

Analysis: Bzdelik still has plenty of work left

By Ryan Thorburn Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 12/13/2009 12:10:45 AM MST

Jeff Bzdelik is disappointed with Colorado's 6-4 record.

"I was hoping for some more wins," the Buffs' third-year head coach said when asked if this is about where he thought this young team would be after 10 games.

Two of CU's victories were against Division II teams, which means the Buffs are actually 4-4 according to the computers with an RPI of 230 as of Saturday.

In other words, Bzdelik still has a lot of work to do if he hopes to have a winning record and an opportunity for postseason play come March.

The Buffs -- coming off a 77-62 loss at Colorado State on Thursday -- will focus on final exams before returning to the court for a home game against Cal State Northridge on Dec. 22.

"I'm not making any excuses, but we had a player, one of our starters, take a final exam at 2:30 this afternoon," Bzdelik said after the humbling defeat in Fort Collins. "They need to get that over with. Then let's get our energy back and get back to work and have that behind us. Right now, we've just got too much going on."

While the Buffs are resting and studying, the Camera takes a look at the good, bad and ugly of this season to this point:

The good

Save the 1-for-10 shooting night at Moby Arena, Cory Higgins has looked like an All-Big 12 player for most of the season. The 6-5 junior guard is second in the Big 12 in scoring (19.7 ppg) and also averaging 3.4 rebounds and 2.4 assists per game.

"We need to get tougher," Higgins said. "We need to do a lot."

Alec Burks has proven to be a steal on the recruiting trail for Bzdelik. The freshman from Grandview, Mo., has made the transition to Division I basketball look pretty easy and has the skills to break Richard Roby's all-time scoring record at CU.

Burks is averaging 16.1 points and 4.3 rebounds per game. The 6-6 shooting guard has averaged 20.5 points in the team's two true road games at Oregon State and CSU.

"I think we need to work on defensive rebounding and picking the intensity up the whole game," Burks said. "If we do that, I think we can be a great team."

Burks, despite taking some acrobatic shots in the paint, is third in the Big 12 in field goal percentage (57.4 percent).

The Buffs have also done a good job of taking care of business on their home court. CU is 5-0 at the Coors Events Center with an average margin of victory of 18.8 points.

Bzdelik's team still has three non-conference games in Boulder — against Cal State Northridge, Yale and Miami (Ohio) — and needs to win them all to build some momentum for Big 12 play.

The bad

One of the keys to the season is for sophomores Nate Tomlinson and Austin Dufault to make the kind of jump in their second year in the program that Higgins did last season.

So far that hasn't happened.

Tomlinson, a starter as a freshman, is averaging 6.5 points and 3.3 rebounds per game off the bench. The 6-3 point guard does have 44 assists and only 19 turnovers, but he had a costly turnover in crunch time against Gonzaga and missed two key free throws in the final minute at Oregon State.

The loss of promising freshman Shannon Sharpe, an athletic point guard who can defend, to a knee injury before the season has probably already cost CU a win or two.

Dufault is averaging a team-high 4.4 rebounds but has not been aggressive at all on the offensive end, averaging just 7.8 points per game. Bzdelik needs the 6-9 forward to average double figures in scoring and to play better defense without fouling.

Marcus Relphorde has been wildly inconsistent and is clearly adjusting to Division I basketball after a year in junior college. The versatile 6-7 forward is averaging 9.4 points per game but only shooting 34.1 percent from the field.

The Buffs need Relphorde, Dufault and Tomlinson to play at a much higher level if they're going to climb out of the Big 12 basement this season.

Dwight Thorne, CU's second-leading scorer last season, is only averaging 7.4 points per game. But the team's only senior is playing fewer minutes and is happy to be more of a role player if it will help him leave the program with a winning season.

The Ugly

The Buffs have lost 20 consecutive road games against Division I opponents. The visitors from Boulder clearly let the vocal CSU student body have an impact in Fort Collins.

"That's part of basketball, you shouldn't be demoralized by that. You should be mature enough to handle those situations," Higgins said. "That's another thing we didn't do (against CSU), keep our poise."

CU let Oregon State off the hook with a poor defensive effort and simply didn't play as hard as the rival Rams. Defense and effort are two things the Buffs can actually control.

Entering Saturday's games, CU was ranked last in the Big 12 in:

- Scoring defense, allowing 70.2 points per game.
- Scoring margin, at +8.1 (78.3 ppg).

- Field goal percentage defense, allowing opponents to shoot 43.9 percent.
- 3-point field goal percentage defense (36.7 percent)
- Rebounding (30.7 rpg) and offensive rebounding (8.10 rpg).
- Blocked shots (2.40 bpg).

Despite all of the above, the Buffs would probably be satisfied with winning six out of every 10 games throughout the season. That would give them an 18-12 record entering the Big 12 Tournament.

Of course, the schedule is going to get much more difficult and includes nine more road trips.

"(Last year) we set a record for best GPA in Colorado men's basketball history. Our citizenship is awesome. The culture's in place," Bzdelik said before the season tipped off. "I understand that we can do all these wonderful things, but the bottom-line is to win and we've got to start turning the corner. I've been around a long time and I understand what's expected of me."

[Close Window](#)[Send To Printer](#)