



Cory Higgins recorded his fourth career 30-point effort.
Photo Courtesy: CUBuffs.com



02/27/2010 B.G. Brooks, Contributing Editor

Higgins, Crawford Push CU Past Iowa State

BOULDER - In a basketball season where "getting over the hump" has been a mountainous challenge, the Colorado men's team might have begun a timely ascent on Saturday.

The Buffaloes -- in order -- won a close game, defeated a team they were rubbing shoulders with in the Big 12 Conference standings, and possibly put themselves in position for a higher seed in the league's postseason tournament. In an unforgiving league, progress sometimes has come in small steps for the Buffs -- but they're taking them.

With junior Cory Higgins scoring a season-high 33 points, including a pair of clutch free throws with 6.7 seconds to play, CU held off Iowa State 75-72 at the Coors Events Center. The win avenged a 64-63

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loss to the Cyclones on Jan. 30 in Ames, Iowa.

"Our team has to learn how to win - and I hope (today) was a big step toward that," CU coach Jeff Bzdelik said. "I'm extremely proud of our team effort . . . it was a collective effort."

How collective? In addition to Higgins' season-best total, three of his teammates reached double figures - Marcus Relphorde (12), Alec Burks (11) and Casey Crawford (10).

Crawford, who entered the game averaging 4.0 points a game, hit consecutive clutch three-pointers in the second half, scored a critical put-back after snaring an offensive rebound and was the key element in CU's bench outscoring ISU's 13-9.

"Casey helped spread their defense," Bzdelik said of Crawford's long-range shooting, but Iowa State coach Greg McDermott was more effusive. He called Crawford "the difference in the game. We were trying to provide help on some of their back cuts and trying to make it difficult for Burks and Higgins as much as we could. We had to give up something and Casey Crawford was just that."

Bzdelik also liked his team's assists (17), low turnover total (9), field goal percentage (55.1) and clutch free-throw shooting (12-of-12, including six-for-six in the final 1:16 from Burks and Higgins).

And don't overlook the Buffs' effort; Bzdelik certainly didn't. "We scrapped our way to a great win for us," he said. "I'm proud of that."

Higgins, whose previous season high was 30 against Kansas State, scored 12 of his total in the first half but helped the Buffs stay afloat throughout.

In an 8-minute stretch in the second half, he scored 15 of CU's 17 points as the Buffs (13-15, 4-10) overtook the Cyclones (14-15, 4-10) at the 9:05 mark and never allowed them to regain the lead.

Higgins, scoring 30-plus points for the fourth time in his career and moving into 12th place on the school's all-time scoring list, said he began the game "just wanting to attack the basket . . . but when my shots started falling, yeah, it felt good."

He called the victory "huge for us; we're still a growing team. Everybody just made plays down the stretch."

McDermott said Higgins "was very efficient with his game. He scored 33 points on 15 shots. He takes good care of the ball and makes good decisions. Some of his shots were challenged and some we were a little late on."

Until the first half's final 51/2 minutes, the Buffs appeared somewhat in control, leading by as many as eight points (23-15) before the Cyclones made a move.

Working mostly inside with 6-foot-10 Craig Brackins, 6-9 LaRon Dendy and 6-7 Marquis Gilstrap, ISU overtook CU and went up 37-31 - the visitors' largest first-half advantage - with 45 seconds left before the break.

But in the final 45, the Buffs limited the Cyclones to a Gilstrap free throw and got a basket by Higgins and trey from Relphorde to close to within 38-36 at intermission.

It was a much-needed surge, but the halftime deficit didn't bode well for the Buffs; entering the game they were 1-8 in Big 12 play when trailing at the half.

ISU, coming to Boulder with one Big 12 road win (56-53 at Nebraska), outscored CU 8-4 to open the second half and reestablish a six-point (46-40) advantage.

Then, Higgins asserted himself. He cut that deficit in half with a three-pointer from the left corner with 15:58 to play, made a pair of free throws just over a minute later, and followed them with a trey from the top of the key.

The Buffs were down 49-48 with 13:36 remaining. But they didn't score again until - who else? - Higgins hit a jumper at the 10:00 mark, followed by a - who else, Part II? - Higgins trey that gave CU its first lead (53-52) since 27-25.

A couple of minutes later, Crawford entered the game and scored 10 of his team's next 12 points. His final basket came on a put-back following one of the Buffs' *three* offensive rebounds (the Cyclones had 18).

Bzdelik admitted that kind of imbalance normally doesn't occur in a win, and Crawford said his orders were to "grab a rebound . . . (Bzdelik) didn't care how - just get it. I was able to sneak in there, get one and put it back.

"My role is to come off the bench when coach needs me. It's difficult sometimes, but it's (nice) to give a little boost and help the team get the 'W.' I just follow orders and play the best I can."

Over the final 9:05, ISU managed three ties and pulled to 71-70 on Justin Hamilton's three-point play with 54.5 seconds remaining.

But Burks, who has been in double figures this season in every game he's finished, and Higgins added four free throws in the final 23.6 and Diante Garrett missed a trey at the buzzer, delivering CU the critical win.

McDermott said his team "needed a big stop there at the end and we didn't get it. Offensively, we executed well enough and even on the last play, (Brackins) set a good screen. We got (Garrett) a little bit of a look . . . they just locked onto our shooters in the corners."

The Buffs travel to Nebraska on Tuesday (6 p.m., FSN Rocky Mountain) before closing out the regular season against Texas Tech on Saturday, March 6 (2 p.m., Altitude).

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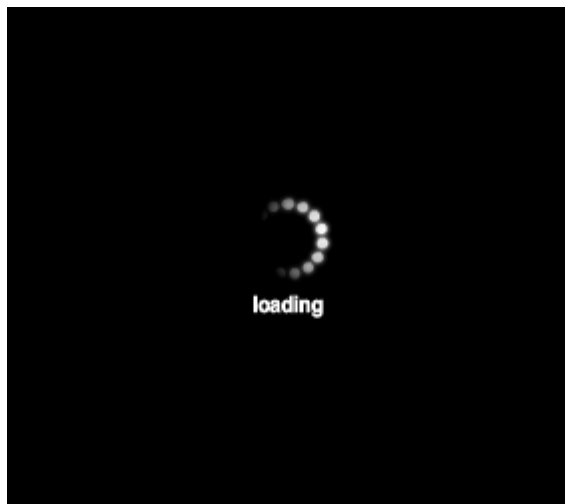
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Higgins heats up to lead CU Buff men over Cyclones

By **Ryan Thorburn** Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 02/27/2010 02:49:49 PM MST



In the spirit of the Oscars this week ...

Cory Higgins wins for best man in a leading role while Casey Crawford takes home the prize for best supporting actor.

Higgins scored 33 points on 12-for-15 shooting to carry the Buffs for most of the afternoon, and Crawford scored 10 points during crunch time to make sure Colorado completed the Hollywood ending with a 75-72 victory over Iowa State on Saturday at the Coors Events Center.

The performances earned the Buffs (13-15, 4-10) a much-needed win and a free trip to Lincoln as the program attempts to claw its way back to .500 before the Big 12 Tournament in Kansas City.

"We want to win out and today was the first step of that," Higgins said. "We accomplished our first goal today. Now we have to focus on Nebraska."

CU plays Nebraska on Tuesday and hosts Texas Tech in the home finale next Saturday. The last-place Huskers beat the Red Raiders 83-79 in double overtime on Saturday.

That means Jeff Bzdelik's team, picked to finish last in the preseason coaches poll, is now tied with Oklahoma (13-15, 4-10) and Texas Tech (16-12, 4-10) for eighth.

"We're making progress," Bzdelik said. "Probably not as fast as everyone wants, slow but steady. We just need to keep recruiting and keep developing and keep believing."

"Because it is closer than what you think."

The Buffs have lost seven games by single-digits this season, including a 64-63 punch-to-the-gut in Ames when a Marcus Relporthe shot at the buzzer rimmed out.

Higgins would not be denied this time.

After the Cyclones took a 46-40 lead in the second half, the junior guard scored CU's next 13 points and gave the home team a 53-52 lead on a 3-pointer with 9:10 remaining.

"We were starting to get a little stagnant on offense. I wasn't just trying to score, I was trying to attack," said Higgins, who had 21 points in the second half. "As a team, we just needed to be more aggressive."

Especially on the glass. Iowa State out-rebounded the Buffs 37-31 with an 18-3 edge in offensive boards.

CU did have a big man come up huge, however, as Crawford came off the bench and splashed a pair of 3-pointers to give his team a 63-59 lead. The 6-9 junior even grabbed an offensive rebound and scored to make the score 69-65 with 2:28 remaining.

"My man, I think he was boxing out in the middle and I was able to sneak in there and put one back real quick," said Crawford, who had three rebounds in just 12 minutes of action. "I was kind of surprised I got it because they're a pretty

good defensive rebounding team."

Alec Burks, who finished with 11 points, four assists and one turnover, made four free throws in the final 1:16 to keep Iowa State in catch-up mode.

And after a field goal by Marquis Gilstrap, who led Iowa State with 26 points on 10-for-16 shooting, cut his team's deficit to 73-72 with 7.8 seconds left, Higgins swished a pair of free throws.

Diante Garrett missed a 3-pointer as time expired on the Cyclones (14-15, 3-11).

"We're still a growing team and to grind one of these wins out is huge for us," Higgins said. "Everybody made big plays down the stretch. It was a great team effort."

The Buffs got off to a hot start, knocking down nine of their first 11 shots, and led 23-15 after back-to-back 3-pointers by Relphorde and Dwight Thorne.

Gilstrap scored Iowa State's next seven points, and Garrett tied the score 25-25 with a 3-pointer with 6:38 left in the half.

The Cyclones were seemingly in control from that point and took a 37-31 lead on an emphatic dunk by Craig Brackins with 51.4 seconds remaining.

The Buffs grabbed the momentum back with a basket by Higgins and a deep try by Relphorde to cut the deficit to 38-36 at the intermission.

"It feels great to get over that hump because we've had some close games," said Burks, who injured his left knee two minutes into the first meeting with Iowa State and did not return. "It feels good to get that win."

CU shot 55.1 percent from the field and went 12-for-12 to the line to make up for the Cyclones' 36-26 scoring edge in the paint and 17-6 edge in second-chance points.

Higgins also led CU with six rebounds and had four assists and no turnovers in 39 minutes. Crawford outscored Iowa State's thin bench 10-9.

"Throughout the whole game (Higgins) really just kept us going. As the game went on we figured out their defense and we were able to make shots and spread them and drive them," Bzdelik said. "Casey really contributed to this win from the standpoint that he helped spread that defense. They gave him some air space, and he was able to knock down some shots and then they had to expand and get out on him. That enabled us to drive this team and get to the free throw line."

Colorado 75, Iowa State 72

IOWA ST. (72)

FG FT Reb

Min M-A M-A O-T A PF PTS

Gilstrap 37 10-16 4-8 6-7 4 4 26

Brackins 37 6-16 0-0 3-9 0 0 13

Hamilton 16 5-5 1-3 3-5 0 2 11

Garrett 37 4-9 2-2 0-2 2 2 11

Chstphsn 33 0-7 2-2 0-3 3 3 2

Buckley 5 0-0 0-0 0-0 1 3 0

Colvin 14 0-4 0-0 0-0 0 0 0

Dendy 21 3-5 3-6 5-9 0 3 9

Totals 200 28-62 12-21 18-37 10 17 72

Percentages: FG .452, FT .571.

3-Point Goals: 4-15, .267 (Gilstrap 2-3, Garrett 1-2, Brackins 1-3, Colvin 0-2, Christopherson 0-5).

Team Rebounds: 2.

Blocked Shots: 4 (Brackins 2, Dendy, Gilstrap).

Turnovers: 7 (Gilstrap 2, Garrett, Dendy, Hamilton, Brackins, Christopherson).

Steals: 5 (Garrett 2, Hamilton 2, Gilstrap).

Technical Fouls: None.

COLORADO (75)

FG FT Reb

Min M-A M-A O-T A PF PTS

Dufault 19 2-4 0-0 0-3 0 2 4

Tmlinsn 32 1-4 0-0 0-3 5 3 2

Rlphord 35 4-10 2-2 1-1 2 4 12

Burks 33 3-6 4-4 1-2 4 2 11

Higgins 39 12-15 6-6 0-6 4 0 33

Thorne II 14 1-3 0-0 0-2 0 0 3

Hrs-Tnks 10 0-0 0-0 0-0 2 4 0

Knutson 3 0-0 0-0 0-0 0 0 0

Crawford 12 4-6 0-0 1-3 0 0 10

Hornbckl 3 0-1 0-0 0-1 0 1 0

Totals 200 27-49 12-12 3-21 17 16 75

Percentages: FG .551, FT 1.000.

3-Point Goals: 9-20, .450 (C.Higgins 3-4, Crawford 2-4, Relphorde 2-4, Thorne II 1-2, Burks 1-3, Dufault 0-1, Tomlinson 0-2).

Team Rebounds: 0.

Blocked Shots: 1 ([C.Higgins](#)).

Turnovers: 9 (Relphorde 4, Thorne II 2, Tomlinson, Burks, Dufault).

Steals: 4 (Relphorde 2, [C.Higgins](#), Thorne II).

Technical Fouls: None.

Iowa St. 38 34--72

Colorado 36 39--75

A -- 6,613.

Officials -- John Higgins, Terry Davis, Kevin Mathis.

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Buff 'closers' deliver down stretch

By Ryan Thorburn Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 02/28/2010 12:14:34 AM MST

When the Buffs have the lead in the second half and the clock starts to wind down they're a difficult team to beat.

That's because Colorado has a pair of dominant closers in Alec Burks and Cory Higgins, who were a combined 6-for-6 at the free throw line in the final 1:16 to slam the door on Iowa State's late comeback bid on Saturday.

The Buffs were 12-for-12 at the line for the game and shot 55.1 percent from the field (Higgins was 12-for-15 while Burks was 3-for-6) during Saturday's 75-72 victory over the Cyclones at the Coors Events Center.

"I have confidence in whoever goes to the line. We're all good free throw shooters," said Higgins, who made all six of his attempts from the stripe. "If it's me or if it's (Burks), it doesn't matter, I have confidence it's going to go in."

Burks gave CU leads of 71-67 and 73-70 after making pressure free throws, and Higgins gave the home team a three-point lead by calmly draining a pair with 6.7 seconds left.

"There is pressure, we're not going to deny that, and they're not always going to make them," Jeff Bzdelik said. "But the more you make them in these kinds of situations, the more you have success as a team in these kinds of situations, then the confidence grows."

CU entered Saturday's action ranked 6th nationally in free throw shooting (76.6 percent). Bzdelik's team improved to 10-2 when shooting 50 percent or better from the field.

The key for the Buffs is to find a way to get the lead more often so they can call on their closers to finish off wins.

"You can talk about confidence, but the only real way to acquire confidence is to achieve success," Bzdelik said.

Rebounding woes continue

Bzdelik plans to sign a couple of big men during the spring recruiting period, but that won't solve the 2009-10 Buffs' glaring problem -- rebounding.

Iowa State won the battle of the boards 37-21 with an alarming 18-3 edge in offensive rebounds.

"That's been a big thing for us all year. Our problem is we don't make first contact and they make first contact and we get moved out of the way," explained Casey Crawford, who did grab three boards in 12 minutes for the Buffs. "It pretty much just comes down to grabbing a rebound."

LaRon Dendy, who was Marcus Relphorde's roommate in junior college, was interested in CU but unable to qualify academically. The 6-9 junior grabbed nine rebounds (five offensive) for Iowa State on Saturday.

CU has been out-rebounded 18 times in the last 19 games (tied Oklahoma 33-33 on the glass).

Sophomore slumps

Austin Dufault missed a dunk and air-balled a jump shot, but Bzdelik says the slumping sophomore is still an important piece of the puzzle moving forward. He finished with four points and three rebounds in 19 minutes.

"I think Austin is just trying so hard. He really cares," Bzdelik said. "And you know what? Everybody contributes. That's what a young team really needs to understand."

Dufault and Nate Tomlinson, both starters, didn't score in Wednesday's 92-63 loss at Missouri. Tomlinson had two points on 1-for-4 shooting with five assists and one turnover against Iowa State.

Notable

CU improved to 12-3 at the Coors Events Center, the most wins at home since 2005-06 (14-2). ... Iowa State leads the all-time series 76-67 but is 2-12 in Boulder since the formation of the Big 12. ... Higgins has started all 91 games of his career and is now 12th on CU's all-time scoring list with 1,324 points.

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Woelk: Higgins steps up when Buffs need it most

By Neill Woelk Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 02/28/2010 12:07:17 AM MST

Fans who watched Saturday's 75-72 Colorado win over Iowa State will remember plenty about the stretch run that helped the Buffs secure the win.

Two huge 3-pointers and an offensive rebound and putback from Casey Crawford. Four free throws from cool-as-can-be freshman Alec Burks. And finally, two clinching free throws from Cory Higgins with just 6.7 seconds remaining.

But what they need to remember is how the Buffs got to that point.

That would be Higgins, Higgins and when all else failed, more Higgins.

The CU junior was flat-out fantastic on Saturday. He finished with a game-high 33 points, a team-high six rebounds, four assists, a steal and CU's only blocked shot of the afternoon.

And he did it when everyone else in a Buff uniform was struggling.

I know balanced scoring is good. Actually, it's great. Coaches love it. It keeps defenses honest. It keeps players involved. It means your offense is operating as it should.

But when balance goes by the wayside, you need someone like Higgins. You need your leaders to step up and assume the burden.

That's what Higgins did Saturday afternoon. The CU junior, who has proven more than happy to share the glory this year with some talented teammates, took over when there was no alternative.

Every time Iowa State threatened to put together a run and pull away from the Buffs, Higgins stopped the bleeding.

ISU up 33-29 late in the first half? Higgins answered for the Buffs. ISU up 37-31 a minute later? Higgins again.

The theme only grew stronger in the second half. When the Cyclones took a six-point lead early in the half, Higgins responded with a 3-pointer. ISU built the edge back to four -- and Higgins delivered another trey.

Finally, at the midpoint of the half, Higgins banked a shot off the glass, then added one more 3-pointer to give the Buffs their first lead since the six-minute mark of the first half, 53-52.

In that stretch, Higgins scored 15 of Colorado's first 17 points of the half.

That's what leaders do.

"I started out just trying to attack the basket," Higgins said. "My shot started to feel good, so I started shooting. ... In the second half, we started to get a little stagnant on offense so I was just trying to attack the basket."

Higgins was also incredibly efficient. He connected on 12 of his 15 field goal attempts, including a 3-for-4 day from 3-point range, and hit all six of his free-throw attempts.

Simply, Higgins kept the Buffs in the game until he could get some help. After his 10-minute, 15-point outburst, that help finally arrived, and the Buffs turned the win into a team effort.

Nate Tomlinson hit his first -- and only -- bucket of the game. Crawford delivered back-to-back huge 3-pointers, then followed up with a layup on a beautiful pass from Marcus Relphorde. And Burks, who had a "quiet" 11 points, four assists

and two rebounds, shrugged off pressure with four big free throws in the final 1:16.

But the Buffs wouldn't have been in that position had Higgins not carried them through the rough stretch.

"We didn't necessarily plan for Cory to play as well as he did," admitted ISU coach Greg McDermott. "He was very efficient with his game. He takes good care of the ball and makes good decisions."

Higgins shrugged off his effort as simply doing what needed to be done. After the game, he was already focused on what's ahead -- Tuesday's road trip to Nebraska and next Saturday's regular season finale at home vs. Texas Tech.

"We want to win out," Higgins said. "Today was just the first step of that. Now we have to focus on Nebraska."

Do what you have to do and move on. That's what leaders do.

That's Cory Higgins.

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Wednesday, April 21, 2010

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SPORTS

CU holds off Iowa State

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

POSTED: 02/28/2010 01:00:00 AM MST

BOULDER — Colorado claimed sole possession of no worse than 10th place in the Big 12 Conference standings Saturday, but Buffaloes coach Jeff Bzdelik viewed the 75-72 victory over Iowa State as much more than that.

A young Colorado squad (13-15, 4-10 Big 12) that had lost four league games by six points or fewer — including to top-10 teams Kansas and Kansas State — finally figured out how to win a tight one.

And, Bzdelik said afterward, this allowed for another opportunity to peek toward a brighter future. "We're closer than people think," he said. "With our strength of schedule and the Big 12 being the No. 1 RPI league, if you just win a couple of those (close losses), you're in the hunt for the NCAA Tournament. That's what a fine line it is. And we're starting to close that gap."

Colorado junior guard Cory Higgins made believers of everyone, scoring a season-best 33 points. As it turned out, CU needed a monster game from Higgins because freshman Alec Burks struggled to find open looks. Higgins exploded for 21 points in the second half, baffling Iowa State defenders with his slashing drives and pull-up jumpers.

Burks, a 6-foot-6 guard already catching the eyes of NBA scouts, entered the game averaging almost 17 points but was hounded by 6-7 Marquis Gilstrap, a wiry forward who led the Cyclones (14-15, 3-11) at the other end with 26 points. Burks made only three field goals and finished with 11 points.

"We were getting a little stagnant on offense," Higgins said of the second half, "but I wasn't trying to score. I was just trying to attack."

Bigger and stronger, Iowa State answered every CU spurt down the stretch, often making it look easier with power moves in the paint. But the Cyclones' size advantage couldn't help at the foul line, where Higgins and Burks combined for 6-of-6 free throws in the final 1:16, including four by Burks.

A Coors Events Center crowd of 6,613 held its breath while Higgins made his pair with 6.7 seconds to play. Iowa State still had a chance to tie the game, but a desperation 3-pointer by 6-4 Diante Garrett — with CU's 6-6 Marcus Relphorde in his face — bounced off the front of the rim as the buzzer sounded.

Iowa State grabbed 18 offensive rebounds compared with only three for Colorado, but the Buffs found a way to hang on.

"We're still a developing team, so this is huge for us," Higgins said.

Tom Kensler: 303-954-1280 or tkensler@denverpost.com



Iowa State's Diante Garrett has his shot blocked by Colorado's Alec Burks in the second half of a Big 12 Conference game Saturday in Boulder. Burks scored 11 points. (David Zalubowski, The Associated Press)

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Higgins' golden shoes and shots

Junior's 33 points leads Buffs to victory

By Tim McGinnis on February 28, 2010

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Junior guard Cory Higgins had a season high 33 points, as his golden scoring performance led CU to a 75-72 win over Iowa State.

Sporting new, aptly-colored gold kicks in front of a crowd of 6,613 during the Saturday afternoon game, Higgins wowed the Buff faithful at the Coors Events Center.

Higgins shot 12 of 15 from the field, three of four from deep and a perfect six for six from the free throw line.

After the game, Higgins said that he started feeling it in the second half.

"After a while I felt like I got into the zone," Higgins said, who scored 21 points in the second half. "I started out just trying to attack the basket. My shot felt good, so I was able to get into a rhythm."

Colorado (13-15, 4-10 Big 12) had great team shooting performance, shooting 55.1 percent from the field, 45 percent from beyond the arc and a perfect 12 for 12 from the charity stripe.

While Higgins had a great game from the field, freshman Alec Burks had an off-day, by his standards. Burks was held to 11 points, five points lower than his season average.

Alec attributed his slow offensive day to Iowa State's Marquis Gilstrap's tough defense.

"It wasn't my day today, I'm just happy we got a win," Burks said. "[Gilstrap] is a great player. Athletic, inside, outside, he can do it all."

Senior forward Marquis Gilstrap led Iowa State (14-15, 3-11 Big 12) with 26 points and added seven rebounds.

Junior forward Craig Brackins added 13 points and nine rebounds for the Cyclones, who have lost 10 of their



Driving to the hoop junior guard Cory Higgins takes charge against Iowa State During Saturday's game in the Coors Events Center. Higgins had a game high 33 points and went 12-15 from the floor. The Buffs beat the Cyclones 75-72. (CU Independent/Phil McMichael)

last 12 games.

The match started off as a back and forth game, with the Buffs and Cyclones exchanging baskets.

Higgins had an emphatic dunk at the 15:47 mark, which led to a short run for the home team. Senior Dwight Throne hit a three to give CU their biggest lead of the game at 23-15.

Iowa State had a nice run capped off by junior forward LaRon Dendy's lay-up after three offensive rebounds that gave the Cyclones back the lead at 29-27.

After a Brackins' dunk put Iowa State up 37-31 with 44 seconds left, Higgins hit a long two, and Relphorde hit a three as the clock expired, bringing CU within two going into halftime.

The second half started just like the first half, with seven lead changes throughout the game.

Junior Casey Crawford had a huge second half, knocking down two threes in a row and finished with 10 points.

"My roll is to come off the bench, and be ready when coach needs me," Crawford said.

Down the stretch, the Buffs shot 8 for 8 from the line, with Burks and Higgins making clutch free throws as their dads watched from the stands.

Gilstrap made a lay-up with 7.2 seconds left in the game to pull the Cyclones within one.

Higgins recorded his final points by knocking down two free throws, icing the game for the Buffs, wearing his golden shoes.

"I guess the shoes helped me, that's what everyone is saying," Higgins said. "I'll probably wear them next game."

Colorado will hit the road to face rival Nebraska in Lincoln before returning home to Boulder to host Texas Tech at 2 p.m. Saturday at the Coors Event Center.

Tim McGinnis is a freshman at Broomfield High School, who is writing for the CU Independent as part of a high school journalism workshop the CU Independent hosted on Feb. 26 and 27.

Contact CU Independent Staff Writer David Starcer on behalf of Tim McGinnis at david.starcerc@colorado.edu

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Longmont, Colorado
Wednesday, April 21, 2010

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CU stymies Iowa State

Coach: men's win 'a big step' forward

By Patrick Ridgell

© 2010 Longmont Times-Call

BOULDER — In its endless quest for improvement, Colorado's men's basketball program should refer frequently to aspects of Saturday's 75-72 defeat of Iowa State. Other parts they might want to forget.

The good for the Buffs came in the way they grinded past an opponent that has had its share of misfortune in 2009-10, but still has NBA-caliber talents in Marquis Gilstrap and Craig Brackins. CU also overcame a halftime deficit that grew to six points in the second half.

Cory Higgins scored a season-high 33 — one shy of his career best — on 12-for-15 shooting, and nearly-forgotten Casey Crawford scored 10 big points, all in the second half, off the Buffs' bench — and did things that surprised everyone, including Crawford.

The bad, once again, came in rebounding, where Iowa State grabbed 37 — 18 offensive — to CU's 21. Iowa State scored 17 second-chance points to CU's six.

The Cyclones nearly stole the game on the boards. But they did not. That's what mattered most.

"I think this team needs to learn how to win, and hopefully, this is a big step toward that," coach Jeff Bzdelik said. "We put ourselves in position to win. Now we need to take the next step.

"We're making progress — probably not as fast as everybody wants, but slow but steady progress. We need to keep recruiting and developing and believing. It is closer than what you think."

At 13-15, 4-10 in the Big 12, CU on Saturday won the first of three games to conclude the regular season — games that appear winnable and could put the Buffs in the Big 12 Tournament as the eighth seed. Remember, Big 12 coaches picked them to finish last in the preseason poll.

The Buffs will travel Tuesday to last-place Nebraska and take one final stab at their 36-game Big 12 road losing streak. Next Saturday, they'll conclude the regular season at home against Texas Tech.

This season is the first in which CU has won more than three Big 12 games since it won nine in 2005-06. It's 12-3 at home.



Iowa State guard Diante Garrett, left, has his shot blocked by Colorado guard Alec Burks during the second half Saturday in Boulder. **David Zalubowski/AP**

COLORADO 75, IOWA STATE 72

IOWA STATE (14-15, 3-11) — Gilstrap 10-16 4-8 26, Brackins 6-16 0-0 13, Hamilton 5-5 1-3 11, Garrett 4-9 2-2 11, Christopherson 0-7 2-2 2, Buckley 0-0 0-0 0, Colvin 0-4 0-0 0, Dendy 3-5 3-6 9. Totals 28-62 12-21 37.

COLORADO (13-15, 4-10) — Dufault 2-4 0-0 4, Tomlinson 1-4 0-0 2, Relphorde 4-10 2-2 12, Burks 3-6 4-4 11, Higgins 12-15 6-6 33, Thorne 1-3 0-0 3, Harris-Tunks 0-0 0-0 0, Knutson 0-0 0-0 0, Crawford 4-6 0-0 10, Hornbuckle 0-1 0-0 0. Totals 27-48 12-12 75.

Halftime — Iowa State 38-36.

3-point goals — Iowa State 4-15 (Gilstrap 2-3, Brackins 1-3, Garrett 1-2, Christopherson 0-5, Colvin 0-2); CU 9-20 (Higgins 3-4, Relphorde 2-4, Burks 1-3, Thorne 1-2, Crawford 2-4, Tomlinson 0-2, Dufault 0-1). Fouled

The Buffs made eight straight free throws in the final 3 minutes, 18 seconds to hold off Iowa State. Higgins hit two with 6.7 seconds left to put CU's lead at three. Iowa State's Diante Garrett missed a 3 at the final buzzer over CU's Marcus Relphorde.

out — none. Rebounds — Iowa State 37 (Brackins 9, Dendy 9); CU 21 (Higgins 6). Assists — Iowa State 10 (Gilstrap 4); CU 17 (Tomlinson 5). Total fouls — Iowa State 17; CU 16. Technicals — none. A — 6,613.

Bzdelik and Iowa State coach Greg McDermott cited Crawford's play as pivotal. Perhaps his biggest moment came with 2:23 left, when he grabbed an offensive rebound and scored to put CU's lead at 69-65. Crawford entered averaging two rebounds and 12.8 minutes per game.

"I was able to sneak in there and put one back," Crawford said. "I was surprised I got it. They're a good rebounding team."

Said McDermott: "He was the difference in the game. We were trying to provide help on some of their back cuts and trying to make it difficult for (Alec) Burks and Higgins as much as we could. We had to give up something, and Casey Crawford was just that."

Crawford hit two 3s that Bzdelik said forced Iowa State to "expand" its defense and open up the middle. Higgins took advantage. Twenty-one of his points came after halftime.

"Throughout the whole game, he really just kept us going," Bzdelik said.

Crawford said CU's rebounding problems stem from letting opponents initiate contact when shots go up, thereby moving the Buffs out of the way. Crawford said coaches during Saturday's huddles stressed initiating contact — probably not the first time they've done so, and probably not the last. CU has been outrebounded by 18 of its past 19 opponents.

But what Bzdelik stressed after the game was the importance of winning a close one, something for a program with 27 single-digit losses in three years to relish. CU has lost four Big 12 games by six points or less in 2010, and its strength-of-schedule rank on Saturday was around No. 18 nationally — signs the coach pointed to that show CU is nearing that next level.

"When you combine that with the Big 12 being the No. 1 RPI league, if you win a couple of those games, you're in the hunt for the NCAA Tournament," Bzdelik said. "That's what a fine line it is. And we're starting to close that gap."

TIP-INS: Senior Marquis Gilstrap led Iowa State with 26 points, shooting 10-for-16. He also spent much of the day defending CU's Alec Burks, and Burks finished with 11. Bzdelik said Burks is getting "worn down," but lauded the freshman for still going 4-for-4 on free throws and adding four assists. "It shows you what a great talent he is," Bzdelik said. ... Iowa State's LaRon Dendy was Relphorde's roommate last year at Indian Hills Community College. Dendy had nine points and nine rebounds in 21 minutes off the bench. CU recruited Dendy as well. ... Relphorde had 12 points. ... CU started 9-for-11 from the field. It finished at 27-for-49, 55.1 percent. ... CU's 13 wins is its most in Bzdelik's three seasons. ... Higgins' 33 points put him 12th all-time at CU with 1,324. He needs 42 to crack the top 10.

Read Patrick Ridgell's [CU sports blog](#). He can be reached at pridgell@times-call.com.



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By Nicholas Bernal
Big 12 Campus Correspondent

University of Colorado standout Alec Burks is having one of the best freshman seasons in school history. Despite flying under the recruiting radar, Burks has been very visible to all the teams that overlooked him as a prospect.

"He's 6'6, he grew a couple inches since we signed him," head coach Jeff Bzdelik said. "He's very long and very athletic and very talented—extremely talented. He can go make a play in a variety of ways. He understands the physical and intensity level at which this game is played at this level. I'm going to go out on a limb and say this, it's up to both him and me for him to realize his potential and if he does he has a chance to be really special."



Courtesy: CU Sports Information

"I think [the season] is going good," Burks said. "I put a lot of hard work in during the offseason and now during the season and I feel like it's paying off for me."

Burks has scored in double-figures in every game this year except for one, and that was when the Buffs traveled to Ames, Iowa to play Iowa State and he was injured in the first two minutes of the game and did not return. Going into that game he was the only freshman to have accomplished that feat, and since returning after a one game absence, he has continued his impressive scoring.

"I feel great," Burks said. "It all goes back to that hard work. I do feel like I was a little under recruited and now I'm just showing everybody what they missed."

Burks teams with junior Cory Higgins to make one of the more dynamic scoring backcourts in the conference, when asked why the two have been able to have so much success together Burks said it had to do with their relationship outside of basketball.

"We're good friends off the court and I feel like the chemistry shows on the court. We just try to play together."

Despite his close relationship with Cory, he says that a different teammate has helped him make such a smooth transition.

"I feel like Dwight Thorne II has helped me the most, him and Cory, but I'd say Dwight a little bit more," said Burks. "He plays my position, they both do, but he plays it more so he helps me out a lot. He'll take me aside and tell me what I did wrong and help me to not do it again."

One of the reasons that Burks chose to come to Colorado was head coach Jeff Bzdelik and his NBA experience. Bzdelik previously coached in the NBA, including some time as the Denver Nuggets head coach; Burks said that Bzdelik has been just what he was expecting when he signed with the Buffs.

"He's helped me a lot, he's an NBA coach and he's really helped me out a lot," said Burks. "He's helped me make the transition from high school to college and his pointers are really helping me get to where I want to be in life."

With his freshman campaign coming to a conclusion and a few school records within reach, Burks maintains a team-first

attitude when asked what his goals are for the remainder of the season.

"For myself I just want to keep going and doing what I'm doing, and for the team I just want to win games," said Burks. "That will make everything good, just winning games."

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