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Maturity will define promising season for Spencer Dinwiddie, Colorado

[Colorado Buffaloes](#)

By [Andy Glockner](#)



Colorado's Spencer Dinwiddie will need to take more of a leadership role this coming season. (John Rivera/Icon SMI)

Maturity was the buzzword for Colorado basketball last season, and not just because the Buffaloes had two freshmen, two sophomores and a junior making up their top five scorers and minutes played. Sure, there was an expected learning curve for Tad Boyle's crew with so many inexperienced parts coming together in an improved Pac-12, but the maturity question kept popping up later in the season. Well into league play, it became code for a team that couldn't consistently handle expectations or play the way it needed to play to be most effective.

With many key guys returning and another excellent freshmen class coming in, the Buffaloes are a trendy pick for a preseason national ranking and a challenger role behind presumed favorite Arizona in the league. The ceiling for their success this season, though, will depend heavily on the maturity of their starting backcourt, with juniors Spencer Dinwiddie and Askia Booker charged with finding the right balance where they both provide more of what they do best.

"There's no question that our success this coming year is going to be based on Spencer and Askia and how they lead," head coach Tad Boyle said on Tuesday. "When you look at those two guys, they're our two most experienced players in the program. They need to be on the same page," he added, "working with each other and for each other."

That didn't always happen last season as the young Buffaloes struggled at times with role identification and offensive hierarchy. There was recent first-round pick Andre Roberson, needed for his defense and rebounding, but not necessarily a dynamic offensive option. Center Josh Scott was a freshman, with all the inherent inconsistency and flaws that go with that status. Dinwiddie, most often the point guard but also the Buffaloes' most talented offensive player, regularly consigned himself to facilitator while Booker, perhaps emboldened by early-season success, struggled through many parts of a high-volume shooting season as a primary scorer.

Those last three guys return, as well as promising sophomore wing Xavier Johnson, who will step in for Roberson, and several other underclassmen who are expected to contribute well. As the primary ballhandler, the onus will fall heavily on Dinwiddie to make better use of the Buffaloes' many expected options, and to be more assertive himself even if he's not always Option 1 offensively.

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"I have to take that upon myself as a leader, be a little more vocal and controlling about where the ball goes," Dinwiddie said last week in Colorado Springs, where he made the U.S. World University Games team. "... With [Roberson] gone, ideally, we'd like to play through Josh Scott because he's a dominant post presence, have 'Ski' get back to his efficient ways, and then have me do my thing with the pick-and-roll and have everyone eating off that. That would probably be the most efficient way we could play."

Dinwiddie is a smooth operator on the floor, taking what's there far more often than forcing himself into the action. At the World University Games tryouts, he stood out while not even trying to stand out, facilitating and making the right play in an environment where there was high-level talent all over the floor. Back home in Boulder, better hierarchy is needed and that starts with Dinwiddie growing more assertive in his position as the team's most talented player as well as its leader.

"We need to set the tone now. I'll put out there for everybody," Dinwiddie said. "Do I think I'm their best player? Of course, that's no secret, but we plan on playing inside-out, which means Josh Scott first. Then we want Askia to be very efficient. We have shooters coming in — Dustin Thomas is gonna be great, Wesley Gordon is gonna be great — and then, when it comes down to it, if I need to be offensive or get aggressive making plays, I like to use the pick-and-roll."

Booker's improvement and refinement will be a huge talking point for this season. He's a potent scorer who made some big shots for the Buffaloes at times last season, but there were far too many games where he took too many shots and simply didn't make enough of them. It wasn't entirely his fault as the Buffaloes often went through stretches of games looking short of options on that end of the floor, but his shot selection and shot-making has to improve this season.

Booker shot a ghastly 28-for-117 (23.9 percent) from the field in Colorado's nine Pac-12 road games. The Buffaloes went 4-5 in those games. Add in a couple of unexpected home losses, especially a bad late-season one to Oregon State (in which Booker shot 3-for-13), which prompted the maturity question to rise again for the whole team, and the Buffaloes ended up a slightly disappointing 10-8 in the league. For all the progress the Buffaloes made last season, there was always the sense that it was coming a year too early. That 2013-14 was the season everyone was focusing on as the chance for Colorado to really make a national statement. So maybe last year needs to be viewed in that vein, as part of the ramp-up for this year, when the Buffaloes have more experience, more depth and more possibilities.

Even re-casting last season in that light, the maturity excuses end now, starting with Dinwiddie, moving to Booker, and running right through the rest of the Buffaloes' roster. This team has a chance to be very good if the pieces fall into place the right way, and it's up to the team's leaders and Boyle to find a way to make this work more consistently. Boyle's happy to hear Dinwiddie accepting the primary role, and now needs to get everything else in place behind him.

"Yeah, that's a good thing. There's no question. I think he's stating the obvious," Boyle said about hearing Dinwiddie's statement about being the team's best player. "Now it's just a matter of getting the other guys to buy into the team concept. And I think we will. I really do. And if they don't, we have options."

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