

Tests inside just beginning for CU

By Ryan Thorburn Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

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TULSA, Okla. -- The Buffs don't have an answer for Texas' Dexter Pittman or Kansas' Cole Aldrich.

Not many teams do.

But Colorado's "big" men certainly had a chance to practice for the Big 12's dominant centers during an 84-59 thrashing by Tulsa on Saturday at the Donald W. Reynolds Center.

Jerome Jordan, a 7-footer who CU head coach Jeff Bzdelik believes could be a first-round pick, drew most of the attention defensively and still finished with 14 points, eight rebounds and three blocks in 28 minutes.

"They will be going against them every week in the Big 12, those kinds of players, so they better learn quick," Bzdelik.

Despite Tulsa's size advantage in the paint, Bzdelik started the three-guard lineup of Nate Tomlinson, Alec Burks and Cory Higgins with 6-7 Marcus Relphorde and 6-8 Austin Dufault defending the paint.

The diminutive but determined Buffs responded with a respectable showing on the boards. Tulsa, one of the nation's best rebounding teams, out-rebounded only CU 38-30.

CU played a 1-3-1 zone and a matchup zone that flustered Jordan at times. He made only three field goals but was 8-for-11 from the foul line.

"When we did what coach asked us to do, I don't think they scored at all," said 6-11 freshman Shane Harris-Tunks, who had three fouls, two points and one rebound in seven minutes off the bench. "When we made mistakes, they pretty much scored or got fouled every time. They weren't mistakes caused by anything other than us doing the wrong thing. We did do a good job for a lot of the time, but we can't have those lapses."

Steven Idlet, a 6-10 forward, had 12 points and 11 rebounds for the Golden Hurricane.

Dufault finished with eight points and four rebounds in 31 minutes, however, Relphorde did not score (0-for-5 shooting) and grabbed just one rebound before fouling out for the third time in the last four games.

"Some guys knocked down some shots who we didn't expect to. I thought we did a good job (on Jordan). That big guy is a load," Tomlinson said. "He puts those type of numbers up on everyone. We did a good job, just a little late on a couple plays."

On Tulsa time

The Buffs arrived in Tulsa on New Year's Eve and practiced at Oral Roberts University on Friday. The extra day of preparation outside of Boulder didn't help much as CU fell to 0-3 in true road games this season and 1-5 away from the Coors Events Center.

CU flew commercial to and from Tulsa. The team will fly charter for most of the Big 12 road games to minimize the amount of class time the players will miss.

Notable

CU still leads the all-time series 4-3. Tulsa also beat the Buffs last season in Boulder (81-68). ... Jordan is Tulsa's all-time leader in blocked shots (291). Second on the program's list is Michael Ruffin, a former prep star at Cherry Creek High School, who blocked 266 shots from 1995-99. ... The 59 points and 33.3 percent shooting were both season-lows for the Buffs.

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Tulsa dominates CU Buff men

By Ryan Thorburn Camera Sports Writer
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TULSA, Okla. -- Insanity: Doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.

That was Albert Einstein's definition.

Insanity: Playing road games.

That is the Colorado men's basketball team's definition.

Jeff Bzdelik's boyish squad has now lost 21 consecutive road games to Division I opponents after Colorado suffered through a predictable 84-59 flogging by Tulsa on Saturday at the Donald W. Reynolds Center.

"It's a common theme with our basketball team," CU's third-year head coach said. "We're not tough enough yet in terms of loose balls and taking charges and being strong with the basketball."

CU officially counts the 73-58 win over Chaminade at the Maui Invitational as a true road win, even though it wasn't played on the home court of the Division II tournament host.

Things certainly aren't going to get any easier for the Buffs (8-5) outside of Boulder. Colorado, picked to finish last in the Big 12 by Bzdelik's peers, opens the conference season on Saturday at No. 2 Texas.

The program's Big 12 road losing streak stands at 29 games and counting, dating back to an 80-78 overtime victory against Oklahoma State in Stillwater on Jan. 21, 2006. That was Ricardo Patton's second-to-last season on the CU bench.

"We're right there, we're knocking on the door," sophomore point guard Nate Tomlinson insists. "We need to scrap a little bit and come up with some loose balls and get in the open court. When we do that, nobody can run with us."

CU is 7-0 at the Coors Events Center, where it is averaging 83.1 points and shooting 53.2 percent from the field with four players scoring in double figures. Entering Saturday's game, the Buffs were averaging 72.6 points and shooting 44.4 percent with two players scoring in double figures in road/neutral-court games.

Alec Burks (17 points) and Cory Higgins (11) were the only men in black who scored in double figures as the vulnerable visitors failed to reach 60 points and shot 37 percent (20-for-54).

"Let's just give Tulsa credit and leave it at that," said Bzdelik, who has six days to search for answers before the trip to Rick Barnes' house. "They're a good basketball team with very good senior leadership and they really wore on us as the game progressed."

Burks -- who also led the Buffs with eight rebounds and three blocks while knocking down seven of the 11 shots he took -- might be the only player on CU's roster Tulsa would trade for this morning.

The Golden Hurricane (10-3), which improved to 10-0 at home, did a good job of frustrating Higgins (3-for-12 from the field). Tulsa also held James Anderson in check during an 86-65 victory over Oklahoma State on Dec. 2.

"We made them run their offense for 25-to-30 seconds and they had been shooting the ball a little bit quicker than that," Tulsa coach Doug Wojcik said. "I thought our guys did a great job of getting 36 deflections against a team that is pretty patterned and makes you play defense for a long time."

CU was able to get some easy points on backdoor layups throughout the game but shot just 23.8 percent (5-for-21) from behind the arc.

"We settled a little too much with the 3," Bzdelik said. "We made some bad decisions with the ball when we drove, we had some people open and knew the big fella was going to contest every shot and that we had to make good decisions."

The center of attention Bzdelik was referring to is 7-foot senior Jerome Jordan, who finished with 14 points, eight rebounds and three blocks despite being double-teamed.

Five different Tulsa players scored in double figures, led by Justin Hurtt's 21 points. The 6-4 shooting guard hurt the Buffs early in the second half by burying a pair of 3-pointers and getting a dunk after an offensive rebound to make the score 50-38 with 16 minutes remaining.

The Golden Hurricane lead was 62-44 after another 3-pointer by Hurtt with 10:31 left, and the rout was on.

"I think in the second half they just wanted it more than us," Burks said after CU was out-scored 48-30 following the intermission. "We didn't do a good job of defensive rebounding and we didn't have a lot of toughness today."

CU trailed 36-29 at halftime after being whistled for 15 fouls and shooting 33.3 percent from the field. The Buffs were 6-for-6 at the foul line but Tulsa was 11-for-18.

Bzdelik's team appeared to be ready to play and led 11-7 after 3-pointers by Burks and Casey Crawford. Tulsa missed its first four shots before throwing the ball inside to Jordan and 6-10 sophomore forward Steven Idlet (12 points, 11 rebounds), which created some early fouls against Crawford, Shane Harris-Tunks and even help defender Dwight Thorne.

CU went cold and the Golden Hurricane embarked on an 11-0 run to seize a 24-14 lead.

"We hit a stretch in the first half where I don't think we scored for four or five minutes," Bzdelik said. "That gave them a little separation in the first half."

Higgins finally ended the CU scoring drought of 4:37 with a three-point play to cut the deficit to seven points. The senior guard led the Buffs with eight points at the break on 1-for-6 shooting.

A backdoor layup by Tomlinson on a pass from Harris-Tunks made the score 25-21 with 3:30 remaining, but the Buffs would never get closer.

"As the game goes on, teams wear on us," Bzdelik said. "It's a mental thing we need to improve on."

CU will wrap up non-conference play on Tuesday against Miami (Ohio) at the Coors Events Center (7 p.m., FSN) before the insanity returns in Austin.

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