

Offense begins to sputter for Buffs

Balanced attack key to Colorado's success in Big 12

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MANHATTAN, Kan. -- At times the Buffs have been among the best shooting teams in the country this season.

That includes impressive performances in a handful of games against ranked opponents.

Colorado shot 53.1 percent from the field and scored 72 points against Gonzaga, shot 53.6 percent with 86 points at Texas, shot 47.3 percent with four players in double figures during the 78-71 victory over Baylor.

But in the last two outings Jeff Bzdelik's team shot itself in the Nike high top.

CU was 20-for-56 (35.7 percent) from the field during the 84-66 loss to Missouri and 19-for-49 from the field during Saturday's 68-51 loss to No. 9 Kansas State.

Part of the problem has been the caliber of defenses the Buffs have been facing of late. Mizzou and K-State combined to force CU into 38 turnovers that led to 41 points.

The coaches and players say the offense is working fine, it's just a matter of knocking down open jumpers and finishing stronger in the paint.

"We have to make shots. We had some open shots and they didn't go down. That's just players being players," Bzdelik said after CU made just nine of 27 shots in the second half at Bramlage Coliseum while allowing the Wildcats to make 14 of 25 shots. "We did have some open looks and some free throws we left on the board. We got the ball to the rim and we have to finish those."

It certainly didn't help that Marcus Relphorde, the team's third leading scorer at 10.4 points per game, was held out due to knee tendinitis.

"It hurt a lot. He's a matchup problem, Mr. Versatility," Alec Burks said of Relphorde. "Without him we didn't have the versatility we usually have. He can shoot and go inside. We missed that."

Two of CU's starting five -- Nate Tomlinson and Trey Eckloff -- didn't even take a shot on Saturday. Austin Dufault was just 1-for-4 from the field with three points.

Per usual, Cory Higgins (21 points on 6-for-15 shooting) and Burks (17 points on 7-for-16 shooting) did all of the heavy lifting.

The Buffs' only chance to win Big 12 games is to have a balanced attack.

CU had three players score in double figures in the win over Nebraska, the one-point loss at Iowa State and the overtime loss to No. 1 Kansas.

"We need to be more aggressive in our offense," Higgins said. "How it used to be is we were looking to score the ball, and now we're just running offense just to run it. That's causing us a lot of problems."

The Buffs (11-13, 2-8) host a surprisingly mediocre Oklahoma team on Wednesday at the Coors Events Center. The Sooners (13-11, 4-6) are also dealing with injuries, illness and a lack of confidence on the road.

"We just need to do whatever we can to wash the tough loss at Iowa State, the tough loss against Kansas and these last

couple games out of our system," Bzdelik said. "But I'm sure Oklahoma feels the same way. It's another Big 12 battle. We just need to be mentally and physically prepared."

In Big 12 games, CU is now averaging 70.4 points per game, which puts them in a tie with Texas A&M for eighth in scoring offense.

Bzdelik's team was ranked No. 1 nationally in free throw percentage earlier in the season but is fourth in the Big 12 in conference games (72.9 percent).

And the Buffs are shooting only 43.6 percent from the field in Big 12 play, which ranks seventh.

These are troubling numbers considering the offense is the strength of the team and the cause for concern opposing coaches usually have when preparing for Bzdelik's system, which is fun to watch and difficult for anyone to stop when executed at a high level.

CU is 11th in scoring defense (76.6 ppg), last in field goal percentage defense (47.3 percent) and last in rebounding (27.8 rpg).

"I feel like we have to play harder and stop making turnovers. If we can cut down on those and execute our offense we can play with anybody," Burks said. "We need to go back to work and be ready for OU."

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