

Thorburn: Bears turning heads around Big 12

Ryan Thorburn
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 01/25/2010 11:44:50 PM MST

There are still reasons to be optimistic about Colorado's season, despite a 1-4 start to the Big 12 grind.

For starters, the Buffs' victory came against Baylor -- the team everyone else in the conference is a little frightened of.

When asked what has caught his eye through two weeks of conference play, Kansas head coach Bill Self immediately thought of the bad news Bears.

"I think Baylor is good," Self said during Monday's Big 12 coaches' teleconference with the media. "I thought we played very well against Baylor and it took everything we had to win the game at home. ... I think Baylor is probably the biggest surprise in the league today."

The No. 24 Bears (15-3, 2-2) -- who lost 81-75 at Allen Fieldhouse and 78-71 at the Coors Events Center -- were picked to finish 10th in the preseason coaches poll but have the look of an NCAA Tournament team.

During a 71-45 victory over UMass on Saturday, Tweety Carter had 23 points and seven rebounds, and Ekpe Udoh finished with 23 points and seven blocks. LaceDarius Dunn has averaged 23.6 points over the last five games while shooting 52.3 percent (23-for-44) from 3-point distance.

"I'm mad at myself," Self said of not recruiting Udoh, an Edmond, Okla., export who went to Michigan and then transferred to Baylor. "He's from my hometown. We definitely knew about him in high school but didn't make a run."

The Bears can really solidify an already impressive resume with games against No. 11 Kansas State (in Waco) and No. 6 Texas (in Austin) this week.

"When you're playing two teams in the top 10 in the nation, that's a great opportunity to show your team belongs there," Baylor coach Scott Drew said.

Bufs still hurting

The return of Marcus Relphorde and Keegan Hornbuckle to the Buffs' rotation is up in the air for Wednesday's pivotal home game against Nebraska.

Relphorde was unable to play down the stretch in CU's 67-63 loss at Texas A&M on Saturday due to a bruised hip. Hornbuckle didn't even suit up because of a nagging right shoulder injury.

"Those guys are day to day," Jeff Bzdelik said.

This is a critical week for the Buffs to make some progress in the standings with the last-place Huskers (12-7, 0-4) coming to Boulder. CU then makes a road trip to Ames to play an Iowa State team in turmoil.

Texas A&M coach Mark Turgeon predicts a turnaround for CU, which has already played at Texas and Oklahoma State.

"They've had an unbelievably tough schedule," Turgeon said. "I guess everybody has had a tough schedule in the Big 12, but it has been really hard on them. They'll win some games."

Stunned by Staiger

One week ago Greg McDermott, who was already down to eight scholarship players due to injuries and suspensions, was verbally stabbed in the back by Lucca Staiger.

The talented junior shooting guard informed the Iowa State coach that he was leaving the program immediately to pursue a professional playing career in his native Germany.

The Cyclones lost that night at Texas Tech and again on Saturday to Kansas at home.

"It was a tough week, but that week is over and we're ready to move on," McDermott said.

Red Raiders coach Pat Knight, who benefited from Staiger's stunning departure, didn't bite his tongue on the sore subject.

"To get up and leave like that doesn't show much respect for his coaches, his teammates, the fans, and the university," Knight said. "He's being selfish, leaving his team. ...

"Everyone wants to blame the coaches too much. You need to start holding these kids accountable."

Staiger, who said he decided to leave Iowa State because he realized his dream of playing in the NBA wasn't realistic, signed a contract with a professional team in Berlin.

On the Mark?

Texas A&M is shooting 18.1 percent (17-for-94) from 3-point distance in Big 12 play, including a 2-for-23 (8.7 percent) effort behind the arc in Saturday's four-point win over CU.

Turgeon insists this bricks will turn into baskets soon. And opponents better look out for the Aggies (14-5, 3-2) when they start making open shots.

"We're going to come out of it. I keep saying that," Turgeon said. "We shot 23 3-pointers on Saturday, and I thought only two of them were bad shots. ...

"We won two close games (last week), and obviously if we would have shot it better they wouldn't have been as close. But right now we're doing what we have to do to win."

The dark Knight

Knight usually tries to be patient with the Red Raiders and focuses on the big picture. But after falling behind 31-23 at halftime to Oklahoma on Saturday in Lubbock, Bob's son went ballistic in the locker room.

At least for a minute or two.

"I started losing my voice and had to walk out and I let my assistants take over," Knight said. "They have better use of the English language than I do."

Texas Tech outscored the Sooners 52-34 in the second half for a 75-65 victory. But don't expect Knight to start going off on his players on a regular basis.

"My dad always told me he thought he could really go nuts on them probably three or four times a year," Knight said. "I've got to be careful because I've already used a couple up."

RPI update

The Big 12 has seven teams among the top 40 nationally in the latest Ratings Percentage Index.

Entering Monday's action, Kansas (2), Kansas State (8) and Texas (9) were all in the top 10 teams, according to the NCAA.

Oklahoma State (28), Baylor (31), Texas Tech (33), Texas A&M (37) and Missouri (47) make up the next tier.

Oklahoma (87), Iowa State (108), Nebraska (125) and Colorado (149) are at the point where winning the Big 12

Tournament might be the only way to get an invitation to the Big Dance.

Notable

Oklahoma State's James Anderson was named the Big 12 player of the week after averaging 28.0 points and 5.5 rebounds in wins over CU and K-State. Iowa State's Marquis Gilstrap earned conference rookie of the week honors for the third time in four weeks. ... Oklahoma has listened to Jeff Capel's plea for better defense. The Sooners have held their last four opponents to an average of 64.5 points and 36.9 percent shooting. ... Nebraska, despite an 0-4 start to conference play, leads the Big 12 in scoring defense (60.4 ppg).

Quotable

"It's just like a fighter. Guys look really good on the heavy bag, but that heavy bag doesn't hit back." Knight, on the struggle some teams are having in the Big 12 after piling up wins against lesser opponents in non-conference play.

[Close Window](#)[Send To Printer](#)

denverpost.com

THE DENVER POST

college basketball

With Huskers coming, CU hoops hurting

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

Posted: 01/25/2010 11:36:02 AM MST

Updated: 01/25/2010 12:50:25 PM MST



Colorado's Cory Higgins steals the ball from Texas A&M's Dash Harris late in the second half Saturday. (AP | Bob Levey)

Colorado's Jeff Bzdelik said today he is not sure whether junior forward Marcus Relphorde (bruised hip) or freshman forward Keegan Hornbuckle (shoulder) will be available for Wednesday night's home game against

Nebraska.

"Those are day-to-day," Bzdelik said on the Big 12 men's coaches teleconference.

Relphorde, a starter, left with the injury during the second half of Saturday's 67-63 loss at Texas A&M and did not return.

Hornbuckle, a reserve, did not suit up for the game.

Bzdelik said that he had not decided who would replace Relphorde if the junior-college transfer can't go. The 6-foot-7 Relphorde ranks third on the team in scoring with 10.5 points per game.

"We'll take a look at practice today,"

CU Basketball

- [View](#) slide show of former CU men's basketball coach Jeff Bzdelik .
- [View](#) slide show of CU women's basketball coach Linda Lappe .
- [Visit](#) the CU Stats Page for men's boxscores, Big 12 standings, team leaders and more .
- [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 .

Advertisement

Kodak

IF YOU'RE NOT PRINTING ON A KODAK ESP ALL-IN-ONE PRINTER, CHANCES ARE
YOU'RE PAYING TOO MUCH FOR INK.

FIND OUT HOW MUCH YOU'RE OVERPAYING FOR INK AT PRINTANDPROSPER.COM

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™

denverpost.com

THE DENVER POST

Bzdelik said about potential replacements for Relphorde.

Colorado (10-9, 1-4 Big 12) needs a victory over Nebraska (12-7, 0-4) to stay out of the conference cellar.

The loss at Texas A&M was the 25th by a single-digit margin during Bzdelik's three seasons at Colorado.

"We've done a lot of good things in basketball games to put ourselves in a position to win," Bzdelik said. "But we have to learn to close out.

"How do you close out? Well, you make timely shots. You make timely stops. In the course of a game, you can't give teams easy points with put-backs. We also have to take more charges. It's the little things that are keeping us from getting wins."

Big 12 proving wide open

Texas and Kansas State have proved to be vulnerable, and even Kansas has had a hiccup.

The Big 12 race is shaping up to be wide open, if the first couple weeks of conference play are any indication.

Texas lost two in a row after being rated No. 1 in the nation for the first time.

Kansas State, which knocked off Texas a week ago, was chopped down at home by Oklahoma

State.

Kansas' only loss was a whopper, coming against a depleted Tennessee team.

Texas Tech coach Pat Knight says every team — with the possible exception of Kansas — is bound to have a bad week in the Big 12.

Knight says teams can't let those weeks get them down.

— *The Associated Press*

Advertisement



Florida Tech
UNIVERSITY ONLINE

Bring the Classroom to Your Home
With a Degree Online From Florida Tech



APPLY TODAY!
FloridaTechOnline.com/FD | 1-888-253-5946



Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™

[Print page](#)[Close window](#)

Longmont, Colorado
Friday, April 30, 2010

Publish Date: 1/26/2010

Big 12's Texas finds trouble at top spot

By Patrick Ridgell
© 2010 Longmont Times-Call

It should be noted that in the final week of January — more than two months into the season — a team other than one from the Big 12 finally sits atop the polls.

Kentucky, the nation's last unbeaten program, was a unanimous No. 1 selection in the Associated Press and ESPN/USA Today Coaches rankings released Monday. Kansas, now No. 2, owned the top spot from the preseason until it lost at Tennessee on Jan. 10. Then Texas took it over until last week, when losses at No. 11 Kansas State and No. 19 Connecticut dropped the Longhorns to No. 6.

Texas coach Rick Barnes was asked Monday if the sky is falling.

"I don't think I did a good enough job talking about (us) becoming the No. 1 team and how (we'd) be under attack," he said.

"I thought we came unraveled (Saturday) at Connecticut. It was, without question, one of our worst defensive performances of the year. It tells me we have to coach them better and work them harder."

Texas' problems Saturday started shortly after halftime, when point guard Dogus Balbay picked up three fouls in less than 30 seconds and had to sit. Connecticut rallied from a 45-34 deficit to win 88-74, prompting Barnes' concerns.

Texas' mental challenges are a recurring theme in Barnes' comments. He said his team concentrated better on offense at Kansas State until it fell behind, then reverted to bad habits. Asked about free throw shooting — Texas is last in the Big 12 at 62.2 percent — Barnes said, "I do think mental toughness has something to do with that." And at Connecticut, consecutive turnovers within 20 seconds made Barnes wonder if his players get it.

"They have to understand what goes into losing," he said.

But Barnes, whose team remains one of the nation's most talented, promised he won't overreact.

"We're a long way from being the team we can be ... but I'm not going to panic or anything like that," he said.



Connecticut's Stanley Robinson rises above Texas' Damion James, center, and Gary Johnson during their game Saturday in Storrs, Conn. Texas was ranked No. 1 at the time, but after losing last week to No. 19 Connecticut and No. 11 Kansas State, the Longhorns have dropped to No. 6. **Fred Beckham/AP**

AROUND THE BIG 12

BUFF STUFF: Colorado coach Jeff Bzdelik said Monday he does not know the playing status for guards Marcus Relphorde (bruised hip) and Keegan Hornbuckle (right shoulder) for Wednesday's home game with Nebraska (8 p.m., FSN).

Relphorde suffered his injury during Saturday's loss at Texas A&M. He had to leave the game and could not return. Hornbuckle did not play.

If Relphorde can't go, Bzdelik will adjust his starting lineup in the absence of CU's third-leading scorer. Bzdelik said he did not know what he'll do if he must make changes.

"That's something we'll take a look at

in practice (Monday)," he said. "I have not made up my mind."

Bzdelik could go with Austin Dufault and Shane Harris-Tunks on the front line. Dufault was a regular starter in non-conference games, but Bzdelik went with Harris-Tunks' size — 6-foot-11 — when Big 12 play started.

The Buffs came close to snapping their Big 12 road losing streak Saturday at Texas A&M, but the Aggies hit their free throws down the stretch and won by four. It's now 32 straight. A&M coach Mark Turgeon said CU is getting close.

"I think all of us coaches knew Colorado would be pretty good," Turgeon said.

"They've had an unbelievably tough schedule so far. ... It's been really hard on them. They'll win some games."

Opponents have said this stuff about the Buffs before. It seems a bit more believable in 2009-10.

MOVING ON: Iowa State is trying to recover from the sudden departure of third-leading scorer Lucca Staiger, who stunned the program last Tuesday when he left to return home, to Germany, to play professionally.

He started the season's first 17 games before leaving. The guard averaged 9.4 points and shot 42.5 percent on 3s. The Cyclones are 0-2 without Staiger.

CU will visit Iowa State on Saturday night.

STRONG NUMBERS: Seven Big 12 programs enter the week with RPIs among the nation's top 37. Eight are in the top 50.

Oklahoma State's victory at Kansas State, ranked No. 9 last week, was the Cowboys' first road win over a top 10 team since Jan. 2, 1958.

Kansas extended the nation's longest home-court winning streak Monday to 54 games when it beat Missouri.

EXTRA POINTS: Oklahoma's Willie Warren missed Saturday's loss to Texas Tech due to a sprained ankle

suffered Thursday in practice. Sooners coach Jeff Capel said he hoped Warren, their leading scorer at 17.6 points per game, would play Wednesday against Iowa State. ... Kansas coach Bill Self admitted he should have paid closer attention to Baylor's Epke Udoh. "I'm mad at myself ... he's from my hometown," Self said. That's Edmond, Okla. ... Nebraska is the only conference team that's winless in league play. The Cornhuskers lead the league in scoring defense, allowing 60.4 points per game. They're last in points, averaging 67.4 a game. ... Baylor has managed to remain ranked over the past two weeks despite losses to CU and Kansas. The Bears have a bear of a week ahead. They host Kansas State tonight, then visit Texas on Saturday. ... Kansas State will host ESPN's College GameDay on Saturday when Kansas visits.

Patrick Ridgell's Big 12 notes column runs Tuesdays during the conference season. Read his CU sports blog at www.timescall.com/blogs/ridgell. He can be reached at pridgell@timescall.com.

Published Jan 25, 2010

Published Monday January 25, 2010

Barfknecht: 'Hot' tip nets hot shot



THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Colorado's Alec Burks, a 6-foot-6 wing, is on pace to break the school's freshman points record.

True college basketball fans recognize Kentucky's John Wall and DeMarcus Cousins, Georgia Tech's Derrick Favors and Kansas' Xavier Henry.

All are true freshmen. All are expected to be "one-and-done" to the NBA next season. All are projected as Top 10 draft picks in June.

But little-known Alec Burks of Colorado has outdone them all this season in one major category.

The 6-foot-6 wing from suburban Kansas City is the only true freshman in the country to have scored in double figures in every game.

And the 18-year-old, who goes against Nebraska on Wednesday night, isn't just sneaking into double digits with meaningless baskets. In three Big 12 road games, Burks has scored 21 points against Texas, 24 against Oklahoma State and 19 against Texas A&M.

Through 19 games, Burks has led a much-improved CU in scoring eight times. He is No. 8 in the Big 12 at 16.9 points, and No. 6 in league play with an 18.8 average.

"He is showing people that he is one of the elite freshmen in this nation," Buffs coach Jeff Bzdelik said Monday from Boulder, Colo.

At his current pace, Burks will pass longtime NBA star Chauncey Billups and former All-Big 12 pick Richard Roby for the most points in CU history as a freshman.

So how did Bzdelik find this gem and sneak him away from Kansas, Kansas State and Missouri?

Go back two summers. The Colorado staff told Bzdelik to go to a camp at a small Kansas college that he can't remember the name of.

"I think I flew into Kansas City and drove two hours," he said. "It wasn't even AAU teams. It was just individual players that they put on teams.

"There were two gyms — one air-conditioned and one wasn't. I hate being cold, even if it's 100 degrees outside, which it was. I went in and there was one other coach in there."

Bzdelik, who spent a decade in the NBA as a coach and scouting director, said he had one thought as he wiped away sweat and watched Burks perform.

"I was hopeful the other coach wasn't watching," Bzdelik said, laughing. "I followed (Burks) around and thought, 'Unless I'm crazy, this young man can play.' "

Burks signed with Colorado in November 2008 before his senior season, picking CU over Kansas State.

As a senior at Grandview High, Burks grew two inches and exploded onto the K.C.-area basketball scene. He was named the Missouri Gatorade player of the year and the Kansas City Star metro player of the year.

The strong play continued once Burks arrived in Boulder.

"I kept saying to myself that this young man is really talented, and in a variety of ways," Bzdelik said. "He has a great feel for the game instinctively — things you just don't teach."

And off the court?

"He is a terrific young man," Bzdelik said. "He has the total package both on and off the court. He's as good of a young man as he is a player."

Basketball is the Burks family's game. Alec's father, Stevie, played collegiately at Washington. His older brother, Steven, is a senior at Peru State (Neb.) College averaging 11.9 points.

But talent and background are no guarantees to the consistency Burks is showing.

"Young players are young players, and it's hard to be consistent," Bzdelik said. "You'll see flashes of it. You'll see flashes of other things as well that aren't so good."

"I didn't think he'd be this consistent. Hopefully, it will continue."

Locker talk

Texas Tech, playing Oklahoma at home Saturday, shot 25 percent from the field in the first half and trailed 31-23.

Tech coach Pat Knight stomped into the locker room to give his best what-the-hell-was-that speech — and lost his voice.

"I was so mad I had to walk out," he said Monday. "I just let my assistants take over. They've got better use of the English language than I do. So the kids kind of got an earful from every corner of the locker room."

The Red Raiders rallied to win 75-65, but Knight said he learned a lesson from his Hall of Fame coaching father Bob that you have to pick your spots for a fiery halftime speech. Do it too often and the players stop listening.

"My dad always told me he thought he could really go nuts on them about three or four times during the year," Knight said. "Now, if you use up those three or four times right away, you're kind of in trouble."

"So I've got to be careful. I've used a couple up, so next time I'll have to try a different approach."

Players of the week

Overall: Oklahoma State guard James Anderson. The junior from Junction City, Ark., had 26 points and eight rebounds in a win over Colorado and 30 points and three assists in a win over No. 9 Kansas State.

Rookie: Iowa State forward Marquis Gilstrap. The senior from Covington, Ga., averaged 18.5 points and 12 rebounds in losses to Texas Tech and No. 3 Kansas.

Worth watching

This is an extremely interesting week for No. 11 Kansas State and No. 24 Baylor.

Those schools meet tonight in Waco, Texas. Then Saturday, KSU hosts No. 2 Kansas and BU plays at No. 6 Texas. Title hopes for these upstarts could depend on how this week unfolds.

Kansas coach Bill Self said he expects Baylor to be in the hunt to the end.

"Baylor is good," Self said. "I thought we played very well, and it took everything we had to win the game at home."

Kansas State throttled then-No. 1 Texas last week, but followed it up with an upset loss at home to Oklahoma State. KSU coach Frank Martin said he hopes that the ugly numbers against OSU were an anomaly.

"When you shoot 35 percent from the field, you miss 13 or 14 free throws and you get outrebounded, you're not going to win in the Big 12," Martin said. "I don't care if you play in a park, a rec center, on the road or at home."

Stat of the week

Kansas State has made 422 free throws, which is more than five other Big 12 schools have attempted: Baylor 362, Nebraska 365, Oklahoma 407, Missouri 417, Iowa State 417.

Quote sheet

- Texas Tech coach Pat Knight on what his young players are learning about action in the Big 12: "It's just like a fighter. Guys look great on the heavy bag. But the heavy bag doesn't hit back. From the preseason going into the conference, it shocked a lot of these guys just how tough it is."

Contact the writer:

444-1024, lee.barfknecht@owh.com

Copyright ©2010 Omaha World-Herald®. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten, displayed or redistributed for any purpose without permission from the Omaha World-Herald.