

Bufs set to return to scene of last road win

Colorado won at Colorado State on Dec. 22, 2007

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How badly does Colorado need a true road victory?

Jeff Bzdelik, in a good mood after the Bufs improved to 5-0 at the Coors Events Center, laughed at the question.

"We need to win on our own court, any court, the playground," Bzdelik said. "Winning anywhere is good."

When rebuilding a program, the first order of business is to establish a home-court advantage. In Bzdelik's third season, CU is finally starting to accomplish this important task with some easy early-season wins over lesser opponents.

The Bufs' average margin of victory at home -- against Arkansas-Pine Bluff, Coppin State, Texas Southern, San Francisco and Colorado Christian -- is 18.8 points.

"We're just a better team in general," junior guard Levi Knutson said after Monday's 84-65 victory over Colorado Christian, a game CU led by 30 points before allowing the Cougars to cut the deficit to 10 points. "That's where we need to continue to grow is playing all 40 minutes. We're getting there but we're not there yet. I think no matter who we're playing we need to put together all 40, especially when we play on the road in the Big 12.

"And at Colorado State, too. It's a rivalry game and they're going to be ready for us."

The Bufs (6-3) will be looking to snap a 19-game road losing streak against Division I foes when they face Colorado State on Thursday night.

CU's last true road victory of note? Ironically, a 73-70 triumph over the Rams at Moby Arena on Dec. 22, 2007.

In the two years since that win, Bzdelik's team has had some close calls -- a 69-67 loss at Texas, a 64-63 loss at Oklahoma State and even a 66-61 loss at Kansas -- against nationally ranked teams.

The NCAA generously ruled that CU's victory over Chaminade (a Division II school) at the EA Sports Maui Invitational last month was a road victory.

But for the most part, the Buffaloes are roadkill when they wander outside of Boulder.

"I think we need to get that off our chest and show everybody we can win on the road," Cory Higgins said.

Under Bzdelik, CU is 3-21 in true road games, including an 0-16 record on Big 12 trips.

The good news is Bzdelik, a former Air Force head coach, is 13-0 all-time against opponents from the state of Colorado. That includes a 5-0 record against the Rams, as well as road wins at Air Force and Denver during his first season in Boulder.

"We do need to bring it on the road and it's going to be hard at Colorado State. It's going to be a great atmosphere, but I think we're ready for it," Knutson said. "We want to make a statement that we're the best team in the state. Not only that, we want to be up there in the Big 12, which is another step up.

"But it starts with a game like Colorado State. They're a tough, scrappy team. We're going to have to come to play. I give them a lot of respect."

The Rams (5-3) are 3-0 at Moby Arena this season with wins over Mayville State (N.D.), San Francisco and Denver. CSU head coach Tim Miles is just 21-50 in his third season, including a 4-28 record in Mountain West Conference play.

The Buffs allowed quality wins to slip away against Gonzaga and Arizona in Maui and let Oregon State off the hook in Corvallis last Friday. This young team really needs to leave Fort Collins victorious to make a statement that they're serious about taking a step forward this season.

"It's always big. They're an in-state rival," Higgins said of the CU-CSU game. "Everybody's going to be hyped up for it and we definitely need to come out with that win."

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