



Former Buffs take long shot at NBA

By Chris Tomasson, For the Camera
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LAS VEGAS -- Suffice to say, David Harrison wasn't feeling like a star at the NBA Summer League.

But Harrison did last season in China. When he walked down the street, it was hard not to notice the 7-foot center for the Beijing Ducks.

"Everybody knew who I was," Harrison said. "That was the beauty of it. Fifteen million people knew everything about you. It was nice. You're a star again."

So when was the last time Harrison was one?

"University of Colorado," Harrison said.

Harrison, who left Colorado after his junior season in 2004 and was taken by Indiana with the No. 29 pick in the first round of the NBA draft, admitted he hardly was a star with the Pacers, where he played four uninspiring seasons and then last fall couldn't get an NBA job.

And Harrison, who averaged about 26 points and 12 rebounds for Beijing, definitely wasn't a star in Las Vegas, where he was uneven for Cleveland during the summer league. In five games, he averaged 5.0 points, 4.4 rebounds and 4.4 fouls over 16.6 minutes, and was ejected Friday from Cleveland's finale after picking up his second technical in the third quarter.

Harrison got a whopping amount of time considering what a pair of other former Buffaloes, swingman Richard Roby for Oklahoma City and guard Dominique Coleman for the Los Angeles Lakers, have been getting during the league, which concludes play Sunday.

With one game remaining, Roby has played in just two of four games for the Thunder, going scoreless in 11 total minutes, while Coleman concluded play by averaging 5.7 minutes and 1.3 points while playing in three of five Lakers games. Roby has played in just one of two games for the Thunder, going scoreless in five minutes, while Coleman is averaging 5.7 minutes and 1.3 points in three games.

"The Buffs got to get into the game," Coleman said.

Unfortunately for Colorado supporters, that hasn't happened much. Buffaloes coach Jeff Bzdelik came to Las Vegas to see Roby play, but he didn't log a second in the one game Bzdelik watched before departing.

Like Harrison, Roby, a guard/forward who starred at Colorado from 2004-08, spent last season overseas. Roby averaged about 11 points in 19 minutes in Israel for Bnei Hasharon, located just outside of Tel Aviv.

Roby said he learned a bit of Hebrew, and has offers to return to Israel or to play next season in France. He wasn't deterred by the fear of violence that can come with playing for an Israeli team.

"Not really," Roby said. "We went to Turkey and it got kind of crazy and we got run off the court because that was the time of the little war they had out there. The crowd just started running the court. We got off the court, and the game was cancelled and security took us off the court.

"Before the game even started they were throwing stuff at us. That's more political reasons. There were a couple of shoes, like at President Bush (who had shoes thrown at him last year in Iraq). Even during that, I didn't feel unsafe."

Harrison said he felt fine in Beijing, but was a bit uneasy when venturing outside the city.

"It's a third-world country," Harrison said. "It was sad. I donated a lot of money to the earthquake relief fund (about \$20,000 to help victims of last year's Sichuan disaster). You just do what you can to help those people."

Coleman, a guard who played for the Buffaloes from 2005-07, has no such recent overseas tales to tell.

But he will be looking for a new team after the NBADL's Colorado 14ers, for which he averaged 15.4 points last season, left Broomfield and will resume operations in 2010-11 in Frisco, Texas.

All three former Colorado players have hopes of future NBA play, with Harrison having the best chance based upon his size and previous experience. But Harrison isn't doing himself any favors.

Harrison said he played at 250 pounds in China before returning to the U.S. in April. But he's since packed on 20 pounds due to inactivity, and doesn't look close to being NBA ready.

"With his size and athleticism and even his talent, he's an NBA player," Cleveland coach Mike Brown, who was an Indiana assistant during Harrison's rookie season, said of Harrison, who averaged 5.0 points and 2.9 rebounds with the Pacers from 2004-08. "But he has to get to the point where he shows he can consistently do it on every single play rather than every once in a while.

"He should be doing a lot better than he is now. Obviously, with him shutting it down for two months and just now getting back into it, it's going to take some time."

Brown said it's too early to say whether Harrison could get an invitation to Cavaliers training camp this fall. The general consensus around the league is Harrison still must prove he's serious about making the necessarily commitment to play in the NBA.

"There are questions, and I'm going to have to provide answers with my actions," said Harrison, who vows to get into shape.

Those questions might not hound Coleman and Roby. But Coleman is 6-3 and Roby 6-6.

"Richard just has to keep polishing his game," Bzdelik said. "He needs to finish better at the rim and be more consistent."

Roby, the half brother of Nuggets star Kenyon Martin, entered his name in the 2006 NBA draft before pulling it out when he didn't believe he would be drafted in the first round.

While some believe he at least would have been taken then in the second round, Roby, who went undrafted in 2008, said he has no regrets.

"I'm the all-time leading scorer in Colorado history," Roby said when asked what he believes he can bring to an NBA team. "I feel I can play any style of basketball. I can guard guys. I've got size for my position."

There's no guarantee Roby will make the NBA any time soon, but he would seem to have a good chance of also being regarded as a star while walking down a foreign street.



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Woelk: Interest in Bzdelik not a bad thing

By Neill Woelk
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News that the Minnesota Timberwolves have an interest in Colorado basketball coach Jeff Bzdelik should be welcomed by Buff fans.

This isn't a case of Bzdelik chasing an opening in a desperate attempt to get out of Boulder. Neither is it a situation in which he's trying to create some leverage and hold his administration hostage in hopes of receiving a contract extension.

It's nothing so nefarious or complicated. It's simply that a man whose coaching abilities are well-respected across the nation is always going to attract attention when a vacancy occurs.

Minnesota's interest is actually an affirmation that CU has the right guy in the position. A coach who has won barely 33 percent of his games at CU in two years must be doing something right if he's still drawing interest for one of the top 32 jobs in the world in his profession.

Not that Buff athletic director Mike Bohn is doing handstands today in celebration of the news. The last thing Bohn needs on his plate is a coaching search, particularly with the season just a few months away.

But even Bohn has to admit that having folks interested in your coaches is much, much better than the alternative.

To be honest, not enough Colorado coaches have drawn serious interest from other programs and the pros in recent years.

Bill McCartney was wooed by a variety of schools. Rick Neuheisel left CU for Washington.

But all too often, CU's coaches are asked to leave, not lured elsewhere -- and in basketball, it's almost always the former.

The last hoops coach to leave Boulder on his own volition?

Try Bill Blair, the coach who recruited Jay Humphries to the Buffs, then left after the 1981 season to join Larry Brown on the New Jersey Nets' staff.

Since then, the list has been less than stellar: Tom Apke was fired, Tom Miller was fired, and Joe Harrington and Ricardo Patton both resigned under pressure.

It's been a little better in football. Eddie Crowder resigned to assume full-time duties as the A.D. Bill Mallory was fired, Chuck Fairbanks left to join the U.S. Football League (some would argue he got out just ahead of the posse), McCartney retired and Neuheisel left for greener pastures.

Gary Barnett was also wooed by others while he was here -- and in retrospect, he might have been better off leaving. Vanderbilt president Gordon Gee (the former CU prez) did his best to lure Barnett to Vandy. The result was the ironclad contract presented to Barnett by CU's administration to convince him to stay.

That deal sent Barnett home with a \$3 million parting gift when he was sacked.

CU's current staffers have also had feelers from other programs. Bohn has been approached at least twice by other schools, and after his second year here, Dan Hawkins fielded inquiries from a variety of programs.

Not that you ever want your school to become a perennial steppingstone. (Ask Wyoming about this). But you do want coaches who are coveted by other teams. Think USC would want a coach whose name isn't mentioned with every major opening? Think Oklahoma would rather no one be interested in Bob Stoops?

Of course not. Coaches who are wanted are successful coaches.

As for Bzdelik, the gut feeling here is that he'll stay.

When he took the job, he knew what kind of mountain he faced. One needs only go back a few paragraphs to see the list of folks before him who tried and failed to make CU a viable basketball program.

The task has only become tougher as the Big 12 continues to flex its basketball muscles. And, as the stakes become higher around the league, so does the level of questionable ethics. That makes Bzdelik's job even tougher because he refuses to cheat.

But, he can coach -- witness the interest by two NBA teams in the last year. He's also stepped up the level of talent, and he's fought tooth and nail to improve facilities for his players.

We're betting that fans will be pleasantly surprised next season by the improvement in his team, one that will still have just one senior. Things will be even better a year later.

And in the meanwhile, don't be surprised if other teams continue to express an interest in Bzdelik's services.

It's not a bad thing -- and definitely better than the alternative.



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