

Bufs face familiar style

Colorado, Oregon State both feature Princeton offense

By Ryan Thorburn Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

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CORVALLIS, Ore. -- President Barack Obama will be rooting against the Bufs tonight.

Colorado's quest to end an 18-game road losing streak against Division I opponents begins against Oregon State as part of the Big 12/Pac-10 Hardwood Series.

The nationally televised game (FSN), which the Oval Office will be keeping tabs on, is scheduled to tip off just after 9 p.m.

Second-year Beavers head coach Craig Robinson is Michelle Obama's brother. The president and first lady attended Oregon State's 64-57 victory at George Washington last Saturday, and the team was given a private tour of the White House during the trip to Washington D.C.

Now, for one night, the Bufs (5-2) have the attention of the Beavers (2-3) and the country's most powerful hoops fan.

"You have to prove now that you're a better team because you have a pretty good Colorado team coming in here," Robinson said during a press conference earlier this week. "They have some losses but were in every game against some really good teams.

"It will be a very interesting game. Their style of play is similar to ours. They run some similar forms of the type of offense we run, and I think it will be a chess-match of a game from that standpoint."

Robinson was the Ivy League's player of the year at Princeton in 1982 and 1983, playing for legendary coach Pete Carril. Prior to taking the job at Oregon State last season, Robinson served as an assistant under former Princeton head coach Bill Carmody at Northwestern.

CU head coach Jeff Bzdelik, who enjoyed great success running a Princeton-style offense at Air Force, finally has the Bufs executing the precision cutting and passing schemes to near perfection.

"With Craig being one of the original Princeton group they run a lot of different things, maybe because there's parts of it they have that a lot of other people don't," said CU associate head coach Steve McClain, who had some classic battles as head coach of Wyoming against Joe Scott's (another former Princeton player and head coach) and Bzdelik's Air Force teams over the years. "But a lot of it is very similar to what we run."

The Beavers experienced a remarkable resurgence under Robinson last season, finishing 18-18 overall, including winning the College Basketball Invitational postseason tournament. During the 2007-08 campaign, Oregon State suffered through an 0-18 record in Pac-10 play.

Robinson was 7-11 in the conference last season, and the Beavers were picked to finish fifth in the preseason Pac-10 media poll this year.

"This year we're talking about making the NCAA Tournament and finishing in the top half of the league, real formidable goals but achievable goals," Robinson told the Oregonian before the season tipped off. "There is the air of expectation."

So far, the Beavers are not living up to the hype with head-scratching losses to Texas A&M Corpus Christi and Sacramento State on the non-conference resume. Oregon State is also 0-1 against the Big 12 this season with a loss at Texas Tech.

Meanwhile, the Bufs — picked to finish last in the Big 12 by Bzdelik's peers — earned some respect during heartbreaking losses against Gonzaga and Arizona at the EA Sports Maui Invitational last week.

According to the NCAA, CU's win over host Chaminade in the tournament finale counts as a true road win, albeit against a Division II foe.

"That's another area where we have to prove to people that we're making strides," Cory Higgins said of winning outside of Boulder. "It's going to be a huge game for us. We have a lot to prove."

Higgins scored 22 points on 9-for-12 shooting during CU's methodical 78-54 victory over San Francisco on Tuesday. The junior guard is third in the Big 12 in scoring (20.7 ppg) and field goal percentage (58.3 percent).

"We need to get off to another good start. We need to keep a close watch on Cory Higgins, who will probably be an NBA player," Robinson said. "We cannot let him go crazy on us and we have to continue to be good on the boards like we have been."

CU is 0-2 in the Big 12/Pac-10 Hardwood Series, losing a home-and-home set with Stanford the past two seasons.

"I think we can play with anybody," Buffs newcomer Marcus Relphorde said. "I know (the Buffs) had a lot of close games last year they weren't able to pull out, but I feel like instead of just playing it close, now the mentality is to win."

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Bufs face celebrity coach in Big 12/Pac-10 Hardwood Series

CU heads to Corvallis in search of sixth win

By David Starcer on December 4, 2009

Fresh off a home win against San Francisco, the Colorado Buffaloes men's basketball team heads west for the 2009 Big 12/Pac-10 Hardwood Series.

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Their opponent: the 2-3 Oregon State Beavers, a team whose national recognition comes from their head coach, but in an unusual way. Tip-off is 9 p.m. MST Friday.

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Craig Robinson, the former head coach at Brown University, is in his second year at Oregon State. Robinson is the older brother of first lady Michelle Obama, which makes U.S. President Barack Obama his brother-in-law.

However, Robinson is more than just a famous sibling as he guided Oregon State to 18 wins last year after the Beavers went 0-18 in the Pac-10 Conference two seasons ago. After a successful first season, expectations are high in Corvallis, Ore. as the Beavers are picked to finish fifth in the Pac-10.

So far, they are off to a rocky start, losing at home to Sacramento State and dropping their season-opener to Texas A&M Corpus-Christi by 24 points. Despite their recent setbacks, however, the Bufs agree they are not a team to be overlooked.

"They're going to be a tough team to play," senior guard Dwight Thorne II said. "They like to slow it down on offense and play tough defense. We haven't seen much of (their style of play)."

The style of play Thorne is alluding to is the fact the Beavers are averaging 58.4 points a contest and allowing 60 per game, a pace a little different than CU's. Associate head coach Steve McClain doesn't want CU falling into their opponent's trap.

"They're a team that likes the score in the 50s or 60s, and we want it in the 70s or 80s," McClain said. "Keeping the pace of the game at a high-tempo is going to be key."



Last season, guard Dwight Thorne II hit five 3-pointers against visiting Nebraska, though the Buffs lost 55-53. Thorne says the team is confident and ready for the Big 12/Pac-10 Hardwood Series after the Maui Invitational. (CU Independent file/Molly Maher)

Colorado enters the contest at 5-2, a very respectable mark, but they said they know they let a few games slip away at the Maui Invitational last week. Although their final tournament game against Chaminade was technically a road win, breaking an 18-game skid, everyone realizes the importance of breaking through away from Boulder.

"We are getting closer and closer to going on the road and getting a win," McClain said. "There's a whole different confidence with these kids and it's growing with each passing game."

Thorne added, "(Maui) gave us a confidence we haven't had before."

The Buffs' lone senior knows how big a win the upcoming game could be for the season. Despite his recent scoring troubles, he's ready to lead the team any way he can.

"I'm approaching every game the same way," Thorne said. "Anything I can do on either side of the floor to get us a win, I'm going to do."

McClain reiterated Thorne's sentiment and is glad the players are heeding the coaches' advice.

"We've been telling these guys for a while, the next game is the most important and that's where the focus needs to be," McClain said. "Another great opponent with a great crowd and a great atmosphere is just another opportunity for this team."

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