

CU men's basketball team looks for consistency

Colorado struggling on defense in second half of most losses

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Kansas is off to a 9-0 start and ranked No. 1 in the nation.

And Bill Self isn't happy or satisfied with his team.

"I'm not displeased," KU's head coach said during this week's media teleconference. "But I really feel there's another step for us to take. ...

"The key when you know that you're not as good as you're going to be is to win some games and get some confidence. And that's what some teams in our league have done."

At the other end of the Big 12 spectrum is Colorado. The Buffs enter the holiday break with a 6-4 record and ranked 241st in RPI as of Wednesday.

Jeff Bzdelik also believes his team is capable of getting better as the season progresses. Although CU's young lineup hasn't been able to win as many games so far as the coach would have liked, there is still an air of confidence at the Coors Events Center.

That's because the results are all about the Buffs. The team knows what it has done well in victory and poor in defeat.

"In our wins there is a better quality of play, regardless of the opponent," Bzdelik said. "We are sharing the ball better. We're defending better. We're rebounding better. That's where we need to improve upon is sustaining the unselfishness, the energy, the intensity with our approach to the game. And, obviously, we need to defend better."

During a team meeting this week, Bzdelik gave his players something to think about between final exams. He presented the Buffs with these facts from the four defeats:

In the 76-72 loss to Gonzaga, a game CU led by 15 points in the first half, the Buffs allowed the Zags to shoot 54 percent from the field in the second half and attempt 37 free throws.

In the 91-87 overtime loss to Arizona, the Buffs allowed the Wildcats to shoot 55 percent in the second half, 100 percent in overtime and 58.3 percent (14-for-24) from 3-point distance.

In the 74-69 loss at Oregon State, the Buffs allowed the Beavers to shoot 59 in the second half, 51 percent for the game and attempt 34 free throws.

In the 77-62 loss at Colorado State, the Buffs allowed the Rams to shoot 48 percent in the first half, score 16 second-chance points and attempt 39 free throws.

CU has more assists (102) than turnovers (71) in the six wins and more turnovers (52) than assists (45) in the four losses.

CU has had four players score in double figures in the six wins and only two players score in double figures in the four losses.

"We've gotten into this trap of trying to outscore people," Bzdelik said. "And against Colorado State we stopped sharing the ball and making the extra pass to create and manufacture a good shot. Consequently, we hit a wall offensively. When you're not defending you get what we saw."

You can guess what the Buffs have been working on in practice -- defense, rebounding and ball movement.

Individually, Cory Higgins has averaged 20.5 points and 30 minutes in CU's wins. The junior guard has scored less (18.5 points) and played more (37 minutes) in the losses.

Marcus Relphorde has epitomized the Buffs' inconsistency. The talented point-forward has averaged 10.3 points and 3.5 rebounds in the wins and 8.0 points with a total of six defensive rebounds in the four losses.

Self pointed out that the time between the end of final exams and the beginning of the spring semester is the last chance for coaches to change and improve their teams in practice before the focus becomes on scouting and preparing for Big 12 foes next month.

The Buffs need to improve more before the Jan. 9 opener at Texas than anyone to achieve the team goal of a winning season.

"It's going to be big," Austin Dufault said of the time players and coaches will be able to spend together on the practice court when the rest of the students leave for break.

"We have some time off for guys to get healthy again. That's definitely going to help me. I'm kind of banged up right now. It will be good for us all to work on the stuff we've been struggling on and really focus on ourselves instead of an opponent."

CU returns to action on Dec. 22 against Cal State Northridge at the Coors Events Center.

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