

Big 12 basement on line between CU and Nebraska

Bufs' Relphorde likely to try to play through hip pain vs. Huskers

By Ryan Thorburn Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

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Dwight Thorne isn't always politically correct inside the Dal Ward Center.

There have been times during his career at Colorado where he has worn a red shirt or hat around campus without thinking much about it.

Nebraska?

Just another Big 12 team Thorne and the Bufs hope to beat. No different than Iowa State or Missouri.

"I don't think it's a rivalry like football," Thorne said. "In Dal Ward, they get mad if you wear red. I tell them: 'I play basketball, I don't play football.'"

"I don't think it's the same at all, but it's a rivalry in its own right."

There will be plenty of intensity and tension on the court between CU and Nebraska tonight at the Coors Events Center (8:07 p.m., FSN) as each team desperately tries to avoid the Big 12 basement.

The Bufs (10-9, 1-4) have lost three consecutive games since upsetting Baylor 15 days ago. The Cornhuskers (12-7, 0-4) are the only winless team in conference play.

"What's the saying? The most dangerous animal in the woods is a wounded one," Jeff Bzdelik said. "We're wounded too."

CU is coming off a 67-63 loss at Texas A&M. Sixty-three points will probably be good enough to win at home tonight.

Nebraska leads the Big 12 and is 25th nationally in scoring defense (60.4 ppg) but is averaging just 57.8 points on offense in its four conference games.

Last year the Huskers escaped Boulder with a 55-53 victory. This season the Bufs -- who are averaging 77.2 points in conference play -- are more skilled offensively with the addition of Alec Burks and Marcus Relphorde.

"If we can just get it up the court without turning the ball over, once we get in the half court and run our stuff, I think we'll be all right," Austin Dufault said. "We have to be ready for them and match their energy, if not exceed it." The Huskers have been within four points of the lead in the final nine minutes of every conference game this season. Like the Bufs, they just haven't found a way to finish consistently.

Both young and relatively inexperienced teams use four-guard lineups. Two 6-11 freshmen centers, Shane Harris-Tunks and Jorge Diaz, will easily be the tallest players on the court.

"A lot of times they've been under-sized but they have five guys that just scrap the whole game," Dufault said. "They never take a possession off. They just play extremely hard and they're disciplined at the same time."

Relphorde, who was unable to finish the Texas A&M game after suffering a bruised hip, practiced on Tuesday and will likely try to play through pain tonight.

"It's still hurting," Relphorde said. "We'll see how it feels. It hurts and it's probably going to hurt regardless. It's kind of what I can take."

True freshman Keegan Hornbuckle is very questionable and underwent an MRI on his ailing right shoulder on Tuesday. He did not suit up at Texas A&M.

The Buffs had a short bench before the injury bug hit. Meanwhile, Huskers coach Doc Sadler plays nine players at least 11 minutes and has used an 11-man rotation since Big 12 play began.

"They do a great job of staying in front of you and staying up and into you," Bzdelik said. "They combine that great ball pressure with great weak side awareness. We're going to have to execute well under duress."

Thorne led the Buffs with 21 points on 7-for-13 shooting in the loss to Nebraska at the Coors Events Center last season. Since conference play began, the veteran guard is shooting 65.4 percent from the field and averaging 11.8 points off the bench.

As CU's only senior, Thorne sees red every time he steps on the court against a Big 12 foe.

"Being a guy who has been here for four years and been through the grind and the struggles, it's on my shoulders to be a leader and show them you have to really play in this part of the season," Thorne said.

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CU men's preview: Nebraska

Camera staff
Boulder Daily Camera

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TODAY -- Colorado hosts Nebraska at 8:07 p.m. at the Coors Events Center.

BROADCAST -- Television: FSN with Tom Helmer (play-by-play), Ceal Barry (analyst) and Alanna Rizzo (sideline); **Radio:** KKZN (760 AM) with Mark Johnson (play-by-play) and Charles Johnson (color).

STORYLINES -- The Buffs (10-9, 1-4) have lost three consecutive games and are coming off a 67-63 loss at Texas A&M. ... CU ranks fourth nationally in free throw percentage (.768) and 17th in field goal percentage (.486). ... The Cornhuskers (12-7, 0-4) are the only team in the Big 12 without a conference win. ... Nebraska is shooting just 39.3 percent and averaging 57.8 points in conference play.

KEY STAT -- Alec Burks, the only freshman in the country to score in double figures in every game this season, is projected as the No. 4 pick in the 2011 NBA draft by nbadraft.net. The 6-6 guard is averaging 16.9 points and 5.1 rebounds.

KEY STAT II -- Since returning to the starting lineup, Austin Dufault has averaged 11.5 points, 4.0 rebounds and is shooting 60 percent (9-for-15) from the field in the past two games.

COACHES -- Jeff Bzdelik is 31-51 in his third season at CU. Doc Sadler is 67-47 in his fourth season at Nebraska.

PROBABLE STARTERS:

Colorado -- G Nate Tomlinson, 6-3, sophomore, 5.6 ppg, 2.5 rpg; G Alec Burks, 6-6, freshman, 16.9 ppg, 5.1 rpg; G Cory Higgins, 6-5, junior, 18.6 ppg, 3.5 rpg; G Marcus Relphorde, 6-7, junior, 10.5 ppg, 3.5 rpg; F Austin Dufault, 6-9, sophomore, 6.9 ppg, 3.4 rpg.

Nebraska -- G Brandon Richardson, 6-0, sophomore, 8.7 ppg, 2.0 rpg; G Sek Henry, 6-3, senior, 8.2 ppg, 3.7 rpg; G Lance Jeter, 6-3, junior, 6.9 ppg, 3.3 rpg; G Ryan Anderson, 6-4, senior, 10.8 ppg, 5.1 rpg; C Jorge Diaz, 6-11, freshman, 8.5 ppg, 4.0 rpg.

SERIES -- Nebraska leads 76-68, including a 16-11 edge in Big 12 play.

UP NEXT -- The Buffs play at Iowa State on Saturday at Hilton Coliseum (7 p.m., no television).

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Aching CU 'desperate' for victory

Bruised Buffaloes brace for Huskers

By Patrick Ridgell
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BOULDER — The Colorado men's basketball team is bruised in more ways than one.

First, the Buffs have some unresolved injury problems as they enter tonight's home game against Nebraska.(8 p.m., FSN).

Starting guard Marcus Relphorde has a hip pointer that he said he suffered during Saturday's loss at Texas A&M. He played only 20 minutes and left without scoring. He also missed Monday's practice. He said he'd practice Tuesday before determining his status for tonight.

CU listed Relphorde, third on the team with 10.5 points per game, as a starter tonight in its notes.

Reserve guard Keegan Hornbuckle has had an MRI on the right shoulder injury that kept him out at Texas A&M. Coach Jeff Bzdelik had yet to learn its results as of Tuesday afternoon.

Hornbuckle averages only 12.1 minutes a game, and he logged nine total in the three prior to A&M. If he's out and Relphorde is out, CU's depth at the wing will be thinned considerably.

The Buffs welcome a visitor in Nebraska that has yet to win a Big 12 game — the only winless conference team. But Nebraska plays an aggressive defensive style that has enabled the Cornhuskers to lead the Big 12 in scoring defense (60.4 points per game).

The programs share a similar mindset.

"They're desperate, and we're desperate, and everybody's desperate," Bzdelik said.

"What's that expression? 'The most dangerous animal in the woods is a wounded one.' And we're wounded too."

The Buffs have lost their past three since their stirring upset of Baylor on Jan. 12. Two were painfully close, including Saturday at A&M, where CU's Big 12 road losing streak reached 32 straight. There is belief inside the program and among college basketball observers that CU is improving. A loss tonight would thwart such belief.

Bzdelik said Nebraska slows the game's pace. It averages around 60 possessions a game, while the Buffs average in the 70s. Bzdelik said tonight will partially be a battle to see who can impose whose style.

But his main point was that Nebraska just defends well.

"They do a great job of just staying in front of you and staying up and into you, and combine that ball pressure with great weak-side awareness," he said. "We're going to have to execute well and under duress efficiently."

At least one Buff said that shouldn't be a problem.

"I think we've proven we can score against anybody," senior guard Dwight Thorne said.

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

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Tonight's games

By Patrick Ridgell
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Nebraska (12-7, 0-4) at Colorado men (10-9, 1-4)

When/Where: 8 p.m. tonight at the Coors Events Center in Boulder.

TV/Radio: FSN/KKZN AM.

The series: Nebraska leads 76-68. The Cornhuskers have won the past three meetings and five of the past seven.

Leading scorers: CU — Cory Higgins (18.6 points per game); Nebraska — Ryan Anderson (10.8 points per game).

Notes: CU continues to target late March for a ceremonial groundbreaking for its basketball/volleyball practice facility. March 25 has been mentioned as a date, but has yet to be confirmed. ... CU is 9-1 at home. ... Over his past five games, guard Dwight Thorne is shooting 65.4 percent. He leads the Buffs with eight 3-pointers over that span. ... CU reported that Alec Burks is the nation's only true freshman who has scored in double figures in every game this season. He's fourth in the nation among freshmen with 16.9 points per game. ... CU's game Saturday at Iowa State will air on ESPN Full Court and ESPN360. It starts at 7 p.m. ... Nebraska is the Big 12's only winless team in conference play. Anderson is the only Cornhusker that averages more than 10 points a game. ... The Cornhuskers lead the league in scoring defense, allowing 60.4 points per game. They're last in points, averaging 67.4 a game.

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Colorado women (12-6, 2-3) at Kansas (11-7, 1-4)

When/Where: 6 p.m. tonight at Allen Fieldhouse in Lawrence, Kan.

TV/Radio: No TV/KKZN AM.

The series: CU leads 33-30. CU is 12-16 in Lawrence, but has won five of the past eight meetings.

Leading scorers: Leading scorers: CU — Brittany Spears (17.9 points per game); Kansas — Danielle McCray (19.3 points per game).

Notes: CU hasn't been .500 six games into conference play since 2003-04. The Buffs have lost three of their past four. ... CU is seeking its second Big 12 road win of the season. It hasn't won two road conference games in one season since 2003-04. It snapped an eight-game road losing streak last week at Kansas State. ... Bianca Smith needs one point to become the 23rd Buff to reach 1,000. ... Kansas started 10-2 and was ranked, but has lost five of its past six. Kansas is 9-1 at home. ... McCray, the Big 12's preseason player of the year, is shooting 41 percent from 3-point range.

Gallegos ready for faster pace as Huskers head to Boulder

By BRIAN ROSENTHAL / Lincoln Journal Star

Nebraska has been running the court more in practice this week, and for Ray Gallegos, that's good.

The freshman guard said he's most comfortable in a game that covers 94 feet in few seconds.

"In high school and in my summer stuff, that's how we played, was just running," Gallegos said. "And that's how I've been successful, just running and creating for myself and for other players.

"It's an advantage for the team, and for me, too."

Gallegos, one of three Huskers given the green light to shoot by coach Doc Sadler, plans on doing his part Wednesday night when Nebraska plays at Colorado.

"He wants us to get more quick baskets, running up and down the court, get 10 or 12 points doing that," Gallegos said, "instead of just grinding it and wasting the shot clock and waiting to get a good shot.

"He wants us to run now."

Actually, Sadler said Tuesday he's always emphasized the importance of a transition game. It's just more of an emphasis now because the Huskers (12-7, 0-4 Big 12 Conference) have scored exactly 53 points in each of three league losses.

Nebraska ranks last in the Big 12 in scoring with 67.4 points per game.

"We need to get the ball down the court," Sadler said. "We've got to get open shots in transition."

So why was Sadler upset with a quick shot in transition during [Missouri's second-half run Saturday?](#)

"It was a midrange shot," he said. "I don't want no midrange shots in transition."

Sadler's rule in transition: Either get the ball to the hoop, or find a player spotting up for a wide-open three-pointer.

Preferably, a player named Eshaunte Jones, Brandon Richardson or Gallegos.

"With everybody else, basically if it's 20 and over (on the shot clock), they can't shoot, really, and if it's 20 or lower, they can," Gallegos said. "But if we have an open shot — me, Bear or Brandon — and we're at like 30 seconds, we're OK to shoot it."

Jones is shooting 45.5 percent on three-pointers to lead Nebraska but had one attempt against Missouri. He missed [the Iowa State game](#) because of illness.

Richardson is shooting 39.1 percent on threes and 47.3 percent overall. Gallegos is shooting 37.9 percent on threes and 40 percent overall.

Saturday at Missouri, Gallegos played 17 minutes, the most he's seen in a Big 12 game, and scored eight points. He was 2-of-5 on three-pointers.

"I think Ray's getting tougher," Sadler said. "I thought he showed some toughness against Missouri in a tough place, guys coming after him. I thought defensively in the Iowa State game, I thought his defense was a little more aggressive."

Gallegos said he's finally adapting to the pace of Division I basketball and has been gaining more confidence as the season progresses. He's playing on the wing, but in the future sees himself playing some point guard, too.

“Sort of like what Brandon Richardson does, a little bit of both, like a combo guard,” said Gallegos, who has 13 assists and five turnovers in 16 games.

“I just have to work on my ball-handling a little more. It’s a little shaky right now. And just work on my weight (in the offseason) so I don’t get bullied around or anything.”

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Huskers look to put zip in offense

By [Lee Barfknecht](#)

WORLD-HERALD BUREAU



REBECCA S. GRATZ/THE WORLD-HERALD

Doc Sadler's Huskers are averaging just 57.8 points per game in Big 12 play — the league's lowest by more than five points a game.

LINCOLN — Is the Nebraska men's basketball team afraid to shoot?

It has looked that way at times during the Huskers' 0-4 start in league play, a period in which they have averaged 57.8 points — the league's lowest by more than five points a game.

Senior Ryan Anderson, when asked that question Tuesday, jokingly pleaded for help from a sports information official. Then he paused and rubbed his chin before answering.

"Sometimes," Anderson said, "I would say so."

Game after game, NU coach Doc Sadler has talked about "grinding" the offense and holding an edge in time of possession.

"Everybody knows how Coach wants to play: a possession game and get a good shot at end of the shot clock," Anderson said. "But I think we're going to change it up a little this time."

Sadler said Tuesday he has stressed looking for more baskets off fast-break chances going into tonight's game at Colorado.

But that's not different, Sadler said, from what he has coached all year.

"I'm on them more for not shooting than I am for shooting," he said. "As I told the team, we've got to get the ball down the court and we've got to get open shots in transition."

"The guys who can shoot the basketball, whether there is 30 seconds on the shot clock or three seconds, they need to shoot it."

Sadler said three players have the green light: Brandon Richardson, Eshaunte Jones and Ray Gallegos.

And that means on a fast break or after a long possession.

"In transition," Sadler said, "you've either got to get it to the basket or you've got to get those guys open 3-point shots. I don't want midrange shots in transition."

Colorado (10-9, 1-4) has juiced up its offense. The Buffaloes are scoring 77 points a game, up from 63 last season.

"It's a function of them having more experience and better players," Sadler said. "They run the same offense they've always run.

"They are getting a lot of points in transition. Everybody wants to talk about what they run in the halfcourt. But they don't get in the halfcourt that much. I think we charted 18 percent of their shots coming in transition. That's a lot."

Colorado is 9-1 at home this season with a win over No. 24 Baylor. The only loss was to then-No. 11 Kansas State.

• **NOTES:** The last time Nebraska started conference play 0-5 was in 1989-90 and 1988-89, both under Danny Nee. ... Colorado is fourth nationally in free-throw shooting (76.8 percent) and 17th in field-goal shooting (48.6 percent). ... NU won both games from CU last season, 55-53 and 46-41.

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