

CU Buffs host speedy Missouri squad today

Burks practices, but his status remains up in air

By Ryan Thorburn Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

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Officially, it's called "The fastest 40 minutes in basketball" in the Missouri media guide.

The more famous description of Mike Anderson's style of play, which the Missouri coach received a Ph.D in as an assistant under Nolan Richardson at Arkansas, is "40 minutes of hell."

The Tigers will try to create chaos for Colorado -- a program seemingly stuck in hoops purgatory -- today at the Coors Events Center (2 p.m., Altitude).

This is an important bounce-back game for both sides.

Missouri had its 32-game home winning streak snapped on Wednesday by Texas A&M. At 16-6 overall and 4-3 in the Big 12, the Tigers need a win to remain in serious contention for a top-four conference finish and at-large consideration for the NCAA Tournament.

The Buffs (11-11, 2-6) are wondering what they did to upset the basketball gods after another disheartening loss -- 72-66 in overtime to No. 1 Kansas this time. That's 27 single-digit defeats and counting for Jeff Bzdelik at CU.

"They all hurt," Bzdelik said before Friday's practice. "But that would have been special, obviously. We can't be hungover emotionally because we have an excellent Missouri team coming in here."

Alec Burks -- CU's key import from Grandview, Mo. -- practiced on Friday and hopes to play today. Doctors cleared the Big 12's top freshman scorer (16.3 ppg) to play against KU, but Bzdelik held him out because his sprained left knee was only "90 percent" healthy.

"I understand where he's coming from. He's looking out for my future, and I respect that," Burks said. "He's a great coach, and I respect everything he does. I just listen to him and believe everything he does will help me out."

Bzdelik wanted to see how Burks practiced and how his knee responded to going full speed again before making an announcement on the 6-6 guard's status today.

"It's hard," Burks said of sitting on the end of the bench during the 64-63 loss at Iowa State a week ago and again during Wednesday's heartbreaker against KU. "We had the No. 1 team in our home arena ... it was very hard for me to watch."

Today's game should be very interesting and fun to watch. It doesn't sound like the Buffs are going to try to slow down the pace too much against Missouri. At least not at home in the first meeting (CU visits Columbia on Feb. 24).

"They speed people up," CU point guard Nate Tomlinson said. "We like to play fast, too. If we look after the ball there will be some good opportunities to get some layups and some open shots."

The Tigers are averaging 12.1 steals per game. Kansas is second in the conference in that department (8.7 spg) while CU ranks fourth (8.4 spg).

Missouri also leads the Big 12 in turnover margin (+7.95). The Buffs are a distant second (+3.14).

"We just want to make sure we keep our turnovers to a bare minimum and take the first best shot we can get," Bzdelik said.

Anderson`s tenacious Tigers have forced every opponent they`ve faced into committing double-digit turnovers. In 17 games they`ve created 20 or more miscues.

"We want to attack them. If you let them get aggressive and attack you then they get a lot of turnovers and score easy buckets," Dwight Thorne said. "If we can attack them and get what we want, whether it`s in the transition game or the half-court game, it will be our tempo."

Missouri has won the last six meetings and owns a 17-7 edge in the series since the formation of the Big 12. However, the Tigers are 1-4 in true road games this season.

CU has lost 33 consecutive Big 12 road games but is 10-2 at the Coors Events Center. And the home losses were both by six points against top-10 teams (KU and Kansas State).

"It`s only about winning," Bzdelik said when asked if the Buffs turned the corner by taking KU to the wire. "There`s only categories for wins and losses. There is not a `C` for confidence."

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CU men's preview vs. Missouri

Camera staff
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 02/06/2010 12:19:59 AM MST

TODAY: Colorado hosts Missouri at 2 p.m. at the Coors Events Center.

BROADCAST: Television: Altitude with Dave Armstrong (play-by-play) and Jon Sundvold (analyst); **Radio:** KKZN (760 AM) with Mark Johnson (play-by-play) and Charles Johnson (color).

STORYLINES: The Buffs (11-11, 2-5) are coming off a hard-to-swallow 72-66 overtime loss to No. 1 Kansas. ... Marcus Relphorde led CU with 18 points and 11 rebounds, and Cory Higgins added 14 points and seven rebounds, but CU squandered a chance to pull off the upset in the final seconds of regulation. ... Alec Burks, who sat out against KU with a sprained knee, practiced on Friday and is a game-day decision. ... The Tigers (16-6, 4-3) had their 32-game home winning streak snapped by Texas A&M on Wednesday (77-74).

KEY STAT: Missouri is 1-4 in true road games (1-2 in the Big 12) and the win was in overtime at Texas Tech. CU is 10-2 at home and the losses were to No. 1 Kansas (72-66 in overtime) and No. 10 Kansas State (87-81).

COACHES: Jeff Bzdelik is 32-53 in his third season at CU. Mike Anderson is 81-41 in his fourth season at Missouri.

PROBABLE STARTERS:

Colorado -- G Nate Tomlinson, 6-3, sophomore, 5.7 ppg, 2.5 rpg; G Alec Burks, 6-6, freshman, 16.3 ppg, 4.7 rpg; G Cory Higgins, 6-5, junior, 18.1 ppg, 3.7 rpg; G Marcus Relphorde, 6-7, junior, 10.8 ppg, 3.9 rpg; F Austin Dufault, 6-9, sophomore, 6.8 ppg, 3.5 rpg.

Missouri -- G Kim English, 6-6, sophomore, 14.8 ppg, 3.7 rpg; G Zaire Taylor, 6-4, senior, 8.5 ppg, 2.8 rpg; G J.T. Tiller, 6-3, senior, 8.5 ppg, 2.6 rpg; F Justin Safford, 6-8, junior, 8.5 ppg, 4.1 rpg; F Keith Ramsey, 6-9, senior, 5.6 ppg, 5.5 rpg.

SERIES: Missouri leads 96-52 and has a six-game winning streak in the series, including three straight wins in Boulder.

UP NEXT: The Buffs play Kansas State on Feb. 13 in Manhattan (4 p.m., Altitude).

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THE DENVER POST

college basketball

Coors brewing with Buffalo excitement

By **Tom Kensler**
The Denver Post

Posted: 02/06/2010 01:00:00 AM MST

Updated: 02/06/2010 01:13:03 AM MST

The crowd. The excitement. The Coors Events Center?

Including Bill Self's days as a player (Oklahoma State) and an assistant, the Kansas coach figures he has been to Boulder about 18 or 19 times. He had never seen the CEC like it was Wednesday night.

The place was rocking — with Buffs fans, of all things.

"This is the best atmosphere I've seen here," Self said after his top-ranked Jayhawks survived in overtime before a sellout crowd of 11,027. "When we played out here in the past, and no disrespect to anybody, but 50 percent of the fans were ours. What was it tonight? About 75 percent Colorado fans? That made for a good crowd."

Straw polls always place the 31-year-old Coors Events Center at the bottom when ranking Big 12 basketball facilities. Granted, the place is showing some age and could use some sprucing up, but the configuration of the seating was inspired to some degree by "The Pit" in New Mexico, with spectators entering at the top level. The place does hold the noise.

"I've always thought this could be a hard place (for a visiting team) to win," Self said. "Before this game, I don't remember seeing such a great turnout by their student body. It was a crazy atmosphere. I don't know how many points it meant to Colorado, but it was several."

CU hopes for another big crowd today for its 2 p. m. men's game against Missouri.

Legends Weekend at CSU.

My late grandmother once said that every day is a good day if I learn something. She would have been pleased to know that, when reading about Colorado State's Legends Weekend, I discovered that CSU's original school colors were pumpkin and alfalfa.

For the "Border War" men's home game tonight against Wyoming, the Rams will wear "tribute" uniforms featuring those colors and emblazoned with "Aggies" — the school's original mascot.

Shake it off.

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THE DENVER POST

Colorado's 6-foot-4 junior center Courtney Dunn is preparing for how to react today in Waco, Texas, if Baylor's 6-8 freshman Brittney Griner dunks on her. Griner has four slams this season. She threw down 52 in high school.

Rams had won seven straight in Laramie.

"I've never had anybody dunk on me, and I'm a little nervous," Dunn said. "I try to tell myself that it's just a showboat move, and I can't be tripping off it. It's just two points."

Rivalry renewed.

Among many reasons CU freshman Alec Burks (knee sprain) hopes to play today is an opportunity to go against Missouri's 6-1 freshman guard Michael Dixon. Both are from Kansas City, Mo., and last spring Burks' Grandview High team eliminated Dixon's Lee's Summit West squad in the state tournament semifinals.

They split state player-of-the-year honors. Dixon (averaging 8.1 points for Mizzou) was named 2009 Mr. Show Me Basketball, while Burks (16.3 for CU) received the nod for Missouri Gatorade player of the year.

"Seeing how he got better and I got better, it's going to be fun," Burks said.

Footnote.

The CSU women will try today to win at Wyoming for the first time since 2002. Prior to their current seven-game losing streak there, the

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Anderson knows Missouri's trip to Colorado is not a vacation

Missouri coach knows while his team lost Wednesday, Buffaloes almost upset Kansas

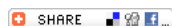


Bill Greenblatt/UPI

Missouri Tigers' coach Mike Anderson hopes he is not frustrated again by his team's rebounding during Saturday's game against Colorado in Boulder.

By Randy Holtz

Saturday, February 6, 2010



Big 12 Standings

BOULDER, Colo. -- There have been years, many years, when a trip out west to the foothills of the Rockies was a nice little vacation in the midst of the brutally harsh conference schedules of Big 12 teams.

Missouri better check that attitude at the door of the Coors Events Center when the Tigers arrive for Saturday's 3 p.m. game against Colorado. The game will be televised on WRBU, Channel 46, in St. Louis.

Coming off a frustrating three-point loss against Texas A&M -- a setback that put to rest a 32-game home winning streak -- the Tigers now face a young and ambitious Colorado team that came within one missed jumper of upsetting the No. 1 team in the land on Wednesday night.

Colorado, playing before a sellout crowd split 50-50 among fans sporting Kansas blue-and-red and CU gold-and-black, took the Jayhawks to the limit and beyond. The Buffaloes, who trailed by 16 at one point in the first half, gathered themselves impressively and had a chance to win in regulation. But they couldn't come up with a good look at the basket and painfully watched Kansas run away in overtime for a 72-66 win.

The Tigers, at the same time, were slogging their way through a forgettable performance

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So even though the Buffs didn't finish the job and turn the nation's basketball-watching eyes to Boulder, they should have Mizzou's full attention Saturday. Especially since the Tigers were hardly something special in their loss to the Aggies.

"Our guys care," Colorado coach Jeff Bzdelik said after Wednesday night's emotional loss. "They really, really care. I believe in them. I hurt for them. We're just going to have to keep banging away."

The Tigers (16-6, 4-3 Big 12) didn't do too much banging against A&M. The Aggies embarrassed the Tigers on the boards, outrebounding them 41-24. Starting forwards Keith Ramsey and Justin Safford had one rebound apiece.

Numbers like that, Missouri coach Mike Anderson knows, mean trouble no matter who and where you play. The Tigers bill their press-and-run style "The Fastest 40 Minutes in Basketball." They might be fast down the floor, but they haven't been fast to the glass of late.

"In terms of rebounding, something's got to change," Anderson said. "It's something that hasn't been a problem all year long and all of a sudden now, there's got to be a sense of urgency when you get in league play. For (Ramsey and Safford) to get two rebounds and play 48 minutes between them, that's not acceptable."

Zaire Taylor's remedy for Missouri's rebounding woes involves getting he and his backcourt mates to the backboards.

"We forced a lot of turnovers and we did a lot of other good things that caused us to stay in the game (against A&M), but that's a recipe for disaster when you constantly let teams out-rebound you," Taylor said. "I think it's time for me and J.T. (Tiller) to start taking more responsibility for that and hold ourselves more accountable.

"I feel like we have some of the bigger guards in the conference -- athletic guys that can jump and that can rebound, too. Our big guys are fighting. I see them, they're fighting. But we've got to take accountability ourselves and personally, I feel like I need to take more responsibility for that."

Colorado, meanwhile, keeps tilting Quixote-like at the conference windmills. Bzdelik, in his third year after coming from the Air Force Academy by way of the NBA, is finding out the ladder of upward mobility is a tough one to climb in a Big 12 most hoops experts regard as the best league in the nation top-to-bottom.

CU is 11-11 overall and 2-6 in the conference, but the Buffs know they have a shot to finish strong if they play as they did against Kansas. They're young, but you can see Bzdelik's coaching when you watch them. They do the little things well. They fight and scratch. They hit the deck for loose balls. They take wise shots. Thanks largely to a surpassing performance from junior swingman Marcus Relphorde, they nearly beat the Jayhawks despite the absence of shooting guard Alec Burks, who missed the game with a sprained knee.

Burks, a freshman Missouri native who played at Grandview High School just outside of Kansas City, is listed as questionable for Saturday. With his 16.3-point average, he's on pace to become the second-best freshman scorer in Colorado history. Sitting atop that list is a pretty well-known fellow named Chauncey Billups.

Wednesday night, Bzdelik said, was a bad news/good news scenario.

"There are no moral victories," Bzdelik said of the near-upset of Kansas. "This is the 28th single-digit loss since I've been here. We need to learn how to win, how to close out games.

"But one of these days, we're going to bust loose. If we keep this up, we're going to have some celebrations. Our players are getting better. They're passionate. They play hard. They're battling. We just have to keep battling."

Globe-Democrat correspondent Will Maetzold contributed to this report.

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