



CU's Bzdelik moving forward

Coach coming off 21-42 record in first two seasons at CU

By Ryan Thorburn
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BOULDER, Colo. — Jeff Bzdelik is already looking forward to his third season as the Colorado men's basketball coach.

Several members of the Buffs' balanced five-man recruiting class — which includes point guard Shannon Sharpe, shooting guard Alec Burks, forwards Marcus Relphorde and Keegan Hornbuckle, and center Shane Harris-Tunks — are already on campus for the June school session.

After an impressive individual season, Cory Higgins is working out with NBA players again this summer and looking to improve his overall game before his junior campaign.

Dwight Thorne, the only senior in the program, recently returned from a trip to Poland and Germany playing on an Athletes In Action team.

Sophomore forward Austin Dufault has already added 10 pounds of muscle in the offseason strength and conditioning program.

The 2009-10 schedule includes CU's first appearance in the prestigious Maui Invitational, road trips to Colorado State, Oregon State and Tulsa, as well as the grueling Big 12 slate.

But before moving forward, Bzdelik sat down with the Camera this week and reflected on another spring of attrition.

Two members of last year's recruiting class, guard Ryan Kelley and forward Toby Veal, left CU basketball recently looking to transfer to other programs.

That makes 10 different players who have departed from CU for a variety of reasons since Bzdelik was hired.

Some of the names on the growing list — which also includes Kal Bay, James Inge, Sean Kowal Caleb Patterson, Xavier Silas, Marc Van Burck, Jeremy Williams and Kyle Wright — had a sense of entitlement about playing time and thought they could just focus on hoops without worrying about homework.

"I think a lot of it has to do with our society. It's instant gratification and everybody ... they want, they want, they want, but few persevere now," Bzdelik said. "You have to work and earn what you get. It's a reflection on our society in some ways."

Kelley, an excellent student, left CU after the spring semester in good academic standing. He is still searching to find a program where he can have more of an impact after playing sparingly for the Buffs and averaging just 2.6 points and 0.5 rebounds as a true freshman.

Veal, who left to be closer to his daughter, leaves CU ineligible due to missed classes. The talented 6-foot-7 project from Savannah, Ga., will likely have to enroll at a junior college after averaging just 1.8 points and 1.6 rebounds as a true freshman.

"They are both good people," Bzdelik said of Kelley and Veal. "Ryan simply was looking for an opportunity to contribute more significantly. And in Toby's case, it was more personal with some issues he needs to iron out. We wish them well. They're good young people that are searching."

Veal could cost Bzdelik a scholarship down the road for failing to leave in good academic standing.

Men's basketball was the only athletic program at CU that failed to meet the NCAA's Academic Progress Rate for the 2007-08 school years, data that was released last month.

CU had a score of 900, which was below the required minimum of 925. Men's basketball was penalized with the loss of a scholarship, but Bzdelik chose to take the penalty last season.

The previous four academic years prior to 2007-08 — Bzdelik's first season at CU — the men's basketball scores were 885, 875, 884 and 873 under Ricardo Patton.

"We inherited an APR mess and we've made great strides to improve it," Bzdelik said. "Even though Toby has left us ineligible, the APR has improved."

Bzdelik — who has a 21-42 record in two seasons at CU after posting a 50-16 record in two seasons at Air Force — understands why some Buffs fans are becoming impatient.

"I'm sure there's doubt in people's minds because we won 12 games and nine games, but you have to look at the whole picture," Bzdelik said. "That's why I said in my first press conference here that I can't wave a magic wand and have this change overnight. It won't happen that way. I've been true to my word. ...

"We inherited a basketball team that won seven games, that had no competitive spirit, that was undisciplined, and had bad grades. And you look and say, 'You've had a lot of players leave the program.' But let me ask you a question: Who out of those players who have left the program have gone on to another BCS school? Name one."

This list of schools where departed ex-CU players landed the past two years includes Cornell, Idaho State, Missouri State, Northern Illinois and UTEP.

Bzdelik believes he is finally moving forward at CU with a roster capable of competing in the Big 12.



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