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Colorado trying to rebound

By Patrick Ridgell
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BOULDER — Colorado men's basketball coach Jeff Bzdelik fields questions nearly every day about his team's rebounding deficiencies. There's good reason for this.

Tuesday's effort against Yale, in which the Buffs were outrebounded 41-27, has landed CU, as of Thursday, last in the Big 12 in rebounding margin at minus-2.5. They average 30.4 a game and allow 32.9.

With Saturday's game at Tulsa (1 p.m., no TV) looming, as well as the Big 12 schedule, which starts Jan. 9, the Buffs' rebounding is magnified. Tulsa's plus-10.4 margin is second best in Conference USA.

"I think every team has something," Bzdelik said before Thursday's practice. "Though rebounding is a big thing; it's a key issue.

"We were really only minus-1 overall going into (the Yale) game. We just have to continue to fight that area of concern all the time." CU is one of only two Big 12 programs with a negative rebounding margin. Missouri is at minus-0.5.

Bzdelik said CU works daily on rebounding. That won't change.

Meanwhile, CU leads the league in free throwing shooting (78.2 percent). It's sixth in scoring (78.8 points per game) and fifth in shooting (49.4 percent). So the Buffs do have some strengths.

Whether those strengths outweigh their glaring weakness is unclear.

"Rebounding is a big part of the game of basketball," guard Dwight Thorne said. "But I mean (shooting) can help combat (rebounding). If we don't rebound the way we should, then we can make shots and make our free throws.

"We have to improve our rebounding in this next game. That's our Achilles' heel."

It's unclear whether Bzdelik will expand his rotation with more big men once Big 12 play starts. CU starts four guards and one forward — 6-foot-9 Austin Dufault. Reserves Shane Harris-Tunks, 6-11, and 6-9 Casey Crawford are playing 12.2 and 11.4 minutes a game.

Saturday's opponent should provide a good indication to Bzdelik's plan. Tulsa senior center Jerome Jordan is a 7-footer who Bzdelik said is potentially a mid-first round NBA draft pick. Averaging 8.8 rebounds a game, Jordan is a similar talent to what awaits the Buffs in the Big 12.

"(Tulsa) is one of the best rebounding teams in the nation," Bzdelik said.

EARLY FLIGHT: The Buffs left Boulder following Thursday morning's practice for Tulsa even though the game won't be played until Saturday afternoon.

Bzdelik said CU already must house and feed its players, and he added he didn't want to deal with busy airports or

weather problems the day before an early game.

“I’d like to be here with my friends and stuff like that on New Year’s, but I know we have business to take care of in Tulsa,” Thorne said.

Bzdelik said the team will likely practice today at Oral Roberts University, but not at the Donald W. Reynolds Center, the venue for Saturday’s game.

“They won’t let us,” he said.

BECKLEY OUT: Bzdelik said 6-10 junior forward Trent Beckley is not expected to play any time soon due to “health issues (that) are a concern that need to be addressed right now.”

Beckley has appeared in two games and played four minutes in 2009-10. Bzdelik said Beckley has not practiced in a long time.

“That’s a shame; he’d provide us with a big wide body,” Bzdelik said.

STARTERS: CU lists Nate Tomlinson as a starter and Dwight Thorne coming off the bench for Saturday.

Bzdelik said Thorne’s minutes have not dropped much since he started coming off the bench two games ago. Thorne is averaging 20.8 minutes a game. He has played 19 and 18 in CU’s past two outings.

Tomlinson and Thorne both said Thursday they don’t care who starts.

“Just as long as we win,” Tomlinson said. “The whole team has that on their minds now.”

Read Patrick Ridgell’s CU sports blog at www.timescall.com/blogs/ridgell. He can be reached at pridgell@times-call.com.