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cu men's basketball

Bzdelik buzzing over CU's new hoops energy

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post
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It had been a while, but fun and excitement seem to be returning to the Coors Events Center.

Speaking today on the weekly Big 12 men's basketball coaches teleconference, Colorado's Jeff Bzdelik said "the most disappointing" part about losing at home Saturday to a ranked Kansas State team was that CU "didn't reward our fans."

The near-sellout crowd of 10,852 provided for the 17th-largest attendance in the 31-year history of the CEC. Arena capacity is listed at 11,064.

"I want to applaud our fans, our students, our alumni for the great energy that they provided us in a couple of Big 12 home games," Bzdelik said during the teleconference. "They have been absolutely awesome. If we can continue to

attract that kind of environment in Coors (Events Center), we're going to have a lot of fun in that building."

Bzdelik said in September and October he would typically visit with two or three groups a week, both on campus and elsewhere in the metro area, to drum up interest.

"I wanted to let people know about this basketball team and their will and their passion to get better," Bzdelik said.

"(Also) there are a group of people behind the scenes to get the message out that this is a young, exciting and growing basketball team," he added. "So it's getting better, both with our support and with our fan base and with our talent level and with our improvement on the court. We just have to continue that."

After Saturday's game, CU junior Cory Higgins, who scored a game-best 30 points, called it "the best 'pro-Colorado' crowd since I've been here."

Higgins was obviously referring to the big crowds drawn for CU home games against Kansas that include thousands of Jayhawk fans. On Saturday, the crowd was comprised almost entirely of CU fans, with only a sprinkling of 100 or so Kansas State supporters.

Footnotes

Colorado (10-7, 1-2 Big 12) plays both of its games this week on the road: at Oklahoma State

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on Wednesday, at Texas A&M on Saturday. CU's Marcus Relphorde, a 6-foot-7 junior forward, was voted Big 12 co-rookie of the week earlier today. Relphorde, who played last season at junior-college power Indian Hills in Iowa, averaged 17.5 points and five rebounds in games against ranked opponents Baylor and Kansas State. Relphorde shared the award with Iowa State 6-7 forward Marquis Gilstrap, who also is a junior-college transfer.

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Billups to Buffaloes: No excuses

By Patrick Ridgell
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Chauncey Billups is as close to basketball royalty as Colorado hoops has. So when he speaks, people listen.

Billups, the former Buff, former NBA Finals MVP and current Nuggets point guard, addressed CU's men's basketball team Saturday in Boulder, where he watched the Buffs lose to Kansas State.

"He said we can't make an excuse out of being too small," senior guard Dwight Thorne said Monday. "So we have to continue to play hard and be aggressive and come out every night like it's a dog fight."

Said Marcus Relphorde: "He said we're undersized, but that just means we have to keep fighting. He said sometimes in the NBA, people might be undersized — or you might be matched up with a bigger guard or somebody like that — but if you keep fighting, it's a good thing."

Kansas State out-rebounded CU 44-27 Saturday. The Buffs will enter Wednesday's game at Oklahoma State with the Big 12's worst rebounding margin, minus-5.1. In three conference games, that figure is minus-15.3.

Coach Jeff Bzdelik said there were seven "glaring" incidents Saturday in which one of his players failed to block out, leading to seven of Kansas State's 20 offensive rebounds.

"I believe I was the culprit on one," Thorne said.

What the Buffs took from Billups' pep talk was mainly encouraging. According to Relphorde, Billups said CU has a lot of ability and can "definitely win some games this year."

"It feels to good hear that from somebody of his stature," Relphorde said.

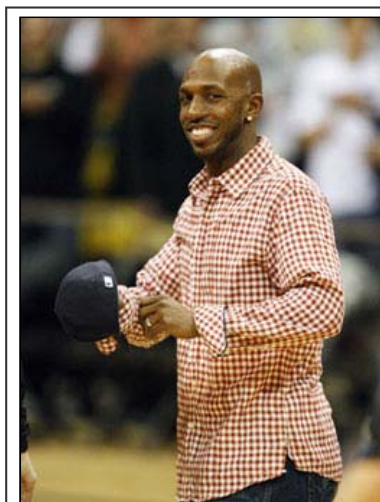
AROUND THE BIG 12 ...

MORE BUFFS BITS: The Big 12 named Relphorde its co-rookie of the week on Monday. He shared the award with Iowa State's Marquis Gilstrap.

Relphorde had 17 points and seven rebounds in CU's defeat of Baylor last Tuesday, and 18 points Saturday.

No Buff has been named Big 12 rookie of the week since Richard Roby in December 2004.

Following its game Wednesday at Oklahoma State, CU will go to Texas A&M on Saturday. The Buffs own a 30-game losing streak in conference road games.



Former Colorado player and current Nugget Chauncey Billups smiles as he is introduced to the crowd on alumni night during halftime of the Kansas State-Colorado game Saturday in Boulder. **Jack Dempsey/AP**

A win would not only snap the streak but also sustain the buzz around the program at last week's home games. CU reported that 10,852 attended Saturday, the 17th-largest crowd at the Coors Events Center.

"I think the most disappointing thing about the loss to Kansas State was to not reward our fans," Bzdelik said. "They've been absolutely awesome. If we can create that kind of environment in Coors (Events Center), we're going to have a lot of fun in that building."

ONE ISN'T FUN: Newly No. 1 Texas had to overcome a two-point halftime deficit last Wednesday at Iowa State, and a 13-point deficit Saturday to Texas A&M.

And then a 14-point deficit against Kansas State on Monday. The Longhorns couldn't quite fight back from that one, and ended up losing 71-62.

The stakes — and pressure — were certainly starting to build.

Monday morning at 4 a.m., fans started lining up outside Bramlage Coliseum for the Longhorns' game at Kansas State.

Such is life when you're No. 1.

"There's no doubt that (opponents) are going to bring energy and emotion when you're a highly ranked team, whether you're 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, whatever," Texas coach Rick Barnes said. "I guess the higher you are, the more pressure you get. Our players have to embrace that and know that in the long run, if we do embrace it, it can make us get better."

Texas will get another chance to "embrace it" Saturday at Connecticut.

Meanwhile, Kansas State, ranked No. 10 this week, is relishing its success.

"This generation wasn't around when K-State was one of the elite programs in the country in men's basketball, but their parents were and their family members were, and you're starting to see that connection take place," Wildcats coach Frank Martin said.

TIME TO PANIC? Texas Tech and Nebraska have started 0-3. Nebraska is 0-2 at home in conference.

"Our guys are giving me everything they've got," Nebraska coach Doc Sadler said. "As a coach, you can't ask for any more than that. As long as we continue to play as hard as we've been playing, we'll be fine."

Sadler added, "when you're playing three and four freshmen in this league, you're going to struggle."

The Cornhuskers visit Missouri on Saturday.

After starting the season 9-0, Texas Tech has lost five of its past eight, including its first three conference games. Coach Pat Knight bristled when asked what Red Raiders fans have to be excited about upon entering Wednesday's home game with Iowa State.

"If you're a real basketball fan and you support your team, you come out even if we're 0-16," he said.

"I'm getting worn out trying to fight this fan stuff. The kids proved they can play good basketball early on. You're going to go into a slump sometimes, especially in this league."

TIP-INS: The Big 12's combined home record entered Monday at 118-6. Five losses came in last week's conference games. ... Oklahoma's Tony Crocker, the league's 20th leading scorer at 12.3 points per game, sprained an ankle Saturday. The Sooners hope he'll return tonight for their game with Texas A&M.

Patrick Ridgell's Big 12 notes column runs Tuesdays during the conference season.

Billups tells CU Buffs 'to hang in there'

Former Colorado standout keeps in close touch with Bzdelik

By Ryan Thorburn Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

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When Colorado upgraded the facilities inside the Coors Events Center, Jeff Bzdelik made sure a permanent locker with Chauncey Billups' name above it was included in the refurbished dressing room.

Billups returned home on Saturday to watch the Buffs take on Kansas State in front of a season-high crowd of 10,852.

After CU fell short on the scoreboard, "Mr. Big Shot" gave the young team a pep talk in the team's fancy new digs.

"He just told us to hang in there," junior forward Marcus Relphorde said. "He said we looked pretty good ... that we had a lot of ability and should win some games this year. It definitely feels good to hear from somebody of his stature. It was a positive."

Bzdelik and Billups -- the former Nuggets' head coach and current Nuggets starting point guard, respectively -- have been communicating on a regular basis since the rebuilding process at CU began after the once promising Ricardo Patton era ended with a thud.

"Chauncey and I, we're close," Bzdelik said. "We communicate very often, and I knew he was coming (Saturday). Chauncey has been very supportive. He has been awesome and he knows these guys."

Relphorde honored

Relphorde was named co-Big 12 rookie of the week on Monday along with Iowa State's Marquis Gilstrap. It's the first time a CU player has received the honor since Dec. 27, 2004, when Richard Roby earned the accolades as a freshman.

Relphorde had 17 points and seven rebounds in the upset of Baylor and 18 points in 19 minutes against K-State.

Alec Burks hasn't won the award yet, but the shooting guard leads all Big 12 freshmen in scoring (279 points, 16.4 per game) and is the only freshman in the nation to score in double figures in every game this season.

These additions have taken some of the pressure off Cory Higgins.

"When you look to your left and look to your right and see you have some people next to you who can play in this league, it should give you some more confidence," Bzdelik said. "Cory's attitude has always been great. I think toward the end of last year he started to wear down because he had to do so many things."

Higgins scored 30 points against the Wildcats on 12-for-18 shooting, but Texas' Damion James was named the conference's player of the week.

Not crying foul

Bzdelik refused to say anything negative about the officials after Saturday's game, which included a Coors Events Center-record 68 combined personal fouls and 95 free-throw attempts.

CU's coach maintains that 90 percent of foul calls are caused by defensive mistakes. During Monday's teleconference with members of the media, Kansas State coach Frank Martin also blamed the whistles on poor defense by the players.

"Fouling is a bad play. We take pride in being physical and being tough, but fouling is not a part of what we teach," said Martin, who was also hit with a technical foul. "We're getting called for fouls that we make. And we need to stop doing

that."

The Buffs have already had 14 players foul out through 17 games. That equals last year's total for the entire season.

Attendance boost

CU's largest crowd since Jan. 15, 2005, has boosted the season average at the Coors Events Center to 5,247.

That's last in the Big 12. Baylor ranks 11th, drawing 6,172 per game.

RPI update

CU was ranked 142 in RPI on Monday evening at realtimerpi.com. That's also last in the Big 12.

The rest of the conference was ranked as follows: Kansas (3), Texas (5), Kansas State (6), Baylor (27), Texas A&M (39), Texas Tech (50), Oklahoma (77), Iowa State (107) and Nebraska (119).

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Big 12 men's hoops power rankings

Ryan Thorburn
Boulder Daily Camera

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(Last week's ranking, current record)

- 1. Kansas (2/16-1/2-0)** -- Jayhawks have held 91 consecutive opponents under 50 percent shooting. **Up next:** Wednesday vs. Baylor.
- 2. Kansas State (5/15-2/2-1)** -- Big upset in the Little Apple as Wildcats take down No. 1 Texas. **Up next:** Saturday vs. Oklahoma State.
- 3. Texas (1/17-1/3-1)** -- Longhorns suffer first loss of the season on Big Monday vs. K-State. **Up next:** Saturday at Connecticut.
- 4. Missouri (4/14-4/2-1)** -- Tigers have forced 20 or more turnovers 14 times this season. **Up next:** Saturday vs. Nebraska.
- 5. Baylor (3/14-2/2-1)** -- Bears rebounded quickly from loss in Boulder. **Up next:** Wednesday at Kansas.
- 6. Texas A&M (6/12-5/1-2)** -- Aggies pushed Texas to overtime before losing in Austin. **Up next:** Tonight vs. Oklahoma.
- 7. Oklahoma State (7/13-4/1-2)** -- Cowboys won't be in a good mood when the Buffs arrive. **Up next:** Wednesday vs. Colorado.
- 8. Oklahoma (11/11-6/2-1)** -- Talented Sooners showing signs of life with two home wins. **Up next:** Tonight at Texas A&M.
- 9. Iowa State (9/12-5/1-1)** -- Cyclones' starting five can compete with anyone. Depth is the issue. **Up next:** Wednesday at Texas Tech.
- 10. Colorado (12/10-7/1-2)** -- Buffs get out of the basement this week after upsetting Baylor and playing K-State tough. **Up next:** Wednesday at Oklahoma State.
- 11. Nebraska (10/12-6/0-3)** -- Doc Sadler's team drops a pair of heartbreakers in Lincoln. **Up next:** Saturday at Missouri.
- 12. Texas Tech (8/12-5/0-3)** -- Red Raiders back to reality after impressive run in non-conference play. **Up next:** Wednesday vs. Iowa State.

-- Ryan Thorburn

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