

Colorado men's basketball: Competitive fire fuels Buffs' Dinwiddie

By Brian Howell Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

Spencer Dinwiddie hasn't forgotten the game he lost.

Colorado's junior point guard is a star on the basketball court, but he's nearly unbeatable when playing Madden NFL on Xbox 360. Nearly.

"I had one fluke loss," he said. "It was to our manager. The game gave him two extra points and he won, but my record against him is like 8-1 and then everybody else, I haven't lost to."

Dinwiddie claims to have defeated everybody on his team, as well as many of the CU football players.

"I'm sure there's probably a Madden player out there better than me, but I haven't met them yet," he said, his words coated in equal parts confidence and arrogance.

There aren't a lot of guys who are better than he is on the basketball court, either.

Considered one of the top point guards in the nation and projected as a first-round pick in the 2014 NBA Draft -- in the event he elects to leave school early -- Dinwiddie is the best player on a CU team that many believe to be one of top 25 in the nation.

"He's a special player," CU head coach Tad Boyle said.

In two seasons at CU, Dinwiddie has helped the Buffaloes reach the NCAA Tournament twice. He has started all 69 of CU's games over the past two seasons, helping them to a 45-24 record. Last season, he led the Buffs with 15.3 points and 3.0 assists per game.

At 6-feet, 6-inches tall, Dinwiddie has the size and skillset that NBA scouts love. He's a great passer, can score from the perimeter or at the rim and, Boyle said, he's an underrated defender.

"Andre (Roberson) got a lot of attention last year defensively, and well deserved, but I think Spencer was kind of overshadowed a little bit, in terms of his defensive prowess and ability," Boyle said. "He can affect the game in so many different ways. That's what makes him great, and he's got great size for his position."

Dinwiddie is well aware of how the NBA feels about him at this point, and he's made no secret of the fact that this is probably his last year at Colorado. He actually considered, very briefly, entering the NBA Draft after last season.

Whatever hesitation he had about going pro this past year is gone now. Over the summer, he was the starting point guard for USA Basketball's World University Games team in Russia and then excelled against other college stars at the Adidas Nations camp.

"Coming off last year, my confidence was already pretty high, so all (the summer) really did was just solidify the feelings I have," he said. "It's just reassurance, I guess."

"I'm not trying to put the cart before the horse, but from an individual standpoint, I definitely feel like I'm there. I honestly felt like I was there last year, but with the experiences that I've had, I understand where I had to grow to get to where I am now and to where I will be after the season."

Getting to the NBA has been a dream of Dinwiddie's since his childhood. Growing up in California, he began telling his parents when he was about 4 or 5 years old that he would play in the NBA. They have supported that dream ever since.

"They said, 'OK, are you going to put in the work to do it?' " he said. "I said, 'Yeah.'"

"Even when I was 5-8, 170 pounds as a freshman (in high school), I said, 'Mom and dad, I'm going to still make it to the NBA,' and they said, 'OK, let's go do it.' It's been a blessing in that regard. I thank God for that. I have a great support system."

Now that the NBA dream is inching close to reality, Dinwiddie said he will spend the next several months fine-tuning the little things he needs to get there.

Don't worry about Dinwiddie losing focus on CU, though. Perhaps more than any other player on the roster, he wants to win and take the Buffs deep into the NCAA Tournament.

"The thing about Spencer, he's always been mature beyond his years as a player," Boyle said. "It's one of the reasons we loved him when we recruited him. He has a poise and a confidence about him and he's the ultimate team player. Spencer literally does not care how many points he scores. He doesn't care how many assists he has or rebounds. He wants his team to win."

Dinwiddie, in fact, feels he is in a "blessed position," because everything he needs to do to prepare for the NBA will also help CU achieve more success as a team.

"It's really great because (scouts) are not asking me to go outside of my comfort zone or outside of my box," Dinwiddie said. "They're saying we want to see consistent effort on both ends of the floor, assist-to-turnover ratio, leadership and we want to see you win more games in the Tournament. Those are all things that point to a great season for Colorado, not just for Spencer."

For Colorado to have a great season, Dinwiddie does have to get better, though.

CU will miss Roberson's exceptional rebounding ability and Boyle would like to see Dinwiddie pick up some of that slack. Dinwiddie averaged just 3.2 boards per game last year, but Boyle said, "For his size at the guard position, there's no reason why he shouldn't be averaging six or seven rebounds a game."

Boyle also said he wants to see Dinwiddie continue to take on tough challenges as a defender, and would like to see more consistency from his point guard.

"That doesn't mean consistently scoring 25 points a night," Boyle said. "It just means being consistent with his effort, consistent with his attitude every day, making sure that he prepares just as hard to play Wyoming as he does for Oklahoma State or Tennessee-Martin or Jackson State. If he's going to be a pro, he needs to start living like a pro every day."

Dinwiddie agrees wholeheartedly with that assessment. He admits his effort in practice is better when he goes up against fellow starter Askia Booker than when he's matched up against walk-on Beau Gamble.

"I understand exactly what coach is talking about, because I did do that a lot last year and that's something that can change," he said. "You kind of relax and that consistent effort is what helps you get in better shape, it helps you take that extra step in the big game, it helps you do all those other little things."

Boyle expects to see Dinwiddie take his game to another level, especially after the experience he got over the summer.

"Confidence has never been a weakness of Spencer's," Boyle said, "but, I do think playing at the level that he played at this summer and with the players he played with, he just gained a new sense of confidence that he's one of the elite players in the country. I think he proved that."

"I felt like that was going to be in his future eventually and good thing the future is now."

The future is now, but this is hardly the end for Dinwiddie. As he proves every time he grabs an Xbox controller, he is as competitive as they come, and he's nowhere near satisfied with what he's done or what he's projected to do.

Kansas' Andrew Wiggins and Kentucky's Julius Randle are the odds-on favorites to go 1-2 in the draft next June, but Dinwiddie said, "If I could be No. 3, I don't see why I wouldn't shoot for that."

He did leave open the possibility of playing two more years at CU, saying that if he were to fall to the second round, "I have no problem coming back (for the 2014-15 season)."

Considering Dinwiddie's competitiveness and drive, however, that's not likely.

Dinwiddie was on the Pac-12's All-Freshman team in 2011-12 and was a first-team All-Pac-12 choice last year. Throw in his accomplishments this summer and Dinwiddie has a nice resume. That's just a start, though.

"I don't look back on accomplishments," he said. "It doesn't really mean anything if I can't accomplish my ultimate goal. Even when I get drafted, whether it be this year or next year, that's still not my ultimate goal. I want to be one of the best players in the league. I want to have that longevity, that 15-year career, be an All-Star and do things like that."

"I'm just in the middle of my journey. I still hopefully have 15-16 years left in this journey. Right now, I'm not there yet. I haven't done much."

Contact staff writer Brian Howell at howellb@dailycamera.com or twitter.com/BrianHowell33.