

## CU Buffs a bust at Big 12 tournament

Colorado loses shot at an NIT bid with season-ending loss

By Ryan Thorburn, Camera Sports Writer  
Boulder Daily Camera

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KANSAS CITY, Mo. - If the Buffs took three steps forward at the end of the regular season then they were called for traveling at the Big 12 tournament.

Colorado's dreams of an NIT berth and another crack at No. 1 Kansas turned into a nightmarish 82-67 loss to Texas Tech on Wednesday at the Sprint Center.

Long after the final horn sounded on a 15-16 season, the players were still sitting in stunned silence with their uniforms on thinking about the dramatic turnaround from Saturday's 101-90 thrashing of the same Red Raiders at the Coors Events Center.

"I never even considered losing this game," forward Marcus Relphorde said. "It hurts. All we can do is try and get better this summer and get ready for next year."

CU made some strides during Jeff Bzdelik's third season as head coach - a 13-3 home record, five more wins in the Big 12, a No. 8 seed after three consecutive last-place conference finishes - but the program still endured a losing record for the fourth consecutive season.

"It's hard right now," Bzdelik said. "But we need to keep things in perspective."

The post-season possibilities didn't just crash and burn here.

The Buffs suffered single-digit losses to Gonzaga, Arizona, Oregon State, Kansas State, Texas A&M, Iowa State and Kansas before the ides of March were upon them.

"It hasn't even really set in yet," forward Casey Crawford said. "This is really frustrating knowing that we've beaten Tech and we would have had a good matchup against Kansas and had a shot at payback for what happened in our place.

"For whatever reason, this is how it ended."

Some of the reasons included the Buffs' 19 turnovers, a 10-rebound deficit, allowing Pat Knight's team to shoot 55.6 percent in the second half, and scoring 34 fewer points than they had in Boulder.

"We didn't really change anything," said Knight, whose team snapped CU's three-game win streak and ended its seven-game skid. "The players just actually followed the game plan. ... We win every time we give up 70 or less and we get beat almost every time we give up 80 or more. So it's right there for you in writing."

The Buffs were 9-0 this season when at least four players scored in double figures. Alec Burks (24 points), Cory Higgins (18) and Relphorde (10) were ready to shoot, but the rest of the tentative team only chipped in 15 points.

CU's bench was outscored 30-9 by Texas Tech's reserves. The Buffs had a 19-18 edge in that department during the first meeting.

"They were a step quicker than us today," Bzdelik said. "They stayed in the possessions longer in a more disciplined way than we did. They seemed to come up with more loose balls than we did. They had an edge to their game that we lost after we started out in such a good way."

This was the fifth time teams that played in the Big 12 regular-season finale have faced off again in the opening round of the conference tournament. All five times the losing team from the first matchup came back to win the second game.

It appeared early that the Buffs were going to buck that trend.

Relphorde scored eight quick points to give his team an 11-5 lead in the first five minutes. A driving hoop by Higgins, CU's fifth layup of the game, made the score 18-8 with 11:37 left in the first half.

And then the Red Raiders (17-14) - who clearly wanted the NIT berth and another shot at the Jayhawks even more than the Buffs did - answered with a 24-6 run and grabbed a 32-24 lead.

"We got off to a pretty good start and then we just gave up some easy baskets. Once they hit a couple shots they gained their confidence," said Relphorde, who had just two points over the final 34 minutes. "We never recovered from it."

Burks finally stopped the bleeding with a steal and slam to get the deficit back down to six points. The Big 12's freshman of the year added a 3-pointer and a pair of free throws as part of a personal 7-0 spurt to bring CU within 32-31.

But as time expired on the first half, John Roberson made his fourth 3-pointer to give Texas Tech a 35-31 cushion at the intermission.

The momentum carried over as CU missed its first four shots of the second half and turned the ball over four times to help Texas Tech build a 43-31 lead with 16:02 remaining.

"We were down by 10 points early and there wasn't a sense of panic at all," Roberson said. "I think we played more like a family today and just stuck together."

Texas Tech, the No. 9 seed, led by as many as 18 points (65-47) before the Buffs' last gasp. Burks cut the deficit to 71-63 with 3:22 left but that was as close as the No. 8 seed would get.

"They didn't do anything that we weren't ready for. I think they just played well," Higgins said. "You have to give them credit."

Teams with losing records have participated in the College Basketball Invitational before, but it's highly unlikely CU would be willing to pay the \$60,000 to host a game in the 16-team tournament.

It was NIT or bust. And the Buffs were a bust at the Big 12 Tournament.

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# CU senior Thorne says 'no regrets'

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

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KANSAS CITY, Mo. -- Dwight Thorne's Colorado career is over.

After CU's 82-67 loss to Texas Tech on Wednesday in the opening round of the Big 12 tournament at the Sprint Center, that reality had not fully bitten the program's only senior.

"I'm not a very emotional guy, but when it hits me it's going to hit me hard," Thorne said after scoring five points in 13 minutes during his final college game. "It will probably happen a day when I'm at the 'rec' playing and then realize I'm done playing for CU."

Thorne, the last Ricardo Patton recruit left on the roster, experienced 78 losses and just 43 wins during his four seasons with the Buffs.

The always-upbeat guard from Arlington, Texas, said he would do it all over again if given the chance -- despite the coaching change, the long rebuilding process, and so on.

"No doubt. It was a great experience," Thorne said. "I wish everybody could experience the feeling of running out and having 15,000 people booing you or cheering for you. It's a feeling like none other."

Thorne, a team captain, accepted his role coming off the bench this season after starting as a junior and finishing as the team's second-leading scorer behind Cory Higgins. He will graduate from CU in May with a degree in business.

The rest of the Buffs, who plan to make a run at the NCAA Tournament next season, regret not winning and allowing Thorne to experience postseason play in the NIT.

"Dwight's my best friend and my roommate here. It's tough for him, and I'm going to try to be there for him," Casey Crawford said. "I can't imagine what he's going through."

## Burks honored again

Alec Burks, voted freshman of the year in the Big 12 by the conference coaches and by the Associated Press, has also been named to the Sporting News' national all-freshman second-team.

Burks averaged 17.3 points, 4.7 rebounds and shot 52.4 percent from the field in the 15 Big 12 games he played in (not including the game at Iowa State when he was injured in the first two minutes).

During Wednesday's loss, Burks led CU with 24 points and 10 rebounds, the second double-double of his career.

"I think it was a great freshman season for me," said Burks, who finished the season with 512 points, a CU freshman record.

## Attendance boost

Athletic director Mike Bohn was clearly disappointed that the Buffs were unable to take advantage of the opportunity to play their way into the NIT.

CU would have been a strong candidate to host a game after averaging 8,201 fans per Big 12 home game. Despite a mediocre overall record, the average attendance for all games in Boulder this season was 6,267, the fifth-highest average in the history of the Coors Events Center.

The Buffs were 13-3 at home, 2-10 on the road and 0-3 on neutral courts this season.

**Notable**

CU fell to 7-14 all-time at the Big 12 tournament (7-5 in the opening round). ... The Buffs lead the all-time series with Texas Tech 17-13, but the Red Raiders are 3-0 vs. CU in the Big 12 tournament. That includes a 79-69 win in 2004 and an 81-71 win in 2007. ... The Buffs, the home team due to their higher seed, wore silver uniforms while the Red Raiders sported their black road gear.

**Quotable**

"They just made shots. They scored more. That was the name of the game. They did it better." CU's Burks on why Texas Tech, a 110-90 loser in Boulder on Saturday, advanced by beating the Buffs on Wednesday.

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## Raiders Redeemed: Red Raiders beat the Buffaloes, advance in Big 12 tourney

By Courtney Linehan | A-J SPORTS EDITOR

**Thursday, March 11, 2010**

Story last updated at 3/11/2010 - 12:13 am

KANSAS CITY, Mo. - Pat Knight stopped his team's final practice before playing Colorado on Wednesday to remind his players exactly what should be motivating them.

"You guys have an opportunity to beat a team that just beat you three days ago," Knight said. "That's an amazing opportunity. They just embarrassed you."

His words got through.

Four days after losing 101-90 in Boulder, Colo., Texas Tech (17-14) beat the Buffaloes 82-67 in the opening round of the Big 12 Tournament to advance and play No. 1 seeded, and No. 1 ranked, Kansas today.

"We wanted to win this time," point guard John Roberson said. "We wanted payback."

Roberson led Tech with 19 points, helping the Raiders snap a seven-game losing streak. He was one of four players to reach double-digit scoring.

But Knight said it's Tech's defense that won the game. After giving up a season-high 101 points on Saturday, he became so adamant about the importance of playing defense that he wrote the word on a dry erase board in the locker room nine times - in alternating black and red script - to hammer home his point.

He said the difference Wednesday happened in those pre-game practices. For the first time all season players began asking questions when they didn't understand something about the scouting report.

Knight said the questions helped him prepare the team.

"They've been practicing their butts off, but they finally started asking questions, telling us when they didn't understand," Knight said. "I think the last couple days of practice were great because I could explain things and make sure they knew."

The Buffs (15-16) shot 42.6 percent Tuesday, 16.2 percent less than it did the first time around last weekend.

Tech also finished with 10 more rebounds.

"They were a step quicker than us today," Colorado coach Jeff Bzdelik said. "They stayed in the possessions longer in a more disciplined way than we did. They seemed to come up with a lot more loose balls than we did."

One change Tech made was adding Mike Davis to the starting lineup for the first time in his career, giving the Raiders a smaller, quicker lineup that matched up well with Colorado. The Raiders also found what they needed in Brad Reese, who came off the bench for 16 points on 7-of-13 shooting.

Nick Okorie, who seemed off his game Saturday when he scored only five points, bounced back with 18, including two monstrous dunks to give Tech

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REED HOFFMANN / AP

Texas Tech guard John Roberson (21) drives on Colorado guard Cory Higgins (11) during the first half of a NCAA college basketball game at the Big 12 Conference Tournament Wednesday, March 10, 2010, in Kansas City, Kan. (AP Photo/Reed Hoffmann)



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leads of 41-31 and 69-52.

"I didn't rush any shots; I just tried to go to the basket," Okorie said. "I think I took about two or three jump shots and everything else was to the basket."

The 15-point win was Tech's largest margin of victory since the Big 12 season began and should be enough to propel Tech to the NIT and its first postseason since Knight became head coach.

"We just wanted to win," Roberson said. "We knew if we won today we might have a chance to be in the postseason. We haven't been there in two years, and that's our goal."

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**TECH BASKETBALL/Red Raiders beat the Buffaloes, advance in Big 12 tourney**

First appeared on [redraiders.com](http://redraiders.com): 5:05 p.m. Wednesday.

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