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CU gearing up to upgrade basketball facilities

By B.G. Brooks, Rocky Mountain News
August 22, 2007

BOULDER — Not that either hopes to duplicate what they saw, but a recent trip to two affluent Big 12 Conference schools offered the University of Colorado men's and women's basketball coaches a template for a long-awaited practice facility.

Coaches Jeff Bzdelik (men) and Kathy McConnell-Miller (women) flew to Texas and Oklahoma on Monday to examine those schools' practice sites.

Bzdelik said the trip was "very informative and productive for us," but added, "We don't need to go over the top; we need it to be functional and a source of pride."

He believes a facility adjacent to the Coors Events Center can be constructed for \$10 million to \$12 million and would include two full courts with supplementary side baskets. One concept is separating the courts with a weight room and players' lounge.

The deadline for starting construction of such a facility is geared to Bzdelik's five-year contract, which contains a provision canceling his buyout clause if CU has not broken ground on the facility by the start of his fourth year.

CU currently is using the Events Center for men's and women's practices as well as women's volleyball and some academic purposes. Scheduling staggered practice times for three teams in two sports is unwieldy, with players' class schedules not allowing "a lot flexibility to make it all work," Bzdelik said.

The only alternative practice sites on campus are the student recreation center and antiquated Carlson Gymnasium, whose floor Bzdelik termed "useless."

Bzdelik didn't face such problems during a two-year stint at Air Force, terming the Falcons' facilities "huge . . . but I'm not complaining, don't get me wrong."

Aside from an operational standpoint, Bzdelik said CU's other need to upgrade is found in recruiting: "You have to stay up with your competition. . . . From a recruiting standpoint, this is what's important to young athletes," he said.

Construction is to begin Monday on a basketball-operations center in the Events Center that will centralize men's and women's offices now at Folsom Field.

Also, renovation of the men's locker room (the women's underwent a face-lift several years ago) is expected to be complete by the start of the Big 12 season in January. Until then, players will use auxiliary locker rooms in the Events Center.

"Our players are going to have to rough it for a couple of months," Bzdelik said. "But they're excited. . . . It's a positive because we know what's being done."

Donations for the locker room revamping have come from alumni and outsiders, including a significant sum from one of his former Northwestern players.

"It's real and it will happen," Bzdelik said.

ETC.: Recruiting in July took Bzdelik coast to coast. Cities visited included Los Angeles, Las Vegas, Chicago, Atlanta, Cleveland and Philadelphia. "We're trying to catch up, to be honest," he said. . . . Of five scholarships available for the November signing period, two likely will go to wing players. . . . Limited practice (four players, two hours per week) can begin when school starts Monday and continue until Sept. 14. Another set of restrictions is in effect from Sept. 15 to Oct. 15, when

full-team work begins.

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CU hoops facilities upgrade on tap

Locker room renovation set to start; coaches take tour of some Big 12 practice courts

By Ryan Thorburn
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Jeff Bzdelik will not have any excuses in March when college basketball is under the microscope.

Colorado's new men's coach, who inherits a team that finished with seven victories during Ricardo Patton's final season in Boulder, wants to make that crystal clear before you continue reading.

"We need to win and play in a way that will make people want to come out," Bzdelik said during a meeting with local newspaper reporters on Wednesday in an office littered with unpacked boxes. "That's on us."

But before signing his CU contract, Bzdelik also made sure he received assurances from athletic director Mike Bohn that the university will do its part to support the program by upgrading the basketball facilities on campus to compete with the other Big 12 institutions.

The coaching change has already drawn the interest of a number of donors who are serious about helping financially to make Bzdelik's hoops dreams at CU a reality.

On Monday there will be demolition inside the Coors Events Center to clear space for construction of a new basketball operations center (which is why Bzdelik isn't unpacking those boxes just yet).

The Buffs' locker room will be vacated, gutted and renovated before the team begins the conference portion of its schedule.

And earlier this week, Bzdelik joined women's basketball coach Kathy McConnell-Miller, associate athletic director of marketing and sales Chris May, director of game management and operations Tom McGann and several boosters on a barnstorming tour of basketball practice facilities at Texas and Oklahoma.

"The school is totally committed, and we're excited about that," Bzdelik said. "And so as we prepare to build, we want to make sure that we learn as much as possible from other schools."

OU's basketball practice facility — a 70,000-square-foot expansion on the Lloyd Noble Center — cost \$17.1 million in 2001. Baylor's 42,990-square-foot facility — which the women's program raised most of the money for after winning a national championship in 2005 — cost \$7 million last year.

Rick Barnes, a longtime friend of Bzdelik's, and the Longhorns moved into a 44,000-square-foot practice facility in 2003 that includes a locker room with a players' lounge, a strength and conditioning

room, a training and hydrotherapy room, an academic resource and activity center, and a coaches lounge and locker room.

The Buffs probably can't afford a Texas-sized diamond, but the program isn't going to settle for cubic zirconia either.

"We don't need to go over the top," Bzdelik said. "Something that's functional and a source of pride."

If CU doesn't break ground on a new basketball practice facility by Bzdelik's third season on the job, the buyout clause in his contract will be voided. He envisions two courts — one for his team and one for McConnell-Miller's — divided by a wall containing a weight/training room and an equipment room.

Bzdelik says the facility, which would be attached to the Coors Events Center, is necessary to make sure players are practicing at times that allow them to attend all of their classes. Currently both basketball programs and the volleyball program share the floor at the Coors Events Center and divvy up the limited practice time as best they can to make it fair for each team.

"I have five players that need seven courses that are only offered in the late afternoon. For one of the semesters I'm going to have to practice in the early afternoon, and the women later on," Bzdelik said. "And so you see there's conflict making sure that the players, both men and women players, stay on their logical progression toward their degree."

The other reason Bzdelik wants the facility is to help in recruiting. He said even in the NBA when he was Pat Riley's assistant with the Miami Heat and later the head coach of the Denver Nuggets, free agents would come in and take a long look at the facilities before deciding whether or not to sign with that franchise.

"The other side is that you have to stay up with your competition," Bzdelik said. "All these other schools have that. From a recruiting standpoint this is what's important to young athletes, the athletic facilities."

Bzdelik joked that the Buffs can get dressed and make their halftime adjustments in his car while waiting for the locker room to be refurbished during the nonconference portion of their schedule.

"You know what? It's OK," he said. "There's a couple of visiting locker rooms within the Coors Events Center (we can use). That's not a negative, that's a positive because we know what's being done."

Hitting the trail

Bzdelik apologized for being short with reporters on the phone over the summer.

"I was tired," he explained.

The coach and his staff spent the majority of July on the recruiting trail. The Buffs will have five scholarships to offer in November during the early signing period.

Bzdelik made stops in Los Angeles (three times), Las Vegas, Tulsa, Cleveland, Akron (Ohio), Philadelphia, Orlando, Atlanta, Savannah (Ga.), Augusta (Ga.) and Chicago last month.

"We tried to utilize every second we could to be out there," Bzdelik said. "We're just trying to catch up."

CU has already received an oral committment from Trey Eckloff, a 6-foot-9 senior at Cherry Creek.

"We're involved with some really good players," Bzdelik said. "There has been a good response."

Notable

Jeremy Williams is the only player on CU's roster expected to be academically ineligible for the fall semester. ... Former Buffs Cal Bay (Eastern Utah) and Sean Kowal (Northern Illinois) have found new basketball homes. ... Bzdelik said the Buffs will not have any "Midnight Madness" festivities to open the season and will instead conduct a normal practice on Oct. 12.



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Construction underway

By ELIOT DEMPSEY

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When Jeff Bzdelik made the decision to leave the Air Force Academy and become the new CU head men's basketball coach, he did so keeping a number of things in mind.

"I went into this job knowing this," said Bzdelik. "No. 1, That there is great administrative support from Chancellor Peterson down through (Athletic Director) Mike Bohn. No. 2, When I was contemplating taking this opportunity, I had a lot of alums offer their support, and No. 3, faith that it would happen."

The 'it' Bzdelik was referring to are the \$10-12 million dollars worth of upgrades that are being made to the CU basketball facilities.

Bzdelik, having just returned from a tour of the Universities of Texas and Oklahoma along with women's head coach Kathy McConnell Miller and several members of the CU athletic department, went to see what type of basketball facilities those schools offer, and to gain some knowledge about how to plan the design of CU's own construction efforts.

Bzdelik made it clear that nice, new basketball facilities, such as a new practice court, locker room and offices, hold a strong standing in the minds of most high school recruits and are crucial when your opponents have quality facilities. Tantamount to that purpose, however, is the necessity from an operational standpoint of having all basketball - related activities under one roof.

"There are a lot of benefits. First of all, having ample practice space to accommodate volleyball, women's basketball and men's basketball. It's very complicated and it's a necessity from that standpoint. Right now they are having a big pow wow at the Coors Event Center trying to schedule all three teams," said Bzdelik. "First you have the Coors Event Center that is used often by the University. Then you have the men's team, women's team and volleyball team. For the men's team for example, I have five players that need courses that are only offered in the late afternoon. So I am going to have to have practices in the early afternoon, and then the women have their own schedules. You have NCAA restraints, players taking classes at various times during the day, ect," he said.

The problem of shared facilities is not one that Bzdelik encountered at Air Force, nor is it one that any other school in the Big 12 has to deal with. All other conference member schools have basketball - only facilities.

It is not a problem that Bzdelik is complaining about though.

"We have a beautiful campus, a great location, a great school academically and a great league. If we can get our facilities up to par with the competition, that gives us a great chance to reach the goals we all have."

Besides looking nice and impressing recruits and alumni, the main focus of the construction effort is functionality.

"First of all, I don't want to forget how functional it can be. For example, we need a basketball weight room at Coors. In January, you can't have players going all the way to Coors and back (to Dal Ward and the basketball offices at Folsom Field), it doesn't work that way," said Bzdelik. "So you will have a basketball weight room in there for men and women. Your office is there, everything is under one roof right where it needs to be so you can get optimal use out of developing your program."

Demolition begins on Monday for the building of the new basketball operations center at the Coors Event Center. Bzdelik said the support that CU has garnered from alumni and even people outside of the CU

community has been great. One of Bzdelik's former players from his days as an assistant coach at Northwestern University contributed heavily, as did a number of people whom Bzdelik declined to name.

The locker rooms will begin construction soon as well, but they will not be finished until the end of the non-conference schedule. Until they are finished, Bzdelik said the Buffs will have to find another place to dress and shower.

"Well, my car is pretty big," he joked. "You know what, it's ok. There are a couple of visiting locker rooms at Coors. That's not a negative, that's a positive, because we know what's being done."

He said that the locker room is like a second home to players. They will have study areas, computer hook ups and it will be near CU's Lees School of Business. Players will be able to work out and study in one place, without running all over campus. The treasure of a quality locker room is one that is even appreciated by the NBA players that Bzdelik encountered in his days with the Miami Heat and Denver Nuggets.

"In the NBA, guys hang around so they don't have to go home and do the 'honey-do list'" he said with a laugh.

The coach himself hasn't even bothered to fully unpack yet, instead getting by with a box full of coaching notebooks and a few pictures on the wall. He is by his own words, 'simple,' and his approach to these construction efforts is likewise. He acknowledged that the new facilities are important, but that playing winning basketball is even more so.

One refreshing encounter Bzdelik recently had was when he was explaining the whole construction process to high school recruit.

"I did call a recruit, an '09 young man, from a small, small town," said Bzdelik. "We were talking and I was very honest with him. I said we have a wonderful, wonderful situation here. Our facilities aren't quite where other schools have them, but they will be. And he said, 'You know coach, do you have a court?' I said yes. 'Do you have two rims?' I said yes and he said, 'Well that's good enough for me.'"

That young man is unfortunately in the minority of a 'What can you do for me,' generation. Regardless, the rest of CU's future athletes will have a beautiful new set of basketball facilities to enjoy during their time at CU.

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cu basketball

Bzdelik hopped up for hoops facility upgrade

By Tom Kensler
Denver Post Staff Writer

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Boulder - After a whirlwind tour of basketball practice facilities at Texas and Oklahoma, first-year Colorado men's basketball coach Jeff Bzdelik couldn't be more fired up if this were the middle of season.

Bzdelik, accompanied by CU women's coach Kathy McConnell-Miller, school officials and boosters, traveled in a private jet Monday to Austin and Norman. Bzdelik's five-year contract stipulates that construction begin on a practice facility by no later than the third year.

"The school is totally committed (to a practice facility and other improvements)," Bzdelik said Wednesday. "We're excited about that."

On Monday, construction is scheduled to begin in the Coors Events Center to convert existing space into new basketball offices for the men's and women's programs. A refurbished men's locker room, undergoing a dramatic upgrade and expansion, is expected to be ready by the beginning of Big 12 Conference play in January.

Preliminary plans for the practice facility include two courts, for use by the men's and women's teams simultaneously, and space for sports medicine and weight training.

The practice facility, to be built adjacent to the Coors Events Center, will allow Bzdelik and McConnell-Miller more flexibility in scheduling practices that might otherwise conflict with volleyball workouts and other demands on the arena, including its use for lectures and exams.

"From an operations standpoint, you need those facilities for optimum efficiency," Bzdelik said. "The other side is you have to stay up with your competition. All the other schools (in the Big 12) have that. From a recruiting standpoint, facilities are what's important to young athletes."

Footnotes

Bzdelik said there were no academic casualties during the summer. It was previously announced that sophomore forward Jeremy Williams will sit out the fall semester to concentrate on his studies. ... CU has five scholarships to offer for next season, beginning with the early signing period in November. One of the scholarships will go to 6-foot-9 Trey Eckloff of Cherry Creek High School. Eckloff orally committed to CU last month. ... Bzdelik traveled to 11 cities, from California to Florida, during the July recruiting period.

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