

Buffaloes eager to return to court

Yale on Tuesday will be second game in 18 days for Colorado

By Ryan Thorburn Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

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Practice makes perfect.

Or as close to perfect as Colorado basketball can get.

Between Dec. 11 and this Tuesday's game against Yale at the Coors Events Center, the Buffs will have played just one game in 18 days.

Jeff Bzdelik's team, however, has arguably never looked better than it did during the 92-58 thrashing of Cal State Northridge six nights ago.

"That's a good question," senior guard Dwight Thorne said when asked if it was CU's best game of the season. "I'll have to think about it, but for now I'd say yes."

The Buffs (7-4) played well during the Maui Invitational but lost heartbreakers to Gonzaga (76-72) and Arizona (91-87 in overtime).

One of the most refreshing aspects of this season has been the young team's ability to take care of business at home against inferior opponents.

CU is now 6-0 at the Coors Events Center with lopsided wins over Arkansas-Pine Bluff (88-72), Coppin State (82-58), Texas Southern (88-77), San Francisco (78-54) and Colorado Christian (84-65).

Bzdelik was "pleased" after watching the Buffs finish with 27 assists on 32 made baskets with five different players scoring in double figures against the Matadors, the defending Big West champions who were in the NCAA Tournament last season.

"I like it in a sense," Bzdelik said of having so many practices and so few games during this holiday stretch. "The good part about it is we're able to really step back and really work hard in the areas that we haven't been good at."

After getting three days off for Christmas the Buffs have been back on the practice court since Sunday night working on rebounding and other deficiencies as Big 12 play looms.

CU had season-highs in points, made 3-pointers (10) and steals (15) against Cal State Northridge. The Buffs, however, remain last among Big 12 teams in rebounding and rebounding margin.

"That's what we have utilized this time for over the past several days is to work on our defensive positioning," Bzdelik said. "You may be a step slow, but you can be a step ahead in your mind and be in the proper spot, and that's what you have got to do."

"Being in the proper position puts you in a position to be able to help effectively and take those charges and things that we need to do to protect the rim."

During a break in the action against Cal State Northridge when it was clear that the Buffs were going to prevail, a member of CU's athletic department noted that the difference between 7-4 and 8-3 seemed large.

The Buffs, of course, lost their fourth game of the season by 15 points at Colorado State before mauling the Matadors.

But the humbling defeat in Fort Collins could end up being a blessing in disguise. Since that night CU's players have been

focused in practice and determined to get better before the conference season begins on Jan. 9 at Texas.

"Against CSU we drove in (the paint) and we were selfish. We were able to get by the first defender when they had two defenders waiting for us; we tried to force up shots one-on-three or one-on-two," Bzdelik said. "When you have two people on you that means that someone else is open. We had open people all over the place, but we weren't very team oriented that day.

"Give Colorado State credit, but I am just saying that we learned a lesson from that. We need to keep sharing because when we do have a chance to knock down shots, we shoot the ball pretty well."

The Buffs enter Tuesday's game with five players averaging over eight points per game -- Cory Higgins (19.2), Alec Burks (15.9), Marcus Relphorde (9.7), Dwight Thorne (8.6) and Austin Dufault (8.2).

"Now it's basketball time," Thorne said, noting that it's easier to focus with finals over and classes not set to begin until Jan. 11. "That's what we're doing."

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