebounds, 1.6 assists and 1.3 steals.

Dufault began his professional career with BK Prostějov, and then moved to NH Ostrava for the final 12 games of the regular season and for nine games of the Czech Republic playoffs. NH Ostrava made it to the semifinals before the team was ousted by BK Prostějov in five games.

In the nine playoff games, Dufault averaged 15.3 points per game including a season-high 26 against BC Kolin.

"Playing in the Czech Republic was a good level for me to start out at," Dufault said. "The Czech Republic is a solid league. It's not the best league in Europe, but it's not the worst. It's right in the middle of the pack."

Moving to Germany

Dufault's new team, Neckar Riesen Ludwigsburg, wasn't as successful. Ludwigsburg ended last year with a 12-22 overall record and missed the playoffs.

The current head coach of Ludwigsburg, John Patrick, had been in talks with Dufault before he signed with BK Prostějov last summer.

However, Dufault didn't sign with Patrick's team at the time. Patrick, who is in Las Vegas for NBA Summer League, didn't waste any time nabbing the 6-foot-9, 209-pound forward when he became available. In the talks with Patrick thus far, Dufault said the team is looking at him to play the No. 4 position — power forward.

Dufault believes he fits Patrick's style of play for Ludwigsburg, which is an uptempo offense — the same type of offense Dufault played during the latter part of his time at Colorado.

"I'll be playing mostly forward," Dufault said. "They like to play uptempo, play a lot of full-court defense and run up and down the floor, which is what I did when I played at Colorado. I'm excited for the new team and the new system I'll be playing in."

As far as speaking German, Dufault admitted he doesn't know much. However, he's strongly considering getting Rosetta Stone, a language-learning software program.

"One of the things I think they do with guys there is they'll have you take a German course or help you learn some German, so you can communicate with the media," he said. "Right now, my knowledge of German is pretty limited."

Sharing memories

Throughout Dufault's professional basketball journey, his girlfriend, Lauren Sandford, has been there every step of the way.

Dufault and Sandford have kept a blog, austinandlauren.tumblr.com, of their journeys during their time in the Czech Republic.

"I'm hoping that Lauren can stay with me for the whole season again," Dufault said. "It's just great having her with me. After long games, you want to come home, unwind and talk with somebody about how your day went. Just having her with me is really big and it helps out a lot with adjusting to the different

"One of the biggest things about living over there is having her with me."

Sandford, who stayed with Dufault for a majority of the time in the Czech Republic, will travel with Dufault to his new German destination.

"I'm huge on traveling," Sandford said. "I like experiencing other cultures and I enjoy meeting new people. It was a really great experience to go over (to the Czech Republic)."

Part of her time in the Czech Republic was cut short because she had some visa problems and was forced to return back to the U.S. for two months. She said it was tough leaving Dufault for the period of time.

"I think there was so many times that the frustration gets to you, because it is so much different from any kind of basketball in the U.S.," Sandford said. "I know there were times where Austin would get frustrated. I think it was nice for him to have someone to kind vent to and it was important to have that outlet."

"I know it was pretty tough for him during those few months not to have that outlet anymore, but definitely having someone in house that he can come home to every day was really important for him."

Sandford is excited to make Germany home. She has German heritage, so she has always wanted to visit Germany. Everyone in Sandford's family has traveled to Germany — except for Lauren. Her wish will soon become a reality as her and Dufault make their way to Germany on Aug. 14.

"I'm so excited for him," Sandford said. "First and foremost, it's all about basketball for him. It will also be more beneficial for me to hopefully find some work. I've heard nothing, but great things about Germany."

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his time on the field.

NFL.com described his play this way: "Prior to the injury, Smith struggled at times in coverage but showed his trademark physicality as a rare cornerback willing and able to lay the wood on opposing ball carriers and receivers."

Coach John Harbaugh said Smith's development as a pro at first was hindered by how good he was at Colorado.

"They never threw at him in college," Harbaugh said. "They didn't even test him. He has been tested a lot more here, and that's helped him."

Though Corey Graham has made a strong case for starting at the corner opposite Lardarius Webb, Smith was a first-round pick. You would think the Ravens really want him out on the field, playing to something approaching his potential.

And, according to NFL.com, Smith could hold the key to an improved Ravens secondary for 2013: "With coverage liability Cary Williams now with the Philadelphia Eagles, the Ravens' secondary actually could be better than last year's Super Bowl unit. For that to happen, Smith will have to emerge as the team's most reliable cornerback as Webb eases back in from knee surgery."

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