

CU's Knutson hopes to make return to court vs. Colorado Christian

Junior missed six of eight games this season with hip injury

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Right now it's hard to take Cory Higgins and Alec Burks off the floor.

Higgins leads Colorado in scoring (20 ppg.) while shooting 56.3 percent from the field and 92.9 percent from the foul line. The junior guard is one of the best and most complete players in the Big 12.

Burks is averaging 16.0 points per game and led the way with 19 points and a career-high nine rebounds during a 74-69 loss at Oregon State last Friday. The 6-foot-6 freshman is also second on the team in rebounding (4.3 rpg) and is shooting 55.6 percent from the field.

Higgins played 39 minutes and Burks was on the court for 36 minutes in Corvallis, but the Buffs ran out of gas and were outscored 10-2 in the final two minutes.

"In hindsight, I think Alec and Cory played way too many minutes," CU coach Jeff Bzdelik said after Sunday's practice. "But the way the game was and what their strengths are, I left them out there. That's not the reason we didn't win the game."

The Buffs (5-3) lost because they didn't play well on defense, gave up some costly offensive rebounds and sent the Beavers to the foul line 34 times.

Bzdelik should have an opportunity to expand the rotation tonight when CU hosts Colorado Christian at the Coors Events Center (7 p.m., no television).

Levi Knutson, now healthy after missing the start of the season with a hip injury, is eager to pull the warm-ups off with only 11 minutes of action through eight games.

"I come ready to play every game and I'll be ready to go. I expect to play every game," Knutson said. "We need to improve. We have a lot to work on. Obviously, we struggled to get some stops against Oregon State. We have to work on helping each other out on defense and keeping the ball in front of us. We struggled with that."

Knutson has provided the Buffs with a spark off the bench in previous seasons by coming up with timely offensive rebounds, loose balls and 3-pointers.

"I think everybody needs to bring that on defense," Knutson said. "If it's not all five guys getting it done on the defensive end, it's going to break down."

CU continues to be thin in the post. Trent Beckley remains out of action indefinitely due to illness and promising freshman Shane Harris-Tunks -- who had two points and four rebounds in 15 minutes against Oregon State -- had his shooting hand wrapped in ice after injuring it during Sunday's practice.

Trey Eckloff, who had his moments last season against All-Big 12 players like Blake Griffin and Cole Aldrich, has been the forgotten big man on the end of the bench.

So why isn't the 6-10 sophomore from Cherry Creek playing?

"Players determine playing time by the way they practice," Bzdelik said.

Eckloff, who has logged a total of 12 minutes this season, is determined to practice his way into the rotation this week. The Buffs also play at Colorado State on Thursday before a 12-day stretch without a game.

"I think every week could be the week. I've just got to show it in practice," Eckloff said. "I've got to keep working hard. And when I get my chance and get in there I've got to show that I can do it."

All three CU losses this season have been by single-digits, with an average margin of 4.3 points. The Buffs have had 23 single-digit losses since Bzdelik was hired.

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