

Colorado men's basketball: Talton hoping to emerge as scorer for Boyle's Buffs

By Brian Howell Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera
Posted:

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Xavier Talton spent a lot of hours in the gym this summer, launching shot after shot.

"You can never be too good at something," he said. "You always have to practice and get better."

The Colorado men's basketball team is hoping the hard work pays dividends this year, because it needs a few scorers to emerge this season.

Last year, CU ranked 164th in the country in scoring (67.6 points per game) and 174th in shooting percentage (43.3 percent). At the end of the season, Boyle said one of the priorities for his program was to find some shooters.

Junior guard Askia Booker will play a major role in that regard. A second-year starter, Booker was second on the team with 12.4 points per game last year, but his accuracy wasn't consistent. Lately, he's been shooting the ball as well as ever.

Aside from Booker, though, the Buffs need players who can come off the bench and hit big shots at key moments. That's where Talton comes in.

"It's really important," the sophomore said. "It can be a little energy spark if the team is down."

In the early going of preseason practices, assistant coach Jean Prioleau said Talton and sophomore Eli Stalzer have been shooting well. But, the Buffs could have several players they can count on as the season goes along.

"I think it's just important to have guys that can just shoot and make shots, at the end of the day," Prioleau said. "To emerge as (the one key shooter), yeah, someone coming off the bench, that would be great, but we expect all of our guys to be able to make shots."

Shooting well in practice is a little easier, of course, because everybody on the team is in constant motion throughout the practice session and they stay warm. What the Buffs need is for their players to learn how to come in during a game and provide that instant spark that Talton talked about.

"It's different when you're sitting on the side and you're subbing into the game cold and then being able to make shots," Prioleau said. "That's not easy to do. I don't care who you are. The guys are getting better at that."

Talton, in particular, has gotten better. He shot the ball well last year, hitting 48.7 percent from the floor, but averaged just 7.3 minutes per game. He scored 1.5 points per game. He would love to see those numbers increase.

"I feel like my game has made tremendous strides this offseason and I'm looking forward to getting on the court more," he said. "This offseason, I just put in time. I was here all summer spending time in the gym getting shots up."

Talton should be ready to contribute more because he's been here a year. As this year's freshmen are learning, it can be overwhelming at times trying to understand everything the coaches want done. Talton went through that last year, but the game is starting to slow down for him now.

"I think he's just more confident," Prioleau said. "In our system, every player is going to get better over time. (Junior guards) Spencer (Dinwiddie) and Ski, when they were freshmen, they made a lot of mistakes, too. It was covered up by the veterans that we had, but our program is based on getting better and our guys do get better."

"It takes time to understand how we play in our system, our terminology, what we want defensively and offensively. It takes time to get accustomed to that. I think X-Talton and Eli have benefited from being here a year because they're better players now."

For Talton, part of getting better meant putting up thousands of shots in the offseason. He said he and Booker would often come to the gym together and try to launch 1,000 shots in one session. The goal was to make 75-80 percent of them.

"You just have to focus when you're in there and spend quality time," Talton said.

That quality time should benefit Talton, which, in turn, should benefit the Buffs. CU is coming off a 21-12 season that included a second consecutive trip to the NCAA Tournament. The emergence of players like Talton could help the Buffs get to the Tournament again.

"The team we have this year is so talented, we can go so far I believe," Talton said.

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Howell blog: Nelson making most of opportunity with Boyle's CU Buffs

By Brian Howell, Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

Kevin Nelson never doubted he could return to the court and be productive.

So far, the senior walk-on is making a nice impression on his Colorado men's basketball coaches.

Earlier this week, head coach Tad Boyle said Nelson has been very good in practice. Nelson said it's simply been good to be back on the court.

"I've been having fun in practice," Nelson said. "I've had some injuries the last few years, so I'm just getting back in the swing of things and understanding the offense."

In the summer of 2012, Nelson transferred to CU from Missouri State-West Plains, a junior college located in West Plains, Mo. But, in September of 2012, he broke his right ankle during a pick-up game.

"The only good thing about that was I was used to it because I did the same thing to the other ankle two seasons prior," he said. "I kind of went through it and knew what to expect. Mentally, I was OK, but yeah, it's tough not practicing and all of that."

With two broken ankles in a four-year period, Nelson said there was a sliver of doubt about his future, but, "At the end of the day I knew I wanted to come back and I'd be good."

So far, he has been.

The 6-2 guard from Albuquerque, N.M., went to New Mexico his freshman year, but sat out with an ankle injury. At Missouri State-West Plains, he was the starting point guard during the 2011-12 season. He didn't get any scholarship offers after that season, but through CU assistant coach Jean Prioleau, Nelson got an opportunity to walk on and join the Buffs.

Now that he's finally getting a chance to be on the court, he's making the most of it.

"You've got to do your job," he said. "Boyle talks every day about defense, rebounding and execute the offense. As long as you're doing those things and helping the team, I don't see why (he wouldn't get playing time)."

Nelson said earning a role on the team that allows him to play key minutes on game days "would be everything."

This may not be Nelson's final year, either. Because he's missed two seasons with injuries, he said he will attempt to get a sixth year of eligibility and try to return to the Buffs for the 2014-15 season.

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