



Bufs' Veal not worried about minutes

CU freshman frustrated, but understands he has work to do

By Ryan Thorburn
Sunday, December 7, 2008

Toby Veal was the most highly touted player in Colorado's five-man freshman class when the group signed last year.

Recruiting services described the 6-foot-7, 225-pound forward from Savannah, Ga., as "explosive" with Rivals.com listing Veal as the best "leaper" of all prospects headed to the Big 12 this season.

Programs like Tennessee, Miami, UNLV and Virginia Tech offered Veal scholarships.

But so far the most athletic player in the program is stuck on the end of a bench watching the Bufs get out-rebounded by teams from the SWAC, Big Sky, Patriot League and Mountain West.

Veal has not scored a single point, has one rebound and is averaging two minutes of playing time through six games.

CU head coach Jeff Bzdelik obviously feels like Veal has some more developing to do in practice before earning a chance to be in the regular rotation. So how does this promising young player feel about this slow start to his college career?

"I understand why I'm being eased into it," Veal said. "But it's frustrating because sometimes I see plays in the game where I could really help but I'm on the bench watching. I can understand it because I'm a freshman. All I can really do is pick up what's going wrong and do it right in practice so Coach can see that I can defend that, or block that shot, or whatever has to be done. That way I can pick that up next year and be able to play."

Next year?

Bzdelik does not plan to redshirt any of his freshmen at this point due to a lack of depth.

"I haven't brought redshirting up to him. A couple of my AAU coaches told me to bring it up," Veal said. "But if I'm going to play my two minutes and help out the team a little bit then I'll play my minutes and help out the team because that's what I'm here for. I don't think I'm going to bring it up. I think I'll try and stick it out."

Two freshmen, point guard Nate Tomlinson and Austin Dufault, are starters who have played very well for the most part this season. They are also the sons of coaches.

Trey Eckloff is getting more and more playing time off the bench as Bzdelik searches for answers inside

with disappointing starts to the season on the court for Casey Crawford and Jermyl Jackson-Wilson.

Ryan Kelley, who made a couple of 3-pointers during Wednesday's 62-46 loss to TCU, has also been used sparingly this season with Cory Higgins and Dwight Thorne playing well and eating up most of the minutes at shooting guard.

"We talk to each other a lot and hang out a lot. We keep each other's heads up to really stick with it and really push our way through it," Veal said of his friendship with Kelley. "Some people might be like, 'Oh, I'm not playing, I want to leave and all that stuff.'

"But we talk to each other and make sure we're OK so we can stick this out together. I think we'll be OK. I think me and Ryan will have a good impact after a couple years as we develop together because we practice against each other a lot."

Veal said academics are not an issue. He points to the fact that the Buffs -- who play eight of their first nine games at home -- have not missed any classes this semester and are surrounded by a committed academic support staff as reasons why he is not worried about staying eligible at CU.

"We have no choice but to study, basically," Veal said. "So I'm doing pretty good. All my grades are good."

The Buffs (3-3) still have a long season ahead of them, and Bzdelik says the rotation he uses now could be different in March, depending on how players perform in practice and under the bright lights.

"We're not locked into anything," Bzdelik said. "Even the guys playing big minutes, no one is guaranteed any starting position, no one is guaranteed anything. As with the way life is. ...

"Ryan and Toby have had a terrific attitude."

And Veal could end up being the center of attention at some point. Recently he has been practicing at the center position instead of at the forward spots.

"The thing I have to get down is basically the offense," Veal said. "Coach moved me from the three and four to the five. So now I'm trying to play the post, and he said it's going to be a little bit easier. That's what I'm trying to get down now."



© 2006 Daily Camera and Boulder Publishing, LLC.