

# CU Buffs relieved freshman Burks OK

## Potential knee injury put scare into Bzdelik's Buffs

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TULSA, Okla. -- Believe it or not, the Buffs actually caught a break here on Saturday.

Colorado suffered an 84-59 defeat to Tulsa at the Donald W. Reynolds Center to fall to 8-5 overall and 0-3 on the road this season.

It could have been much worse.

Super freshman Alec Burks -- the lone bright spot for the visitors with 17 points, eight rebounds and three blocks -- was able to return to the game after hurting his knee with 7:48 remaining in the first half. The 6-6 guard spent a couple of anxious moments writhing in pain on the court before being helped off by the head trainer.

There was a collective sigh of relief on the CU bench when Burks' knee checked out OK in Oklahoma.

"When I first went down I was like, 'Man, I hurt my knee,'" Burks said. "You never know what can happen with a knee injury. I was hoping I could get back out there, which I did. It was a big relief."

Jeff Bzdelik is already trying to make up for the loss of promising freshman point guard Shannon Sharpe, who went down with a season-ending knee injury five minutes into the team's first practice back in October.

Trent Beckley, a 6-10 junior the Buffs could have used in the paint against 7-footer Jerome Jordan on Saturday, is dealing with health issues unrelated to basketball that will likely prevent him from playing the rest of the season.

CU needs its remaining veteran players and healthy freshmen to follow Burks' lead and play at a high level on a consistent basis.

"Obviously, he's a very talented player and he's getting better all the time," Bzdelik said. "The experience going out there and getting the minutes he's getting is going to bode well for him, as it did for Cory (Higgins) as a young player."

Tulsa's defensive game plan focused on Higgins, who was held to 11 points on 3-for-12 shooting. Burks was 7-for-11 from the field while his teammates combined to go 13-for-43.

Marcus Relphorde, a 6-7 junior point-forward who was supposed to take pressure off Higgins this season, was 0-for-5 and did not score.

"It's bittersweet," Burks said of the fast start to his collegiate career. "I feel like I played good (against Tulsa), but we lost. It doesn't mean anything if you lose. ...

"I think our toughness went away in the second half. We didn't keep our toughness up for the whole 40 minutes. If we do that we can play with anybody."

Bzdelik and his staff did a great job of identifying Burks' potential and recruiting him to Boulder before he blossomed into the Gatorade Player of the Year in Missouri last season as a high school senior. Now it's their responsibility to make sure his talent isn't wasted at CU the way Richard Roby's was.

The future looks bright with only one senior in the program right now, but the Buffs didn't exactly look like a team on the rise during the lopsided loss to Tulsa.

"I don't think we're that far away at all because we see it in spurts. It's not like it's not there. It's something that we just have to grasp and hold onto and do for 40 minutes, rather than 20 or even less," freshman forward/center Shane Harris-Tunks said. "It's going to be great to play with most of these guys. Obviously, Alec is doing well for us so far. I know I'm interested to see how much better he's going to get. I think it's going to be fun."

Burks led the team in scoring for the fifth time this season (twice shared). He has scored in double figures in all 13 games, including seven games with at least 17 points. And it was the fifth time (one shared) he has led the Buffs in rebounding.

"I could tell from day one he could play," sophomore point guard Nate Tomlinson said. "When he gets stronger and picks up what we want him to do, he's going to be tough. He's a hell of a player."

Burks' impressive season will continue. And at least that news was a big win for the Buffs on Saturday.

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