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Searching for answers, Buffs hit road again

By Patrick Ridgell
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BOULDER — You can't get around it.

The 31-game road losing streak in Big 12 games the Colorado men's basketball team carries today to Texas A&M is impossible to ignore. It has become the bane of the program's existence.

Wednesday's 90-78 loss at Oklahoma State rendered last week's encouraging home efforts against two ranked opponents forgotten. It prompted coach Jeff Bzdelik to wonder publicly about the leadership he sees on the court. And that prompted at least one player to take exception.

"Obviously I have to go have a talk with him, first of all, to see what he's really looking for, and then I have to go from there," said Dwight Thorne, CU's lone senior. "I think to make any speculations is not always the best thing to do. If he feels there are certain things we aren't doing as well as we should be doing, and we can do better, I would like to hear it from him."

Said Bzdelik: "I can't stop every play and call a timeout. At some point in an environment like we were in (Wednesday), somebody has to gather everybody around and say, 'Come on, we have to really execute on this one' or 'Come on, let's do this.'"

"If I say something to a player ... it never gets to the next player, and then the next player and the next player. In today's society, we might have to let them play with their cell phones so we can text each other down the court."

Yet another road game provides CU yet another opportunity to fix things. The mystery is what'll go wrong today.

CU's start Wednesday perplexed Bzdelik. It trailed 11-0 before finally losing by 12. Slow starts hadn't been a problem previously, including Jan. 9 at Texas. Thorne said the Buffs came out flat.

"Why they'd be flat ... I'm going to ask them (why)," Bzdelik said. "I don't understand that."

The coach lamented how his team can be No. 3 in the Big 12 in scoring in conference games only, and No. 12 in points allowed. It's No. 2 in shooting, No. 12 in defensive field goal percentage. CU's rebounding margin through four league games is minus-15.2.

Does he have a bunch of guys who like to play just offense, not defense?

"That'd be correct," Bzdelik answered.

GAME PREVIEW

Colorado men (10-8, 1-3) at Texas A&M (13-5, 2-2)

When/Where: 11:30 a.m. today at Reed Arena in College Station, Texas

TV/Radio: Altitude/KKZN AM

The series: CU leads 9-7. Texas A&M leads 3-2 in Reed Arena and has won the past six meetings.

Leading scorers: CU — Cory Higgins (18.6 points per game); Texas A&M — Donald Sloan (17.5 points per game)

Notes: In addition to its 31 straight conference road losses, CU has lost its past 23 road games against Division I opponents. ... Coach Jeff Bzdelik said forward Trent Beckley, who CU previously reported was not expected to play this season due to undisclosed health issues, is doing more in practice. Bzdelik would not say if Beckley will play this year. "We're taking it day by day," he said. ... Reserve forward Casey Crawford played 21 minutes Wednesday at Oklahoma State, his most since 23 against Gonzaga in November. Crawford hadn't played in four of CU's previous seven games. Whether he plays today depends on the situation, Bzdelik said. ... Texas A&M is 10-0 at home.

Patrick Ridgell

CU's problems defending and rebounding aren't new. Neither are its road woes. But by now, the challenges away from home might be more mental than anything.

Thorne said only one thing will cure all.

"A win," he said. "I think a win would be the best thing, or to be in position to win toward the end of a game, where we feel like we can go and get it. The best kind of experience you can get is actually doing something. We haven't won (a conference road game) since I've been here.

"I know me, personally, I expect to win every time I step on this floor. It's competitive spirit. I think all of us have that. But we don't know what it takes to win on the road. That's the biggest thing. We know what it takes to win here. We know what it takes to win Big 12 home games. We haven't realized what it takes to win Big 12 road games."

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

CU Buffs turn attention to Aggies, defense

In Big 12 play, Buffs giving up league-worst 87.8 points per game

By Ryan Thorburn Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

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COLLEGE STATION, Texas -- After losses at Kansas State and Texas last week, Mark Turgeon's confidence in his third Texas A&M team never wavered.

"Stick with us," Turgeon said during Monday's teleconference with the media. "We'll be all right."

Sure enough, the Aggies bounced back with a 65-62 home victory over Oklahoma to improve to 13-5 overall and 2-2 in the Big 12.

Colorado -- which has also lost to Texas and Kansas State, two teams currently ranked in the top 10 nationally -- could use its own confidence boost Saturday against Texas A&M at Reed Arena (11:47 a.m., Altitude).

The Buffs (10-8, 1-3) are trying to rebound from a 90-78 loss at Oklahoma State that stretched their road losing streak in the Big 12 to 31 games.

CU had four different players score in double figures in Stillwater with Casey Crawford adding nine points. The problem was a weak effort on the defensive end as the Cowboys shot 55.4 percent from the game with 44 points in the paint and 17 second-chance points.

"Our offense is great," noted Alec Burks, who had a career-high 24 points against Oklahoma State. "On defense we just need to pick up our intensity the whole game. If we rebounded and played with more heart the whole game we would have won."

Since conference play began, the Buffs are third in the Big 12 in scoring at 80.8 points per game. Kansas (84.7 ppg) is first and Texas (81.8 ppg) is second.

However, CU is last in scoring defense, allowing 87.8 points per game. Texas Tech is 11th (83.8 ppg).

The Aggies (65.2 ppg) are 10th in scoring offense but tied for third in scoring defense (68.8 ppg).

"Defense is a big thing we have to take care of," Dwight Thorne said. "All we can do is work on it, but it will get better."

Texas A&M is 13-0 this season and 41-5 under Turgeon when holding opponents under 70 points.

Senior guard Donald Sloan is averaging 18.0 points for the Aggies in the six games since backcourt mate Derrick Roland suffered a gruesome season-ending knee injury in a loss at Washington.

"Guys gain confidence or lose confidence as the season goes on," Turgeon said. "You want to be one of those teams that gains confidence as the season goes on."

The Aggies, like every Big 12 team, are very confident at home with a 10-0 record at Reed Arena entering Saturday's game.

A victory in College Station would give the Buffs a much-needed road breakthrough and an opportunity to even their conference record at home against Nebraska on Wednesday.

"There's no reason why we can't turn it around," Cory Higgins said. "Starting (now)."

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CU men's preview: at Texas A&M

Camera staff
Boulder Daily Camera

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TODAY -- Colorado plays Texas A&M at 11:47 a.m. at Reed Arena.

BROADCAST -- Television: Altitude with Brad Sham (play-by-play) and Reid Gettys (analyst); Radio: KKZN (760 AM) with Mark Johnson (play-by-play) and Charles Johnson (color).

STORYLINES -- The Buffs (10-8, 1-3) are coming off a 90-78 loss at Oklahoma State on Wednesday. ... CU has lost 31 consecutive Big 12 road games and 23 consecutive true road games against Division I opponents. ... Alec Burks scored a career-high 24 points against the Cowboys and is the only freshman in the country to score in double figures every game this season. ... The Aggies (13-5, 2-2) are coming off a 65-62 victory over Oklahoma that improved their record at Reed Arena to 10-0 this season. ... CU's previous two road opponents, Texas and Oklahoma State, were also 10-0 at home when the Buffs visited.

KEY STAT -- Alec Burks is averaging 18.4 points and 6.6 rebounds over the last five games.

KEY STAT II -- The Aggies are 13-0 this season when holding opponents under 70 points.

COACHES -- Jeff Bzdelik is 31-50 in his third season at CU. Mark Turgeon is 62-26 in his third season at Texas A&M.

PROBABLE STARTERS:

Colorado -- G Nate Tomlinson, 6-3, sophomore, 5.9 ppg, 2.7 rpg, G Alec Burks, 6-6, freshman, 16.8 ppg, 5.2 rpg, G Cory Higgins, 6-5, junior, 18.6 ppg, 3.6 rpg, G Marcus Relphorde, 6-7, junior, 11.1 ppg, 3.4 rpg, F Austin Dufault, 6-9, sophomore, 6.6 ppg, 3.4 rpg

Texas A&M -- G Dash Harris, 6-1, sophomore, 5.1 ppg, 3.3 rpg, G David Sloan, 6-3, senior, 17.5 ppg, 3.9 rpg, F Bryan Davis, 6-9, senior, 9.6 ppg, 7.1 rpg, F Khris Middleton, 6-7, freshman, 5.7 ppg, 3.7 rpg, F Nathan Walkup, 6-7, junior, 6.4 ppg, 3.7 rpg.

SERIES -- Colorado leads 9-7, although Texas A&M has won the previous six meetings.

UP NEXT -- The Buffs return home to face Nebraska on Wednesday (8 p.m., FSN).

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