# Buffs hope to send Thorne out a winner

CU senior plays last home game Saturday

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

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LINCOLN, Neb. — Statistically, it was a forgettable night for Dwight Thorne II.

Colorado's veteran guard missed the only shot he took in his fourth and final appearance at the Devaney Center. He didn't have a rebound or an assist. He turned the ball over twice and made one steal in 12 minutes of action.

But walking off the court here as a member of the winning team — spoiling Senior Night for his Nebraska peers in the process — is a memory Thorne will always cherish.

"I didn't have my best game of the year, but we got the win. That's all that matters," Thorne said after CU ended its 36-game Big 12 road losing streak with a sweet 81-68 victory over the Cornhuskers. "We played with big heart, big emotion and big concentration."

In other words, the Buffs played with the effort and determination Thorne has brought to practices and games throughout a difficult collegiate career (at least on the scoreboard).

The contributions the program's only senior has made to CU basketball are not lost on his head coach or teammates — a group that could have given up on this season a week ago and looked forward to a brighter days next November.

The team felt like carrying Thorne off the court after he experienced a Big 12 road victory for the first time on his final visit to a hostile arena.

"Dwight's like a big brother on the team. He looks out for everybody and he has been a steady voice in the locker room the whole time," Cory Higgins said. "He doesn't get too high or too low, he keeps everybody's head on straight. We have to send him out a winner."

Thorne will be honored by CU before Saturday's regular-season finale against Texas Tech at the Coors Events Center (2 p.m., Altitude). His proud parents, Dwight Sr. and Vivian, who have followed the Buffs everywhere from Kansas City to Ka'anapali Beach, will be in attendance. Several friends from his hometown of Arlington, Texas, will also make the trip to Boulder, as will his high school coach.

And Jeff Bzdelik will be first in line to embrace the only member of Ricardo Patton's final recruiting class at CU that made it from the first practice to graduation.

"I think it speaks to my character," Thorne said of being the last man standing from his seven-member class. "If I start something I want to finish it. We still have to finish this season strong."

Thorne has suffered more losses than any player in CU men's basketball history — 77 (with 42 wins) — but he takes pride in knowing that the program is in better shape today than when he arrived on campus.

Before his freshman season, Patton announced that he would not seek a contract extension, making for a long lame duck campaign (7-20). Bzdelik was hired and lost 20 games during Thorne's sophomore season and lost 22 games (including 15 Big 12 defeats) last season during a difficult rebuilding job void of shortcuts.

"My goal was to come in and help build the program. It was unorthodox, but it's still good though," Thorne said. "The tough times made me cherish the wins and realize that this game is going to end one day. I just need to continue to move forward."

After winning back-to-back conference games for the first time in four years, the Buffs (14-15, 5-10) are making a late-season surge for a winning season and a possible postseason berth with great expectations for 2010-11.

"I'm hoping we win the Big 12 Tournament and go to the NCAA Tournament. But if we can get a couple wins here, there's the NIT," Casey Crawford, Thorne's roommate, said after scoring 20 points against the Huskers. "I haven't played in the postseason in my career, and I know Dwight wants to play in the postseason bad. We're all going to play our tails off for him."

Thorne is a great teammate because he is always willing to answer questions after a loss when some teammates would rather just slip out a side door and get on the bus. And he is a great teammate because it doesn't bother him when those same players bask in the glory after a big win.

Last season, Thorne was CU's second-leading scorer and top 3-point threat, averaging 12.0 points per game while shooting 48.1 percent from the field as a starter. Despite his status as a senior captain, Thorne found himself coming off the bench this season.

Instead of pouting or getting upset, Thorne became a mentor to the wonder kid who was gobbling up most of his old minutes and shots.

"Dwight helped me out a lot," said Alec Burks, who is on pace to become the most prolific freshman scorer in CU history. "There were some things I needed to learn quick because I was playing, and he took me aside and told me what I needed to do and learn in every practice."

Thorne, who was one of four CU student-athletes nominated in the spring 2009 to represent CU at the NCAA Student-Athlete Development Conference, is going to graduate in May with a degree in business.

"That's what I sat out to do when I came here was get my degree in four years," Thorne said. "I think I'm one of the first players in like eight years to do that. It means a lot to me because it allows me to have opportunities beyond basketball."

Walk-on Trent Beckley is still around but hasn't played the past two seasons due to injuries and medical problems. Kal Bay, Xavier Silas, Jeremy Williams and the rest of the class of 2006 all left CU for various reasons.

Thorne will remain a Buff for life.

"Dwight has epitomized what we want out of a Colorado basketball player," Bzdelik said. "He's a young man that defines class. You can expect a great effort from him every day you step on the court with him. You sleep well at night because of his citizenship. He has been a great mentor with Alec Burks. His senior leadership has really been exemplary.

"I'm really proud of him and he should be really proud of his career and what he has meant to the University of Colorado."

## Where are they now?

Dwight Thorne is the only member of Ricardo Patton's final recruiting class still on the Colorado roster. He will be honored on Senior Day at the Coors Events Center this Saturday as the Buffs wrap up the regular season. Here is a look at where the other six members of the 2006 class ended up:

## Kal Bay

The 6-1 point guard from Tempe, Ariz., averaged 6.1 points as a freshman at CU but left the program soon after Jeff Bzdelik was hired to replace Patton. Bay played one season at a junior college before moving on to Idaho State. He averaged 6.4 points and 1.4 assists during his junior season but left the Ben´gals of the Big Sky with one year of eligibility remaining, report´edly to walk on at Arizona State. He is not listed on the Sun Devils' current roster.

## James Inge

The 6-3 guard from Camden, N.J., left CU after averaging just 0.7 points in 15 appearances during his freshman season. Inge, whose twin brother Semaj (James spelled backwards) played at Temple, transferred to Maryland-Eastern Shore. James Inge is not on the Hawks' current roster.

#### Sean Kowal

The 6-10 center from St. Louis followed Patton to Northern Illinois after his freshman season at CU. Kowal is averaging 10.1 points and a team-high 6.2 rebounds for the struggling Huskies (9-19 overall, 5-10 MAC).

#### **Xavier Silas**

The talented 6-5 guard from Austin, Texas, played for Bzdelik as a sophomore but was suspended by the new coach during the 2007-08 season. He also moved on to Northern Illinois and sat out last season per NCAA transfer rules. Silas currently leads the Huskies in scoring (19.5 ppg) but is shooting 37.3 per´cent from the field.

#### Marc Van Burck

The 6-11 center from Star City, Saskatchewan, also left CU soon after the coaching change and spent a season at a junior college before transferring to Cornell, where he averaged no points and 2.8 minutes last season in just six appearances. Van Burck is no longer listed on Cornell's roster.

#### **Jeremy Williams**

The 6-7 forward from Memphis, Tenn., averaged 7.7 points and 4.6 rebounds as a freshman and then sat out due to aca´ demic issues his second year at CU before transferring to a jun´ ior college. Williams — one of the Patton recruits Bzdelik really wanted to remain with the Buffs — transferred to UTEP before the 2009-10 season. He is averaging 10.5 points and 5.0 re´ bounds for the 24th-ranked Miners, who wrapped up the Con´ ference USA regular season title on Tuesday and will be in´ cluded in the NCAA Tournament field.

## **Academic honors**

A program record number of Buffs were named to the Academic All-Big 12 team on Wednesday.

Junior Levi Knutson and sophomore Trey Eckloff were named to the first team (GPA of 3.20 or better), while junior Casey Crawford was named to the second team (3.00 to 3.19 GPA).

Colorado has never placed as many as three players on the academic team in the 14-year history of the Big 12.

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## All Things Colorado Sports — Blogs — The Denver Post

MARCH 3, 2010, 1:23 PM

# NIT for Colorado men?

By **TOM KENSLER** | No Comments

It could happen.

If the Buffaloes (14-15, 5-10 Big 12) hold serve on Saturday and bag a victory in the 2 p.m. home game against Texas Tech, Colorado would need to win at least its opening-round game at next week's <u>Big 12</u> Tournament <sup>[1]</sup> to finish with a .500 record.

A win over Texas Tech would give Colorado the No. 8 seed in Kansas City, where it would be matched against the No. 9 seed (Texas Tech or Oklahoma) in the 10:30 a.m. MST opener on Wednesday.

If Colorado fails to finish with a winning record or gets passed over by the  $\underline{NIT}^{[2]}$ , the less-prestigious College Basketball Invitational ( $\underline{CBI}^{[3]}$ ) would be a possibility. The  $\underline{CBI}^{[3]}$  has selected teams with losing records.

Fields for the NIT [2] and CBI [3] will be announced on Selection Sunday, March 14.

Colorado has not participated in post-season play since playing in the 2006  $\underline{NIT}^{[2]}$ , where the Buffs were bounced 79-61 by Old Dominion in the opening round.

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## All Things Colorado Sports — Blogs — The Denver Post

MARCH 3, 2010, 9:21 AM

# Suddenly, CU men eye No. 8 seed at Big 12

By TOM KENSLER | No Comments

Forget about all the previous talk about Colorado hoping to avoid the cellar in the <u>Big 12 Conference</u> [1] men's basketball standings.

Don't look now, but CU would secure the No. 8 seed for next week's <u>Big 12 Tournament</u> <sup>[2]</sup> in Kansas City if the Buffaloes (14-15, 5-10 Big 12) can wrap up the regular season Saturday with a home victory over Texas Tech (16-13, 4-11).

Tipoff in the Coors Events Center is 2 p.m. Guard Dwight Thorne will be honored during "Senior Day" activities.

In addition to Colorado snapping a 36-game road losing streak against Big 12 foes, here are some other notes following the Buffaloes' 81-68 victory Tuesday night at Nebraska, compliments of the CU sports info staff:

Colorado won in Lincoln for only the third time in 14 meetings since the Big 12 was formed. It marked the Buffs' first win in the Devaney Center since Jan. 14, 2004 (68-60).

Before this year, that 2003-04 season had been the last time Colorado swept the two-game, regular-season series with Nebraska. Earlier this season, CU defeated the Huskers 72-60 on Jan. 27.

Colorado has won two straight Big 12 games (along with Saturday's home win over Iowa State) for the first time since the 2005-06.

CU's 12 3-pointers against Nebraska are a season-best.

With 19 points Tuesday night, junior guard  $\underline{\text{Cory Higgins}}^{[3]}$  moved to within 23 points of 10th place on CU's career scoring list.

Colorado reached season-bests in field goal shooting (.619) and 3-point shooting (.706). The Buffs improved to 8-1 this season when hitting at least 50 percent in both halves.

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