

CU Buff men look to back it up

Colorado tries to knock off second ranked team in row

By Ryan Thorburn Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

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Alec Burks made SportsCenter. Dwight Thorne was still getting pats on the back from classmates two days later. Jeff Bzdelik did more radio interviews than Governor Ritter.

Finally, the Buffs and their long suffering fan base had something to celebrate: Tuesday's 78-71 upset of No. 22 Baylor.

But can Colorado deliver an encore?

That's going to be difficult as No. 13 Kansas State visits the Coors Events Center today (2 p.m., Altitude2).

The CU men's basketball program has never defeated ranked opponents in back-to-back games.

"Right after the win we had to start getting ready for Kansas State," said Cory Higgins, who scored 16 of his 18 points in the second half against the Bears. "You don't want to celebrate too much and act like it's a one-time thing."

The Buffs (10-6, 1-1) are looking to improve to 10-0 at the Coors Events Center for the first time since the building opened for the 1979-80 season.

In order to make history, Bzdelik's team will have to hold its own against one of the nation's top backcourts. Again.

Denis Clemente and Jacob Pullen combined for 39 points during the Wildcats' 88-65 blowout of Texas A&M on Tuesday.

Baylor's dynamic guard tandem of Lace Darius Dunn and Tweety Carter combined for 36 points on Tuesday. Bzdelik was able to counter with 55 points from guards Higgins, Burks, Thorne and Nate Tomlinson.

"We have to handle their pressure. They're going to get up into you, they're going to hold you, they're going to grab you, and they're going to be nasty," Thorne said. "We have to match that intensity and hold them, grab them, and get after them."

"If we do that on our home court, we'll have the advantage."

Baylor's Ekpe Udoh, the reigning Big 12 player of the week, had 14 points and 14 rebounds against CU. That production was basically canceled out by another terrific game by versatile junior Marcus Relphorde, who finished with 17 points, seven rebounds, two assists and a key steal for the Buffs.

The Wildcats (14-2, 1-1) are led by 6-10 center Luis Colon (14.9 ppg) and Curtis Kelly (11.1 ppg, 6.2 rpg) inside.

"It's going to be another challenge for the backcourt," Bzdelik said. "And they have a very powerful front line."

Shane Harris-Tunks will start his third consecutive game. The 6-11 freshman helps CU match the size of its conference foes in the paint.

That lineup change combined with Relphorde's outstanding play has Austin Dufault's mug on the side of milk cartons these days. The sophomore forward is in a Big 12 slump with three turnovers, one point and no rebounds in just 20 minutes of playing time over the last two games against now No. 1 Texas and Baylor.

"Austin has been asked to be very under-sized in there, and that's in a way unfair for him. It has been tough for him to have to battle the people he has battled out of necessity," Bzdelik said. "Austin is just an awesome team player. ... We

need him. He`s a valuable member of this team. We need him to perform well, and he`ll get going again."

Will the Baylor game be the highlight of CU`s season? Or will the Buffs be able answer Bzdelik`s calls for more "milestone" moments?

"We just need to win," Bzdelik said when asked how the extra exposure from Tuesday`s win benefits the program. "It can`t be a one-time thing."

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CU Buffs men's preview: Kansas State

Camera staff
Boulder Daily Camera

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TODAY: Colorado (10-6, 1-1 Big 12) hosts No. 13 Kansas State (14-2, 1-1) at 2:01 p.m. at the Coors Events Center.

BROADCAST: Television: Altitude2 with Chad McKee (play-by-play) and Rich Zvosec (analyst); **Radio:** KKZN (760 AM) with Mark Johnson (play-by-play) and Charles Johnson (color).

STORYLINES: The Buffs are coming off a 78-71 victory over No. 22 Baylor. It was CU's first win over a ranked opponent since Feb. 15, 2007 (84-75 over No. 18 Oklahoma State). ... Five different players scored in double figures, led by Cory Higgins' 18 points. ... The Wildcats are coming off an 88-65 victory over Texas A&M. ... Denis Clemente and Jacob Pullen combined for 39 points as K-State improved to 9-0 at home.

KEY STAT: CU's Alec Burks is the only true freshman in the country who has scored in double figures in every game (16) this season. He leads all Big 12 freshmen in scoring with 265 points.

COACHES: Jeff Bzdelik is 31-48 in his third season at CU. Frank Martin is 57-26 in his third season at Kansas State.

PROBABLE STARTERS:

Colorado -- G Nate Tomlinson, 6-3, sophomore, 6.7 ppg, 2.9 rpg, G Alec Burks, 6-6, freshman, 16.6 ppg, 5.1 rpg, G Cory Higgins, 6-5, junior, 18.2 ppg, 3.4 rpg, G Marcus Relphorde, 6-7, junior, 11.1 ppg, 3.5 rpg, F Shane Harris-Tunks, 6-11, freshman, 2.5 ppg, 2.1 rpg.

Kansas State -- G Jacob Pullen, 6-0, junior, 8.1 ppg, 6.2 rpg, G Denis Clemente, 6-1, senior, 19.8 ppg, 2.5 rpg, F Dominique Sutton, 6-5, junior, 2.6 ppg, 4.3 rpg, F Curtis Kelly, 6-8, junior, 11.1 ppg, 6.2 rpg, C Luis Colon, 6-10, senior, 14.9 ppg, 2.5 rpg.

SERIES: Kansas State leads 95-44.

UP NEXT: The Buffs hit the road to face Oklahoma State on Wednesday at Gallagher-Iba Arena (7 p.m., ESPNU).

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college basketball

CU hopes twin bill boosts both programs

By Tom Kensler

The Denver Post **Tom Kensler**

covers college basketball. Contact: 303-954-1280 or tkensler@denverpost.com

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Iowa State freshman Anna Prins, right, returns to Coors Events Center this week to take on the Buffs. Prins led Broomfield High to three state titles. (David J. Phillip, The AP)

It might be difficult for the Colorado women's basketball team to maintain its focus during warm-up drills before today's 4:30 p.m. game against Iowa State at the Coors Events Center. The Buffaloes are sure to take a peek at what's going on with the crowd.

The women's game follows a 2 p.m. men's contest between Colorado and 13th-ranked Kansas State. Good sign if a lot of fans stay for the women's game. Bad sign if most head for the

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exits.

"We'd like to think that with fans already being there for the men's game, it will be harder for them to leave when our pretty faces go onto the court," CU senior guard Bianca Smith said.

Doubleheaders do not happen often during conference play. Usually, the Big 12 schedules a

CU Basketball

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- [Visit](#) the CU Stats Page for women's boxscores, Big 12 standings, player pages and more .
- [Visit](#) Tom Kensler's All Things Buffs blog for a behind-the-scenes look at CU sports .

school's men's team on the road when the women's team is at home, and vice versa. This will provide Colorado fans an opportunity to see two games for the price of one.

Here's how the seating shuffle will work today: spectators with men's season tickets must move to open seating after the men's game if women's season-ticket holders also have those seats.

"I think a doubleheader like this is always a

great way to go," CU women's coach Kathy McConnell-Miller said. "It's a way to generate fan interest for both programs."

Another Coors Events Center doubleheader is scheduled for Saturday, Feb. 27.

Seeing purple.

Colorado freshman sensation Alec Burks expects today's game against Kansas State to feel a bit strange. Burks, who is from suburban Kansas City, Mo., got to know the Wildcats coaches and several players during a recruiting trip to Manhattan, Kan.

"It was a real hard decision (between Colorado and KSU)," Burks said this week. "I was probably a day away from going there. My mom wanted me to stay close to home. But I came out (to Boulder) for my visit and loved it so much."

Return of Prins.

Anna Prins is one Iowa State freshman who won't need directions to the locker rooms when the Cyclones arrive at the Coors Events Center.

A 6-foot-7 center, Prins led Broomfield High to three straight Class 4A state championships in that building, including the 2009 title last March.

Heavily recruited by CU, Prins is averaging 9.8 points and 4.6 rebounds in nine games, with six starts. She missed time in December with mononucleosis.

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Iowa State coach Bill Fennelly predicts stardom for Prins. She has shown her versatility this season by going 7-for-16 on 3-pointers.

Footnotes.

The Colorado State men will try today to win at BYU (No. 18 in the AP poll) for the first time since 1998. CSU has not defeated a ranked opponent since knocking off No. 25 Air Force in the 2004 Mountain West Tournament. . . . The CU men would make history today with a victory over No. 13 Kansas State. According to research by the CU sports information department, Colorado has never defeated ranked opponents in back-to-back games. . . . Northern Colorado is the only Big Sky women's team to have two scorers — No. 3 Whitley Cox (17.8) and No. 5 Courtney Stoermer (13.9) — among the league's top five. . . . DU senior Nate Rohnert is the reigning [Midmajority.com](#) national "baller of the week."

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CU men find themselves in different position

By Patrick Ridgell
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BOULDER — Here's something different: Can Colorado men's basketball stand prosperity?

As the Buffs host No. 13 Kansas State today (2 p.m., Altitude2), questions aren't about one of their many marks of futility. Instead, they're about how CU will build off Tuesday's rousing defeat of No. 22 Baylor.

"It's about winning," coach Jeff Bzdelik said Thursday.

"We need to continue to get better, and the winning and losing will take care of itself. If we continue to get better as a basketball team and we can play with passion and put ourselves in position to win, and couple that with the fan support we had the other night, that's how you start having more of these situations."

For CU (10-6, 1-1 Big 12), the situation is encouraging.

It reported Thursday that 7,000 tickets already had been sold for today. Its season high in 2009-10 was Tuesday's 6,957.

CU has finished last in the Big 12 in attendance four seasons in a row. It averaged 4,637 fans last season. The league's next-smallest attendance average was Baylor's — 7,066.

Buffs long accustomed to small, lifeless crowds and empty seats in the student section notice the difference when the Coors Events Center crackles.

"You just get a lot more excited, a lot more energy, a lot more ready to play," CU forward Trey Eckloff said. "You have to be ready under any circumstance, but a big crowd helps you that much more."

CU also reported that Bzdelik appeared on four sports talk radio shows this week after the Baylor win. A fifth one requested him, but Bzdelik couldn't do it. He conducted one interview while driving through Texas on a recruiting trip.

Of course, Bzdelik realizes this attention will shrivel up and disappear if the program returns to its losing ways.

He also realizes the Big 12 has four ranked teams, four others receiving votes and eight teams with RPIs among the nation's top 50. CU hasn't won a road conference since January 2006, an embarrassing stretch of 30 straight losses that must end this season for the Buffs to succeed.

College basketball previews

No. 13 Kansas State (14-2, 1-1) at Colorado men (10-6, 1-1)

When/Where: 2 p.m. today at the Coors Events Center in Boulder

TV/Radio: Altitude2/760 AM

The series: Kansas State leads 95-44, 32-31 in Boulder. The Wildcats have won the past seven meetings, including three in Boulder.

Leading scorers: Kansas State — Jacob Pullen (19.8 points per game); CU — Cory Higgins (18.2 points per game)

Notes: CU is 9-0 at home. It last started 9-0 at home in 1982-83. Its last 10-0 start at home was in 1979-80, the season the Coors Events Center opened. ... CU is 1-9 in its past 10 games against ranked teams. The win came Tuesday over No. 22 Baylor. ... According to CU, Alec Burks is the only true freshman in the country to score in double digits in every game this season. ... Kansas State lost its Big 12 opener last Saturday at Missouri. It beat Texas A&M 88-65 on Tuesday.

Iowa State (12-3, 0-2) at Colorado women (11-4, 1-1)

When/Where: 4:30 p.m. today at the Coors Events Center in Boulder

TV/Radio: FSN/760 AM

The series: CU leads 36-27, 18-9 in Boulder. Iowa State has won the past six meetings and 11 of the past 12.

Leading scorers: Iowa State — Alison Lacey (17.7 points per game); CU — Brittany Spears (18.4 points per game)

“We’re doing all the right things,” Bzdelik said. “We have great young people that are doing extremely well in the classroom. ... I sleep easy at night knowing they do all the right things.

“But the reality is the only thing people care about is winning. And I understand that. I’m a big boy. Been around a long time. So we need to start turning the corner.”

Kansas State features one of the Big 12’s best backcourts in Jacob Pullen and Denis Clemente. Pullen, a junior, averages 19.8 points a game, second best in the Big 12. Clemente, a senior, scores 14.9 per.

While size in the post is one of CU’s flaws, length on the perimeter — with guards like 6-foot-6 Alec Burks, 6-7 Marcus Relphorde and 6-5 Cory Higgins — is a defensive strength.

Notes: The Buffs are coming off Tuesday’s 74-61 loss at Texas Tech. They are 10-1 at home in 2009-10. ... CU hits 8.1 3s a game, third in the Big 12, and leads the league in free throw shooting, 76 percent. ... CU reserve guard Bianca Smith leads the Big 12 with 46 3s and leads in free throw shooting, 97.1 percent. ... The Cyclones received votes in this week’s Associated Press poll. They won 11 in a row before losing their first two Big 12 games. They lead the Big 12 with 8.4 3s a game and in scoring defense, allowing 52.2 points per game.

Patrick Ridgell

“We make a big deal about getting deflections, getting ball pressure, that kind of thing,” Bzdelik said. “We’re improving in that area. ... That bodes well for our future.”

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Wildcats staying focused on today's opponent

By Arne Green - Special to The News

During a brief film session following their Thursday night practice, suffice it to say the Kansas State Wildcats weren't watching coming attractions.

Even with an ESPN Big Monday home date with No. 1-ranked Texas just a few days away, they didn't dare look too far ahead.

Instead they were dialed in on Colorado, today's 3 p.m. opponent in Boulder, Colo.

"When we're sitting around in film and people like Jamar (Samuels) are nodding off and going to sleep and then you see somebody like Alec Burks dunk on somebody, he wakes up fast, because he knows that could be him," K-State guard Jacob Pullen said of Colorado's freshman guard, who has given the Buffaloes another potent weapon to go with junior guard Cory Higgins this season. "So that's how the team really focuses in, because on highlights everybody looks good."

The film wasn't the only thing that got the No. 13-ranked Wildcats' attention as they prepared for Colorado, which was picked again to bring up the rear in the Big 12. Not only are the Buffs a respectable 10-6 with a 1-1 league record, but they're unbeaten at home and on Tuesday knocked off No. 22 Baylor, 78-71.

"That grabs our attention," said Samuels, who also adamantly disputed Pullen's claim that he was nodding off in the film room. "Colorado's a good team."

"I think Brad (Underwood, assistant coach) said they matched the total games that they won last year. It's going to be a tough fight."

K-State (14-2, 1-1) has beaten Colorado seven straight times, including three in a row at the Coors Center, but it has seldom been easy. Take the lack of atmosphere - "It can lull you to sleep," Pullen said - the Buffs' unorthodox four-guard offense and the upgrade in talent over last year and the Wildcats are wary.

"They're difficult," said K-State coach Frank Martin, whose Wildcats are coming off an impressive victory of their own Tuesday, an 88-65 blowout of Texas A&M. "They have as good an offensive starting five as anyone in our league as far as skill at all five spots."

"They're scoring the ball at a high clip (and) their offense has become even more difficult because you have to guard all five spots now in that action."

Higgins, a 6-foot-5 junior, leads Colorado in scoring with 18.2 points a game, followed by the 6-6 Burks at 16.1 points and a

team-high 5.1 rebounds. Marcus Relphorde, a 6-7 junior, adds 11.1 points, allowing sophomore Nate Tomlinson (6.7 points, 4.1 assists) to run the point.

"Last year they weren't a hard-playing team, but this year they go five guards and just play hard - they rebound, they score, they just do anything to win," said Samuels, the Wildcats' energetic sixth man, who ranks third on the team in scoring at 12.2 points a game and rebounding at 4.9. "It's just a real good test for us on the road.

"We'll try to bounce back from that Missouri loss (last Saturday, 74-68) on the road."

In Tuesday's game against A&M, senior guard Denis Clemente broke out of a shooting slump with 24 points to go with six assists. Pullen continues to lead the team with 19.8 points a game, while forwards Curtis Kelly (11.1 points) and Dominique Sutton (8.1) are the top rebounders at 6.2 each.