

CU Buff men face Texas-sized foe inside

Longhorns hold size advantage with Pittman, Jones inside

By Ryan Thorburn Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 01/09/2010 12:17:17 AM MST

AUSTIN, Texas -- The scene here had the feel of a bad horror movie on Friday.

At the airport, on campus and even up and down the always-lively Sixth Street, people were walking around like burnt orange-clad zombies.

There is a mourning period going on in the aftermath of Colt McCoy's stunning injury and Texas' loss to Alabama in the Bowl Championship Series title game.

At least Longhorns fans have basketball to ease some of the pain of the oh-what-might-have-been? finish to the football season.

Rick Barnes' team is also ranked No. 2 nationally, off to an impressive 14-0 start and ready to open the Big 12 season today against Colorado at the Erwin Center (11:47 a.m., Altitude).

And the Buffaloes? They're supposed to be what's for dinner after Texas starts to feel better about itself with some home cooking.

Entering today's action, Big 12 teams are a combined 105-1 (.991) at home. Iowa State's 63-60 loss to rival Northern Iowa on Dec. 2 in Ames is the only blemish.

The Buffs (9-5) were 8-0 in Boulder during non-conference play and have matched last season's win total. Still, CU brings some dubious streaks into Austin, including:

A 29-game road losing streak in the Big 12 dating back to Jan. 21, 2006 (Oklahoma State, 80-78 in overtime).

A 25-game road losing streak versus ranked opponents dating back to Jan. 11, 1997 (Texas Tech, 80-78).

A 21-game road losing streak against Division I opponents dating back to Dec. 22, 2007 (Colorado State, 73-70).

A 12-game losing streak in Big 12 openers dating back to Jan. 4, 1997 (Nebraska, 79-73).

"I understand what I'm up against. That doesn't make me fearful," third-year CU head coach Jeff Bzdelik said. "I like the challenge of seeing if I can build a program here at Colorado in the best conference in the nation. ...

"Has it been quick enough? No. But we're getting there, slow and steady."

The Longhorns are arguably the deepest team in the nation and had the look of a serious national title contender while beating North Carolina and Michigan State in a five-day period last month.

The Buffs have some nice pieces in place with Cory Higgins (18.4 ppg) and Alec Burks (16.3 ppg) in the backcourt together. Marcus Relphord has the versatility to create matchup problems and a dangerous third scoring option when the junior forward is engaged and ready to play.

But there are no answers on Bzdelik's current roster to combat the size and skill of Dexter Pittman (6-10, 290 pounds) and Damion James (6-7, 225 pounds) in the paint. Texas' terrific senior two-some combines for 31.3 points and 17.9 rebounds per game.

"You always expect the worst, for it to be extremely physical and all that, but I think it exceeded my expectations last year," 6-8 forward Austin Dufault, who has been starting at center all season, said of his experiences in the Big 12 as a freshman last season when CU finished 1-15 in the conference. "I'm actually looking forward to getting another shot at it. I'm excited to see how this team handles it, we're a year older and the new guys will help us out a lot."

Bzdelik's teams have given the Longhorns some trouble the past two seasons. CU lost 69-67 in Austin two years ago and dropped a pair of competitive games to Texas last season (85-76 in overtime in Boulder and 67-56 at the Big 12 Tournament).

"We have no problem playing Texas," sophomore point guard Nate Tomlinson said. "Last year we played them tough two times. We have no fear going down there or any fear going on the road. We're a young group, and that's a good thing. We're just going to go out there and give it a shake."

Barnes, a young assistant alongside Bzdelik on the Davidson staff in 1978, is doing his best to make sure the Longhorns take CU seriously.

"First of all, Jeff is truly one of the great coaches. He gets as much or more out of players as anyone you will see," Barnes said. "They're a very much improved team. They drive the ball and get to the free throw line as much as any team we've played. There's no doubt in my mind that he's doing it and he's going to win games this year."

The Buffs have never defeated a top 10 team on the road, but they're going to have to pull off some upsets this season in order to realize the team goal of a winning season.

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CU men's preview vs. Texas

Camera staff
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 01/09/2010 12:00:33 AM MST

TODAY: Colorado opens Big 12 play against No. 2 Texas at 11:47 a.m. at the Erwin Center.

BROADCAST: Television: Altitude with Mitch Holthus (play-by-play) and John Sundvold (color); **Radio:** KKZN (760 AM) with Mark Johnson (play-by-play) and Charles Johnson (color).

STORYLINES: The Buffs (9-5) matched last season's win total with a 67-65 victory over Miami (Ohio) on Tuesday. ... CU finished non-conference play 8-0 at home, the best start to a season at the Coors Events Center in 27 years, but was 0-3 in true road games. ... The Longhorns (14-0) are hoping to help fans forget about what happened to Colt McCoy and Co. in the BCS national championship by making a run to the Final Four this season. ... Texas posted wins over North Carolina and Michigan State during non-conference play.

KEY STATS: CU has lost 29 consecutive Big 12 road games, 25 consecutive road games to ranked opponents, 21 consecutive road games against Division I opponents and 12 consecutive conference openers. ... Big 12 teams are 105-1 (.991) at home this season, easily the best record of any conference.

COACHES: Jeff Bzdelik is 30-47 in his third season at CU. Rick Barnes is 261-93 in his 11th season at Texas.

PROBABLE STARTERS:

Colorado -- G Nate Tomlinson, 6-3, sophomore, 6.4 ppg, 3.1 rpg, G Alec Burks, 6-6, freshman, 16.3 ppg, 5.0 rpg, G Cory Higgins, 6-5, junior, 18.4 ppg, 3.4 rpg, G Marcus Relphorde, 6-7, junior, 9.7 ppg, 3.1 rpg, F Austin Dufault, 6-9, sophomore, 7.4 ppg, 3.8 rpg.

Texas -- G Avery Bradley, 6-2, freshman, 10.7 ppg, 1.8 rpg, G Dogus Balbay, 6-1, junior, 4.5 ppg, 3.6 rpg, G Damion James, 6-7, senior, 16.7 ppg, 10.8 rpg, G Justin Mason, 6-2, senior, 2.7 ppg, 2.1 rpg, C Dexter Pittman, 6-10, senior, 14.6 ppg, 7.1 rpg.

SERIES: Texas leads 13-8, including wins in the past five meetings.

UP NEXT: The Buffs host Baylor on Tuesday at the Coors Events Center (7 p.m., FSN).

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Longmont, Colorado
Thursday, May 06, 2010

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'Mild' Buffs hope to push back in Big 12

By Patrick Ridgell
© 2010 Longmont Times-Call

BOULDER — Coach Jeff Bzdelik wants to see his Buffaloes push back, which is just fine with his big Australian center.

That big center just might not be sure how hard.

Colorado's men's basketball team opens Big 12 play today at No. 2 Texas (11:30 a.m., Altitude) with obvious weaknesses. Its post defense and rebounding margin — CU's minus 2.9 is last in the Big 12 — glare brightly.

Bzdelik has repeatedly stated he wants more toughness. Questions this week about how he plans to handle the abundance of quality Big 12 big men made the coach go off the record to discuss the toughness issue further. But before he did so, he was asked to define his team's personality.

"Mild," he answered.

Yuck.

Shane Harris-Tunks, the 6-foot-11, 225-pounder from Australia who was brought in to help shed such mildness in 2009-10, admitted he could be pushing harder. He could've been talking for the whole team.

"Personally, I think I have to be more physical with the defensive rebounds and taking those bigs out of the contest," Harris-Tunks said.

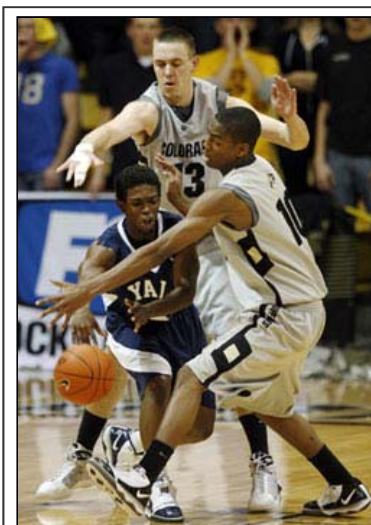
Why isn't he being more physical?

"I think it's a mentality thing," he said. "I'm getting a feel for how much you can get away with still with the different refereeing. I think that'll change again once we get into the Big 12. From what I'm told, it'll be a lot more physical."

Harris-Tunks, 19, said the physicality of Division I hoops over what he faced playing for the Australian Institute of Sport — where he faced men in their 20s, 30s and sometimes 40s — is noticeable.

"A lot of the time, I could hit someone harder in Australia," he said. "At the same time, that was in open men's competition. ... We were a lot younger compared to the people I was playing against."

Such thoughts should please Bzdelik, who, these days, might be more interested in seeing his team draw charges than score points. CU took two in



Colorado forward Shane Harris-Tunks, back, and Colorado guard Alec Burks put pressure on Yale guard Michael Grace during their game Dec. 29 in Boulder. The 6-foot-11, 225-pound Harris-Tunks has noted that he needs to be more aggressive on the court — and will get that change against No. 2 Texas tonight. **David Zalubowski/AP**

TONIGHT'S GAMES

Colorado men (9-5) at No. 2 Texas (14-0)

When/Where: 11:30 p.m. today at the Erwin Center in Austin, Texas

TV/Radio: Altitude/KaZN 760

The series: Texas leads 13-8, 6-2 in Austin. The Longhorns have won the past five, including an overtime decision last year in Boulder.

Leading scorers: CU — Cory Higgins (18.4 points per game); Texas — Damion James (16.7 points per game)

Tuesday's defeat of Miami (Ohio), and the coach was quick to point it out after the game.

Bzdelik said he wants his mild team to transform into one of "controlled, strong aggression." Harris-Tunks' willingness to play through a tendon injury in his hand, plus his willingness to push and shove Tulsa's 7-foot Jerome Jordan last week, have appealed to the coach.

Entering today at 9-5 and having already matched last year's win total, Bzdelik says the team is improved and headed in the right direction. But as he saw in Tulsa, the Buffs will have no choice but to play their big men more minutes in the Big 12, starting today against Texas' 6-10, 290-pound center Dexter Pittman.

Baylor comes to Boulder on Tuesday. The 12-1 Bears go 6-10, 6-10 and 7-foot across their front line.

Other challenges the team must conquer include an embarrassing road conference losing streak that dates back 29 games, to January 2006. Barring something shocking, that streak will reach 30 today.

But the Buffs know better what to expect in places like Austin; Lawrence, Kan.; and Columbia, Mo. They know their weaknesses. They know where they want to go.

They know they must be tougher to get there.

"It's not an indictment of our team," Bzdelik said. "I think we have some young players that are just trying to figure this game out. As we all figure it out individually, we need to figure it out together."

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

Notes: The Buffs carry several dubious streaks into today. They've lost 21 straight road games against Division I teams, 29 straight Big 12 road games, 12 straight Big 12 openers, 25 straight road games against ranked teams and eight straight to ranked teams overall. ... CU has never beaten a top-10 team on the road. ... CU entered the week leading the nation in free throw shooting. It enters today at 78.2 percent. ... CU's Alec Burks is seventh in the nation among freshmen in scoring, at 16.3 points per game. ... CU coach Jeff Bzdelik and Texas coach Rick Barnes worked together as assistants at Davidson in 1978. ... Texas is 9-0 at home, winning by an average of 30 points per game.

Missouri (10-3) at Colorado women (10-3)

When/Where: Noon today at the Coors Events Center in Boulder

TV/Radio: FSN/KVCU 1190 AM

The series: CU leads 38-27, 20-8 in Boulder. The teams split two games last season.

Leading scorers: Missouri — Jessra Johnson (13.1 points per game); CU — Brittany Spears (19.8 points per game)

Notes: This is the Big 12 opener for both programs. ... CU is 9-1 at home. The Buffs need one win to match last year's total. ... Entering this week, CU ranked second in the Big 12 and eighth in the nation with 8.6 3s per game. CU leads the Big 12 in free throw shooting, hitting 77 percent. ... CU's Bianca Smith leads the Big 12 with 42 3s and is the league's top free throw shooter, at 96.7 percent. ... Spears also leads CU with 8.7 rebounds and 2.5 steals per game. ... Missouri is 2-1 on the road. It had won seven straight prior to dropping its non-conference finale Tuesday to Xavier.

Patrick Ridgell

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big 12 men's basketball preview

Jayhawks have precarious favorite's role

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

Posted: 01/09/2010 01:00:00 AM MST



Sherron Collins lends senior leadership for Kansas' top-ranked team, which coach Bill Self says will face a challenge to win the Big 12 title. (Andy Lyons, Getty Images)

Less than two years after Kansas basketball coach Bill Self lost all five starters and seven of the top nine players from his 2008 national championship team, the Jayhawks are at it again.

Kansas (14-0) has topped this season's top 25

polls each week.

"I had no idea," said Self, when asked if he could have imagined rebuilding this quickly. "But one thing about our guys, they expect to have success. They play at a place where every day there's pressure on them to perform. I think in a lot of ways that forces the development of young guys more rapidly."

Kansas has it all. The Jayhawks have experience in senior guard Sherron Collins and 6-foot-11 junior center Cole Aldrich, holdovers from the 2008 national title team and strong All-America candidates. They have one of the nation's top freshmen in Xavier Henry. And sophomore point guard Tyshawn Taylor, a smooth operator from fabled St. Anthony's High in Jersey City, N.J., can run the show.

The Jayhawks are considered a cinch to reach the Final Four, but Self isn't about to take anything for granted. With Big 12 play beginning today, Texas (14-0) is ranked No. 2 in the polls, and Self anticipates traps and challenges around every turn of the conference schedule.

"I really believe this year will be the hardest for us to win the league, and we have a really good team," Self said. "It's going to be tougher to win on the road because teams are better, up and down this league. Anybody can go anywhere and get beat."

While that may sound like chamber of commerce chatter, statistics through nonconference play

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support the claim that this could be, from top to bottom, the best the Big 12 has been.

Consider:

- The Big 12's success rate of .828 (140-29) in nonconference play leads the nation.
- The Big 12 stands 28-10 versus the other "Big Six" conferences.
- Only the Big 12 has eight teams with a winning percentage of .800 or better.
- Big 12 teams enter league play sporting a combined record of 105-1 at home. The only hiccup was a home loss by Iowa State to Northern Iowa.

"We're going to beat up on each other," Texas A&M coach Mark Turgeon said of conference play. "But it's going to be fun."

Kansas State coach Frank Martin, who has his 13-1 Wildcats ranked as high as No. 10 in the polls, believes the 14-year-old Big 12 has never been stronger because the nine coaches that have been in the league for four seasons or less "are establishing their programs and establishing their cultures." The depth of the Big 12, coaches say, sets it apart.

Colorado (9-5), picked to finish last in the conference, opens league action today at second-ranked Texas, and Longhorns coach Rick Barnes talks as if he couldn't sleep at night. The

Buffaloes boast two of the league's top scorers in 6-5 junior Cory Higgins (18.4) and 6-6 freshman Alec Burks (16.3).

"Colorado is a very much improved basketball team," Barnes said. "Jeff (Bzdelik) is truly one of the great coaches. He gets as much or more out of players as anybody you'll ever see. There's no doubt in my mind he's going to win games with that group of guys that he has."

Tom Kensler: 303-954-1280 or tkensler@denverpost.com

Five players to watch

G Xavier Henry, Kansas, 6-6, Fr.: May be the nation's best freshman not named John Wall; flashy (KU-leading 16.1 ppg) yet disciplined.

G Sherron Collins, Kansas, 5-11, Sr.: Built like a fireplug, the Jayhawks' inspirational leader does whatever it takes.

G James Anderson, Oklahoma State, 6-6, Jr.: Big 12 coaches believe the Arkansas native (21.5 ppg) is the nation's most underrated talent.

F Damion James, Texas, 6-7, Sr.: Consistent, sometimes understated performer averages double-double of 16.7 points and 10.8 rebounds.

C Cole Aldrich, Kansas, 6-11, Jr.: One of nation's best defensive big men, averaging 10.0 rebounds and 3.7 blocks.

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Five newcomers to watch

G Xavier Henry, Kansas, 6-6, Fr.: Huge get by Jayhawks when he switched from Memphis following departure of coach John Calipari to Kentucky.

G Avery Bradley, Texas, 6-2, Fr.: ESPNU had him ranked as nation's top signee, ahead of Kentucky's Wall. Jaw-dropping athleticism.

G Alec Burks, Colorado, 6-6, Fr.: With NBA-like offensive repertoire, sky's the limit for this bouncy talent (16.3 ppg).

F Marquis Gilstrap, Iowa State, 6-7, Sr.: Do-everything junior-college transfer making most of his one season of eligibility.

C Ekpe Udoh, Baylor, 6-10, Jr.: Springy transfer from Michigan tops Big 12 in rebounding (11.5) and blocks (4.5).

March 6: Kansas at Missouri: Mizzou probably already has this rivalry showdown circled.

Five key games

Jan. 18: Texas at Kansas State: No. 11 KSU might be Big 12's third-best team.

Jan. 30: Kansas at Kansas State: Ditto.

Feb. 1: Texas at Oklahoma State: Could be toughest road test for No. 2 Longhorns.

Feb. 8: Kansas at Texas: Outcome may determine a No. 1 seed for the NCAA Tournament.

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Big 12 men's basketball preview

08:23 PM CST on Friday, January 8, 2010

By MIKE JONES / Special Contributor to The Dallas Morning News

Based on its nonconference performance, Oklahoma's basketball team is searching for an identity.

As well as a warm place to suit up and some Sooners practice gear.

When players reported for Thursday's practice, they found their dressing room locked, which of course meant they were left to come up with their own workout attire.

That included the coach, who met reporters wearing sweats and a black shirt.

"He's taken the locker room away from us," said Willie Warren, a sophomore guard from North Crowley. "He said we weren't playing like an Oklahoma team and we didn't deserve to be in the Oklahoma locker room.

"Everything he's done for us, he's done to himself also. We can't wear Oklahoma gear, he can't wear Oklahoma gear."

Capel said it's not about winning.

"It's about doing things the right way and having pride in ... everything that we do," he said. "If we do that, we'll earn the right to wear [Oklahoma] on our chest."

Out of necessity, OU will wear game uniforms today in the Big 12 opener at Baylor.

The lockout comes after an intensive two-week, defensive-oriented practice grind, resulting in a victory over Maryland-Eastern Shore on Monday that broke a two-game losing streak and left the Sooners at 9-5.

During a nonconference season when the Big 12 made national news, the Sooners were left outside the party.

Warren, in a phone conversation Thursday, admitted this isn't what he imagined when he decided to return.

"It has been tough," he said. "But I think we know what we need to do to win games. It's just a matter of doing it or not. We know we can score with the best of teams. We just need to defend."

Touted freshmen Tiny Gallon and Tommy Mason-Griffin have been slow to discover that defense wins at this level. Capel admits the two have disappointed him in that regard and he also isn't too pleased with their overall discipline, such as being on time for things.

"I love both of them to death," Capel said. "But it's tough to change in two or three months a habit they've had for 18, 19 years. One of the things is that maybe for the first time these guys are being held accountable for stuff."

Warren leads OU in scoring (18.5) and assists (4.5) but said he's not playing to potential. He's also gone through an adjustment period in his new leadership role that has left Capel publicly puzzled.

Despite the early rough sledding, Warren believes OU can still be a part of a competitive Big 12

run.

"I still think we can be a dangerous team," he said. "If we learn to defend."

The shirts on their backs depend on it.

RANKING THE CONFERENCE

- 1. Kansas:** Until proven different. Chances of a repeat conference championship may ride on games at Kansas State (Jan.30) and Texas (Feb.8).
- 2. Texas:** The most versatile team. If freshmen J'Covan Brown and Jordan Hamilton improve their overall games, the Longhorns could win it all.
- 3. Kansas State:** A complete, experienced, hard-nosed team with maybe the Big 12's best backcourt combination.
- 4. Baylor:** Seeing will be believing. But the Bears have been very impressive. Tweety Carter runs the show, and Ekpe Udoh has transformed a formerly lacking defensive structure.
- 5. Texas A&M:** The loss of Derrick Roland takes the edge off both experience and defense. The ingredients are there if the Aggies can play up-tempo and avoid previous mid-conference swoons.
- 6. Texas Tech:** A nice blend of experience and new faces mark Pat Knight's best team. The Red Raiders will be tough if their inside game is productive.
- 7. Oklahoma State:** The Cowboys have leveled off but still have an upside. Junior guard James Anderson is one of the best. How the rookie guards hold up is crucial.
- 8. Oklahoma:** Budding stars Tiny Gallon and Tommy Mason-Griffin must realize this isn't high school or AAU ball for the Sooners to move up.
- 9. Nebraska:** The Huskers are getting healthy and the addition of 6-8 German forward Christian Standhardinger could provide an inside boost.
- 10. Missouri:** The Tigers may be better than this. They still play Mike Anderson's defense despite some key losses.
- 11. Iowa State:** A bit of a disappointment. Two really good players – Craig Brackins and Marquis Gilstrap. Quality depth may prove a problem.
- 12. Colorado:** Jeff Bzdelik's best team. But where will it go? Will have some unexpected victories.

EARLY HONORS

Most pleasant surprise: Texas Tech, Baylor

Biggest disappointment: Oklahoma

Top newcomer: Ekpe Udoh, Baylor forward

Best backcourt: Jacob Pullen and Denis Clemente, Kansas State

Top freshmen: Guards Xavier Henry, Kansas and Alec Burks, Colorado

Living up to very high expectations: Damion James, Texas; Sherron Collins, Kansas; James Anderson, OSU

BY THE NUMBERS

105-1

Big 12 teams' record at home

.828

A conference record and nation's best league winning percentage

140

Record number of nonconference victories

28-10

The Big 12's record vs. ACC, Big East, Big Ten, Pac-10, SEC

8-4

The Big 12 vs. Top 25 teams