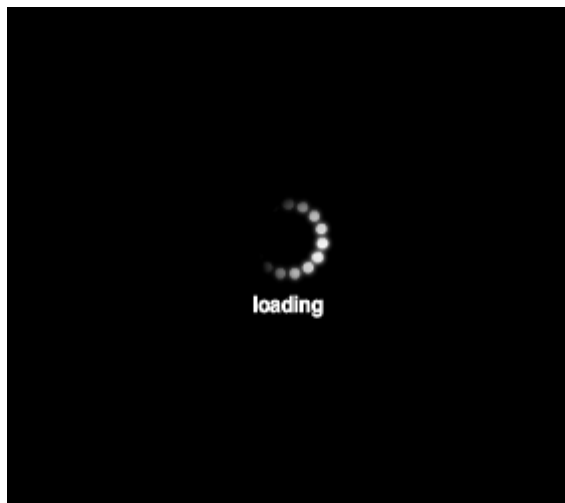


# CU Buffs hang on for victory over Miami (Ohio)

## RedHawks give Colorado tough test in last non-conference game

By **Ryan Thorburn**, Camera Sports Writer  
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 01/05/2010 09:22:51 PM MST



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RedHawks down.

It was perhaps a little too close for comfort for Jeff Bzdelik, but Colorado completed its non-conference schedule with a 67-65 victory over Miami (Ohio) on Tuesday night at the Coors Events Center.

The 2,658 breathless witnesses had to watch a potential game-winning 3-pointer by RedHawks guard Allen Roberts bounce off the front of the rim -- just an inch or two short of creating a dogpile of celebration at half court -- as time expired.

The sweet relief of victory allowed the Buffs (9-5) to match last season's win total and improve to 8-0 at home, the best start at the Coors Events Center since the 1982-83 season.

"I don't think we're going to have any blowout games in the Big 12," Cory Higgins said. "This was one of those steps we needed to take, to win those close games."

With seven minutes remaining, Higgins had not scored. Yet the Buffs were winning by seven points.

What a difference the addition of Alec Burks has made for CU. The skillful 6-6 freshman did most of the heavy lifting -- producing his first career double-double (17 points, 10 rebounds) -- before Higgins scored his 11 points in the final 6:54 to help finish what proved to be the difficult task of beating the visitors from the Mid-American Conference.

"Last year we probably would have lost that game if I had played the way I did today," said Higgins, who was 4-for-11 from the field and 1-for-3 at the line after entering the game shooting 50.3 percent from the field and 87.1 percent from the line for the season. "This year we're a much better team, and it showed."

Marcus Relphorde and Dwight Thorne added 14 points each on a combined 9-for-13 shooting. Nate Tomlinson and Austin Dufault both took charges, something Bzdelik has been begging his players to do with more frequency. And Shane Harris-Tunks showed some spunk with three rebounds and an impressive blocked shot in 15 minutes of quality work.

The RedHawks fell to 3-10, but Bzdelik described the game as a "quality win" for his program. Miami also lost by two points at Kentucky (72-70), by three points at Xavier (70-67) and by four points at Cincinnati (63-59) earlier in the season.

"So to beat a quality team historically that has a great basketball tradition is a real confidence boost to our young basketball team," Bzdelik said.

CU led 63-56 after a pair of free throws by Higgins with 1:21 remaining, but three misses at the stripe by the home team in the final 36.6 seconds allowed Miami to get within two points with possession of the ball in the final 9.6 seconds.

The Buffs had entered the game as the nation's best free-throw shooting team (78.9 percent). CU was 18-for-26 (69.2 percent) at the line on Tuesday.

"That's the kiss of death," Bzdelik said. "We were ranked No. 1 in the nation in free throw percentage going into tonight. I don't think we will be anymore."

The Redhawks cut a seven-point halftime deficit to 41-40 with 9:28 to play. The Buffs answered with a 9-0 that began with a Burks basket and ended with Higgins' first four points.

Miami clawed its way back again and was within 53-52 after a long 3-pointer by Nick Winbush with 3:40 remaining. Thorne and Higgins responded with back-to-back makes from behind the arc on CU's next two possessions to push the lead back to seven points.

In the final 38 seconds, Roberts hit a 3-pointer and Kenny Hayes scored six points to make things very interesting.

"I just held my breath and hoped it didn't go in," Relphorde said of Roberts' final shot.

Things are looking up for the Buffs. At least until the Big 12 season begins on Saturday at No. 2 Texas.

## **Colorado 67, Miami (Ohio) 65**

### **MIAMI (OHIO) (65)**

#### **FG FT Reb**

#### **Min M-A M-A O-T A PF PTS**

Mavunga 26 3-5 3-6 0-5 1 2 9

Ballard 30 2-5 1-2 0-2 2 3 5

Fletcher 27 4-6 1-1 1-6 0 3 9

Haddix II 22 1-4 0-0 2-3 0 4 2

Hayes 35 8-13 2-2 0-0 1 3 21

Roberts 20 5-9 3-3 1-2 3 1 14

Sdrbrg 5 0-0 0-0 0-0 0 1 0

Williams 6 1-2 0-0 0-0 1 1 2

Winbush 29 1-7 0-0 1-7 3 4 3

Totals 200 25-51 10-14 7-27 11 22 65

**Percentages:** FG .490, FT .714.

**3-Point Goals:** 5-13, .385 (Hayes 3-5, Winbush 1-2, Roberts 1-3, Haddix II 0-1, Ballard 0-2).

**Team Rebounds:** 2.

**Blocked Shots:** 1 (Roberts).

**Turnovers:** 14 (Haddix II 5, Roberts 3, Soderberg, Ballard, Mavunga).

**Steals:** 6 (Hayes 3, Roberts 2, Haddix II).

**Technical Fouls:** None.

**COLORADO (67)****FG FT Reb****Min M-A M-A O-T A PF PTS**

Dufault 25 0-2 2-2 0-1 1 2 2

Tomlinsn 32 1-1 2-2 1-3 2 2 5

Relphrde 31 5-7 3-5 0-3 1 3 14

Burks 36 6-11 4-6 2-10 3 2 17

CHiggins 28 4-11 2-3 0-2 2 3 11

Thorne 21 4-6 3-4 0-1 1 3 14

H-Tunks 15 0-1 0-0 0-3 1 2 0

Knutson 6 0-1 2-2 0-1 0 0 2

Hrnbackle 6 1-1 0-2 1-1 0 1 2

Totals 200 21-41 18-26 4-25 11 18 67

**Percentages:** FG .512, FT .692.**3-Point Goals:** 7-14, .500 (Thorne II 3-4, Relphorde 1-1, Tomlinson 1-1, [C.Higgins](#) 1-3, Burks 1-4, Knutson 0-1).**Team Rebounds:** 0.**Blocked Shots:** 3 ([C.Higgins](#), Harris-Tunks, Dufault).**Turnovers:** 14 ([C.Higgins](#) 4, Relphorde 2, Dufault 2, Harris-Tunks 2, Tomlinson 2, Hornbuckle, Thorne II).**Steals:** 6 (Relphorde 2, [C.Higgins](#) 2, Burks, Thorne II).**Technical Fouls:** None.**Miami (Ohio) 25 40--65****Colorado 32 35--67**

A -- 2,658.

**Officials** -- Gerry Pollard, Terry Oglesby, Jaime Luckie.

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## Woelk: Brutal world of Big 12 awaits Jeff Bzdelik's CU Buffs

By Neill Woelk, Camera Sports Writer  
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 01/05/2010 11:58:51 PM MST

Now it gets serious.

Ready or not, the Colorado Buffaloes open Big 12 play on Saturday. The team that held its breath as a buzzer-beating 3-pointer clanged off the rim to preserve a 67-65 win over Miami of Ohio at home on Tuesday hits the road on Saturday, where it will enter an entirely different world.

Arguably the best basketball conference in the nation is on the horizon, with one of the best teams in the nation, No. 2 Texas, dead ahead.

Welcome to the league CU coach Jeff Bzdelik fondly refers to as "the Big Nasty."

CU freshman Alec Burks, who nailed down a 17-point, 10-rebound double-double against Miami (along with a team-high three assists), thinks he knows what awaits. At least, he says, his veteran teammates have attempted to prepare him.

"It's not for kids," Burks said with a grin. "It's for grown men out there."

If Burks isn't ready now, he will be in a hurry. There's no place to hide in this year's Big 12, a conference that currently boasts the nation's No. 1 (Kansas) and No. 2 (Texas) teams, as well as No. 11 Kansas State, No. 22 Texas Tech and three other "ARV" (also receiving votes) teams: Texas A&M, Baylor and Oklahoma State.

Colorado's first five conference opponents are on that list: at Texas, at home against Baylor and Kansas State, and at Oklahoma State and Texas A&M. They'll have to wait until their eighth conference game to get a taste of Kansas.

"Honestly ... I know what we're up against, and they do to," Bzdelik said about the task ahead. "I think they know what to expect." It's why Bzdelik wasn't unhappy with his team's inability to put the Redhawks away Tuesday night. He knew that a team that lost at Kentucky by two points, lost at Cincinnati by four and had also played at Temple and New Mexico wasn't going to fold up and quit at the first sign of a double-digit deficit. Bzdelik knew his team would likely be pushed to the end -- and if these Buffs are going to experience any kind of success at all in the Big 12, they'll have to learn how to win the close ones at home.

After the game, Buff junior Cory Higgins -- who scored 11 points in the final seven minutes Tuesday -- said the Buffs' goal this year hasn't changed. Win more games than they lose and earn some kind of postseason berth.

The math for that one says it won't be easy. It means the 9-5 Buffs will have to win at least six conference games, which would send them into the league tournament with a 15-15 record. There, they'd likely need to win at least one tourney game to finish .500 and pick up a postseason invitation.

Six wins in the Big 12? That's not going to be easy for the team picked to finish dead last in the conference, especially in a conference that currently has the best winning percentage in the nation.

If the Buffs have anything in their favor, it's that they play well at home (and absolutely horribly on the road). CU's win Tuesday bumped Colorado to 8-0 in the Coors Events Center this year. To get to postseason play, they'll likely need at least five more home victories, plus at least one road win -- something they haven't experienced now for more than a year.

To get there, it will be imperative that the Buffs don't fall into a huge early hole in the conference. Somewhere in those first five conference games, they'll need to pick up a win. After that, they'll have a good chance for a home win when Nebraska visits, followed by one of their best opportunities for a road win when they travel to Iowa State. Then comes a Feb. 3 nationally televised game against top-ranked Kansas.

That will get them halfway through the conference schedule. If the Buffs don't have two or three wins under their belts by

then, reaching the postseason will be one heck of a hill to climb down the stretch.

To their credit, the Buffs don't appear to be scared. They've already matched last season's win total, and they believe they're a much better team than they were a year ago. They have some veteran leadership in players such as Higgins and Dwight Thorne, and some talented newcomers in the form of Burks and Marcus Relphorde.

When asked about facing Texas, Relphorde was matter-of-fact with his response. "I know in the past they've played some close games against Texas," he said. "With more weapons, we should be better."

But fact is, this is a team that's still unaccustomed to success. They've flirted with it this year, but there's no commitment. They've proven they can win at home, but they haven't won on the road. They've lost games they probably shouldn't have lost (Oregon State, Colorado State), but they've also shown the ability to bounce back from a poor performance and play well.

Most of all, still missing is a win over a team they weren't supposed to beat.

That's the confidence boost they need -- and they'll have plenty of opportunity to accomplish that goal in the coming weeks.

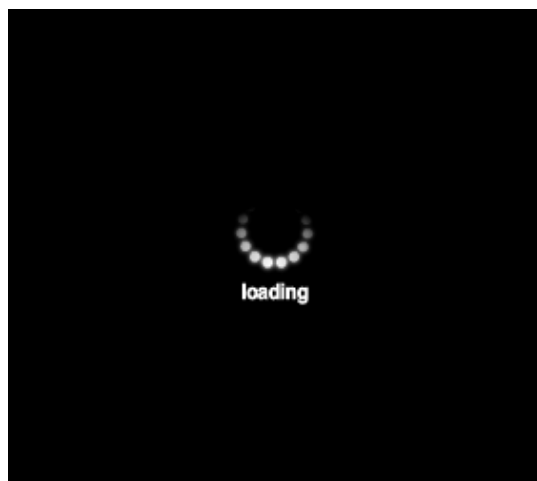
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## CU Buffs' Burks appears ready for Big 12 play

By **Ryan Thorburn** Camera Sports Writer  
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 01/05/2010 11:54:52 PM MST



*Click on any photo to see full gallery*

Alec Burks still looks like a boy in the face.

However, the 6-6 freshman plays like a man.

As far as Colorado coach Jeff Bzdelik is concerned, his prize recruit is ready for the rugged Big 12. Burks and the Buffs open conference play on Saturday against No. 2 Texas.

"It's not for kids," Burks said when asked what veteran teammates have told him about the conference. "It's for grown men out there."

Burks' overall game is more evolved than Cory Higgins' game was as a freshman two years ago. It's still early in his career, but so far Burks appears to be an even better version of Richard Roby.

During CU's 67-65 victory over Miami (Ohio) on Tuesday night at the Coors Events Center, Burks led the home team in points (17), rebounding (10) and assists (three).

"I would bet he is (ready for the Big 12)," Bzdelik said. "He's a very talented young man."

Burks was the only bright spot in last Saturday's 84-59 loss at Tulsa, finishing with a team-high 17 points and eight rebounds.

### On the trail

The current Buffs will not

practice today because Bzdelik and associate head coach Steve McClain are both making recruiting trips.

CU's coaching staff is hoping to add an experienced big man -- likely a junior college transfer -- to the roster during the spring signing period in May.

### Looking Sharpe

Shannon Sharpe is already walking without crutches. The promising freshman point guard's rehabilitation from microfracture surgery is on schedule and he should be back on the court playing again in April.

Five minutes into the first practice of the season, Sharpe suffered a season-ending knee injury. Bzdelik had planned to split the minutes at the point between Sharpe and sophomore Nate Tomlinson this season.

### Notable

CU is 8-0 at home for the first time since the 1982-83 season when the team won its first nine games at the Coors Events Center. ... Dwight Thorne played his 100th career game. CU's only senior was 3-for-4 behind the arc with 14 points. ... CU is 6-0 when four of the five starters net double-digits and 7-1 when shooting better than 50 percent from the field.

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cu basketball

## Balanced scoring keeps Buffs perfect at home

CU 67, Miami (oh) 65

By The Associated Press

Posted: 01/06/2010 01:00:00 AM MST

BOULDER — Cory Higgins was Colorado's lone scoring threat last year. Buffaloes coach Jeff Bzdelik wanted more balance, hoping to avoid repeating a season where Higgins led the team in scoring 18 times.

"I think we expect so much out of him," Bzdelik said. "We need everybody at their best every night."

The Buffaloes delivered Tuesday night.

Alec Burks scored 17 points, and Marcus Relphorde and Dwight Thorne each added 14 as Colorado defeated Miami (Ohio) 67-65 to improve to 9-5 overall and 8-0 at home.

Higgins was held to 11 points, eight points below his average.

"Four players in double digits and shooting 51 percent for the game," Bzdelik said. "That's the kind of balance we need and when we

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play well, we usually have that kind of balance."

Higgins, who hit 4-of-11, didn't mind the point distribution.

"Last year we probably would have lost this game if I played the way I did today," Higgins said. "We're a real balanced team this year with a lot of weapons on the team. It's not just one or two people; it's a group effort."

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Longmont, Colorado  
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## CU finishes with a 'whew' win

Missed buzzer-beater means Buffs will enter Big 12 play with perfect record at home

*By Patrick Ridgell*  
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BOULDER — Like No. 3 Kentucky, Cincinnati and Xavier, Colorado's men's basketball program had a heck of a time Tuesday with Miami (Ohio).

The Buffs escaped with a 67-65 win when Miami's Allen Roberts clanged an open 3 off the rim as time expired. CU, which also survived an off night by leading scorer Cory Higgins, led by 11 with 6 minutes 29 seconds to go. But CU hurried a few jump shots in the closing minutes, and then the Buffs — the nation's leader in free throw percentage — missed three free throws in the final 36 seconds to give Miami one last chance.

"I held my breath, man," CU's Marcus Relphorde said about the last shot.

CU finished non-conference play 9-5, 8-0 at home. Nine wins match last year's final total, but last year's record included a 1-15 mark in the Big 12, something the Buffs hope they never endure again.

Shortly after Relphorde and every other person associated with the program exhaled, they immediately looked ahead to their conference schedule, which will begin Saturday at No. 2 Texas (11:30 a.m., Altitude). Actually, Relphorde and Alec Burks — who had team highs with 17 points and 10 rebounds — said they're looking forward to what awaits.

"I'm ready," Burks said. "The non-conference schedule helped me a lot. I can't wait to play Saturday."

Said Relphorde: "I'm excited for it. I'm ready for it. I hope we can do some big things."

Coach Jeff Bzdelik was a little more subdued.

"I think there's better understanding (of what to expect in the Big 12), but to be honest with you, I know what we're up against," Bzdelik said. "And they do, too."

"Like I said before it all started, it's the Big Nasty, not the Big 12."

A loss Tuesday to Miami (3-10) certainly would have left a nasty taste. Bzdelik has said for days that the Redhawks are better than their record. A two-point loss at Kentucky, a three-point loss at Xavier and a four-point loss at Cincinnati suggested Bzdelik might have been right.

Hampering CU's efforts was Higgins' uncharacteristic performance. He has never gone scoreless in a game, but he

### COLORADO 67, MIAMI (OHIO) 65

#### MIAMI (OHIO) (3-10)

Mavunga 3-5 3-6 9, Ballard 2-5 1-2 5, Fletcher 4-6 1-1 9, Haddix 1-4 0-0 2, Hayes 8-13 2-2 21, Roberts 5-9 3-3 14, Soderberg 0-0 0-0 0, Williams 1-2 0-0 2, Winbush 1-7 0-0 3. Totals 25-51 10-14 65.

#### COLORADO (9-5)

Dufault 0-2 2-2 2, Tomlinson 1-1 2-2 5, Relphorde 5-7 3-5 14, Burks 6-11 4-6 17, Higgins 4-11 2-3 11, Thorne 4-6 3-4 14, Harris-Tunks 0-1 0-0 0, Knutson 0-1 2-2 2, Hornbuckle 1-1 0-2 2. Totals 21-41 18-26 67.

**Halftime**—CU 32-25.

**3-point goals**—Miami 5-13 (Hayes 3-5, Roberts 1-3, Winbush 1-2, Ballard 0-2, Haddix 0-1); CU 7-14 (Thorne 3-4, Tomlinson 1-1, Relphorde 1-1, Burks 1-4, Higgins 1-3, Knutson 0-1).

**Fouled out**—none. **Rebounds**—Miami 27 (Winbush 7); CU 25 (Burks 10). **Assists**—Miami 11 (Roberts 3, Winbush 3); CU 11 (Burks 3). **Total fouls**—Miami 22; CU 18.

**Technical**s—none. **A**—2,658.



didn't score Tuesday until 6:54 remained. He still finished with 11 points, eight below his average. He was 4-for-11 from the field and played only 11 minutes in the first half, partially due to two fouls.

Higgins' struggles placed more burden on other Buffs. Relphorde and Dwight Thorne finished with 14 points each to pick up some of the slack. Burks had his first double-double.

Higgins said he felt fine and had no explanation for his slow start. But he had some interesting observations.

"I'm one of the leaders on the team; I can't go out there and lay a goose egg," he said.

"Last year, we probably would have lost that game if I played the way I did today. This year, we're much better than we were last year. We showed it today."

Bzdelik said Tuesday's win over a program that has Miami's "great basketball tradition" should boost confidence. His players talk like they have confidence.

Determination, too.

"We should win more than we lost and put ourselves in position for postseason play," Higgins said.

"There's no reason why that shouldn't happen."

**TIP-INS:** CU's problems in the post continued. Miami outscored the Buffs 34-20 in the paint, and the Redhawks won the boards, 27-25. ... Kenny Hayes led Miami with 21 points. Roberts had 14. ... CU's 8-0 start at home is its best since 9-0 in 1982-83. ... Over his past five games, Burks is averaging 17.8 points and six rebounds. He's shooting 53.6 percent from the field and 83.3 percent from the free throw line. He also led the Buffs with three assists Tuesday. ... Thorne played his 100th career game.

Read Patrick Ridgell's CU sports blog at [www.timescall.com/blogs/ridgell](http://www.timescall.com/blogs/ridgell) . He can be reached at [pridgell@times-call.com](mailto:pridgell@times-call.com).