



Higgins makes impression in a hurry at CU

Son of NBA general manager expected to start tonight

By Ryan Thorburn

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Have any of the new guys stood out in practice?

When polled independently at the Big 12 basketball media days in Kansas City last month, Colorado seniors Richard Roby and Marcus Hall immediately blurted out the same name:

Cory Higgins.

And Jeff Bzdelik seems to agree. CU's head coach, who made Higgins his first recruit after taking the job, will start the 6-foot-5 guard in tonight's 7 o'clock exhibition game against Regis at the Coors Events Center.

"I want him to get the feeling of what it's like to start," Bzdelik said before Monday's practice. "Starting is not that big of a deal to me; it's how well you play while you're in the game and who shows us that you deserve to be in at the end."

Higgins has already shown enough maturity and skill to impress the veteran coaching staff and earn the respect of his teammates. Which isn't really a surprise considering he is the son of Rod Higgins, who played in the NBA for 13 seasons and is currently the general manager of the Charlotte Bobcats.

Dad's circle of famous friends includes some guy named Michael Jordan.

"It's just a great advantage to have," Higgins said. "My dad gave me so much knowledge, and I thought I came in with a high basketball IQ already, which is important."

So is talent, something Higgins also has an abundance of. He flashed his skills during last week's exhibition game against Brock University, scoring seven points, grabbing five rebounds, handing out two assists and blocking a shot in 34 minutes of court time.

"Cory is not your typical freshman because of his background," Bzdelik said in Kansas City. "Cory has played with NBA players. And being around those kinds of great athletes and playing in the summer time in the gym with those kinds of people doesn't make him your typical freshmen in terms of experience and knowledge of the game and awareness."

Higgins doesn't expect the rigors of the Big 12 to be easy, but he's confident in his ability to help Roby and Hall go out on a positive note this season.

"I was around NBA players all my life," Higgins said. "I'm sure it will be tough, but it shouldn't be overwhelming."

Bzdelik, of course, has coached NBA players for a good portion of his life. That experience should help the first-year CU coach lure more players like Higgins to Boulder.

"I liked his focus," Higgins said of Bzdelik. "And how he knew where he wanted to take the program."

While Higgins appears ready to be a key contributor as a freshman, recruiting classmate Caleb Patterson is still

adjusting to playing at a Big 12 level. The promising 6-foot-11 prospect from Ringwood, Okla., did not play in the first exhibition game and it doesn't sound like he's in the game plan tonight.

"I'm a very frank guy," Bzdelik said when asked about Patterson. "He needs to show me in practice that he's ready to play."

The Buffs will need all hands on deck this season, starting Friday in the nonconference opener against New Mexico, but redshirting Patterson is an option the coaching staff could consider if he doesn't practice his way into the rotation.

"He's a young man coming from a town of 400 people. So all this is new to him," Bzdelik said. "And hopefully his adjustment period ... let's just hope it happens sooner (rather) than later."

CU fans will have a chance to see Higgins as soon as tonight's opening tip.

"Cory is doing really well right now," Roby said. "He has a chance to be a great college player."

Notable

Regis lost 88-62 in an exhibition game at Wyoming on Saturday. ... The Buffs lead the all-time series with Regis 4-0. ... CU has a record of 45-6 (.882) in exhibition games and hasn't dropped one since Nov. 8, 1998 (91-89 to the California All-Stars), a streak of 20 consecutive wins. ... Bzdelik said he hopes his team was just getting the jitters out of its system while turning the ball over 11 times in the first half against Brock. The Buffs had two turnovers in the second half. ... FSN Rocky Mountain will air a 30-minute CU men's basketball preview shown starting tonight at 7.



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