

## PAC-12 TOURNAMENT CHAMPIONS

**LOS ANGELES** - Dust off those dancing shoes, Buffs fans. Pac-12 hoops, who's your Taddy?

The improbable, unflappable, and in the very end undeniable Colorado Buffaloes made history, outlasting Arizona 53-51 at the Staples Center to win the Pac-12 Conference tournament championship in their debut season in the expanded league.

CU is a conference tournament champion for the first time in program history and in the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 2003 after earning the Pac-12's automatic berth.

A season after being denied an NCAA Tournament berth and losing 75 percent of his offense, CU coach Tad Boyle reloaded as best he could and hoped for the best. But Boyle constructed his second season in Boulder with more determination than dreams, ultimately squeezing and coaxing every ounce of effort out of the Buffs during a taxing four-day Pac-12 run that followed a dismaying regular-season finish.

Losing three of its final four games, CU dropped from regular-season title contenders to a sixth tournament seed. No problem; rising up in L.A. was the Buffs' mission. They did it in grand - if gut-wrenching - style, and they did it the hard way, winning four games in four days.

CU (23-11) almost squandered a 12-point lead, scoring only three points in the last 9 minutes but still denying No. 4 seed Arizona (23-11) in its comeback attempt.

"Saying I'm proud of these guys is the biggest understatement I've ever made," Boyle said. "If you believe in destiny, you believe in the Colorado Buffaloes."

Freshman Spencer Dinwiddie led CU with 14 points, and senior Carlton Brown - the Buffs leading scorer in the tournament - added 13, including a dunk in the final minute that was his team's last field goal. Sophomore Andre Roberson submitted his third double-double (10 points, 11 rebounds) in four tournament games.

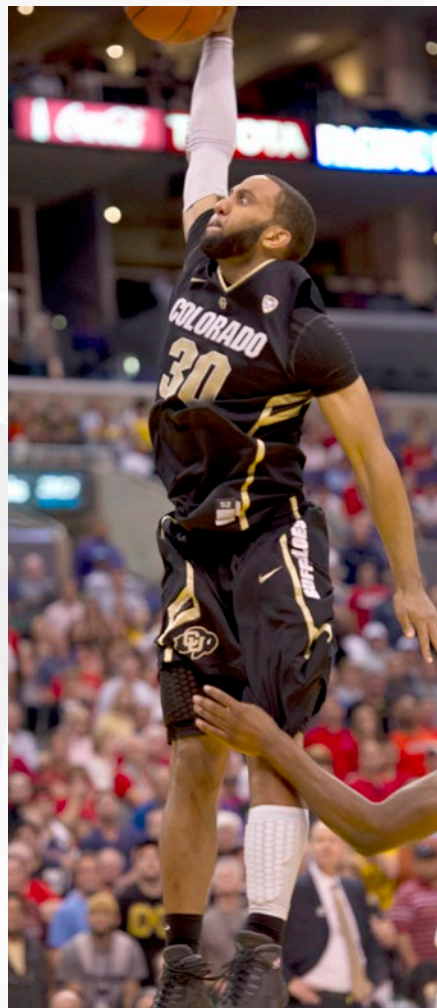
Brown was named the tournament MVP, highlighting a two-week run that saw him hit lows, highs and finish as high as he's ever been.

Said Boyle on Brown: "I think what you saw out of Carlton these last four games is he's a guy who put this team on his shoulders. He's been more vocal than he's been all year in timeouts, in huddles, on the floor, encouraging his teammates . . . (He) deserves the MVP of this tournament because he was big when we needed him to be big."

Brown, the only member of the CU roster to play in the NCAA Tournament (with Utah), said the late-season scoring slump he encountered finally was put behind him: "I just tried to put everything in the past, knowing I had this opportunity to be aggressive and play in this tournament . . . I just let everything go."

Roberson also was named to the all-tournament team, joining Jared Cunningham (Oregon State), Kyle Fogg (Arizona), Solomon Hill (Arizona) and Jesse Perry (Arizona). That trio led the Wildcats in scoring Saturday - Fogg with 14, Hill with 13 and Perry with 11.

Arizona coach Sean Miller was effusive in congratulating CU and Boyle: "I want to say the job that Tad Boyle has done at Colorado and what Colorado represents to the future of the Pac-12, I can make the argument that there's





been no greater gift to college basketball in the Pac-12 than adding Colorado."

Miller said whoever draws CU in the NCAA Tournament "is running into a hungry, well-coached, disciplined team. I really believe that's the story of today. They beat us. They were the better team."

CU had 8- to 10-point cushions in the final 10 minutes of the previous two games and held on - barely against Oregon, handily against Cal. But could the Buffs stay composed in their biggest tournament game thus far?

Some doubt surfaced when Arizona scored five straight and cut its deficit to 50-43 on one of two free throws by Perry with 5:29 remaining. And no nerves were calmed when Tomlinson and Askia Booker both misfired badly on consecutive possessions from the same spot in the left corner.

The Wildcats capitalized on those botched trips with a layup by Hill to cap a 7-0 run and close to 50-45 with 4 minutes remaining. At the 1:41 mark, without a field goal in almost 8 minutes and seven consecutive missed shots, Boyle called a timeout.

It might not have been what Boyle had drawn up, but Roberson drove to the basket as the shot clock wound down and was fouled with 1:23 showing. He hit one of two, sending CU up 51-46.

At the other end, 22 seconds later, Perry sank two free throws, but Brown drove the lane and countered with a thunderous dunk to push the Buffs ahead 53-47 with 49 seconds to play.

CU's first trip to the NCAA Tournament in nine seasons appeared all but booked . . . but not quite. Fogg's pair of free throws at 34.5 cut CU's lead to 53-49, and Hill also converted at the other end to make the score 53-51.

Dufault, who let a pass from Tomlinson bound away from him for a turnover, also missed a pair of free throws with 14.4 to play.

"It would have been nice if we had ended the game smoother . . . if I could have knocked down a couple of free throws or caught that pass," Dufault said.

Arizona had a final chance, but Fogg's tightly contested shot with 1.4 seconds left was badly off to the left.

Continued Dufault: "We went down to the other end, and once again we just dug in defensively and got a stop."

It was done . . . CU in the Big Dance.

