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Team effort helps Buffs get the win

By Brian Howell
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BOULDER — Cory Higgins had a big night for the Colorado men's basketball team Friday.

Yet it was the performance of his supporting cast that made the Buffaloes' season opener seem so easy.

Five Buffs scored in double figures, led by Higgins' 26, and CU coasted to an 88-72 win over Arkansas-Pine Bluff at Coors Events Center.

"A pretty quiet 26 (for Higgins), because other guys were out there doing things," said CU associate head coach Steve McClain, who guided the Buffs on Friday in place of head coach Jeff Bzdelik.

Earlier Friday, Bzdelik left town for a family emergency. McClain said that as far as he knows, everything is fine with Bzdelik. It is not clear whether he will be back in time for Monday's game against Coppin State.

"Literally, he's our leader, so when we heard that news, it probably pumped everybody up even more, because we knew we had to step up even more," Higgins said of Bzdelik. "We definitely wanted to make sure we didn't have a letdown while he was gone."

They didn't, and Higgins certainly didn't. His 26 points included 16-for-16 from the free throw line, tying a CU record for most free throws in a game without a miss.

"That's a point of emphasis in my game," he said. "Anytime you can get to the line, it's easy points, and basically you just have to focus and knock every one down."

Aside from Higgins, freshman Alec Burks scored 13 points; Austin Dufault, Dwight Thorne II and Casey Crawford chipped in with 10 apiece. In all, nine Buffs scored.

"I hope everybody else can see we're a much more balanced team this year, and all-around better," Higgins said.

The new-look Buffaloes opened the game with a surprise in the starting lineup. Sophomore point guard Nate Tomlinson started all 28 games in which he played last year, but he came off the bench Friday. Burks got the start in his place.

"That was the plan all along," McClain said, adding that Burks "gets a little better every day."

COLORADO 88, ARKANSAS-PINE BLUFF 72

ARK.-PINE BLUFF (0-1)

Weathers 2-7 0-0 4, Glass 5-10 3-6 13, Calvin 7-11 7-8 21, Washington 6-8 0-0 12, Townsend 4-10 0-0 10, Martin 0-1 0-0 0, Moore 0-2 0-0 0, Ootesey 0-0 0-0 0, Collins 1-4 0-0 2, Smith 1-2 0-0 3, Davis 0-2 0-0 0, Lasker 0-0 0-0 0, Tidwell 3-4 1-4 7. Totals 29-61 11-18 72.

COLORADO (1-0)

Relphorde 3-8 0-0 6, Dufault 3-4 3-4 10, Burks 2-5 9-13 13, C.Higgins 5-8 16-16 26, Thorne II 3-5 2-2 10, Tomlinson 2-5 2-2 7, Harris-Tunks 2-2 0-0 4, Coney 0-0 0-0 0, Crawford 3-4 2-3 10, Hornbuckle 1-2 0-0 2, Beckley 0-0 0-0 0, Eckloff 0-0 0-0 0. Totals 24-43 34-40 88.

Halftime — Colorado 43-22. 3-Point Goals — Ark.-Pine Bluff 3-15 (Townsend 2-6, Smith 1-1, Washington 0-1, Collins 0-1, Weathers 0-1, Martin 0-1, Moore 0-1, Calvin 0-1, Glass 0-2), Colorado 6-15 (Crawford 2-2, Thorne II 2-3, Tomlinson 1-2, Dufault 1-2, C.Higgins 0-1, Burks 0-2, Relphorde 0-3). Fouled Out — None. Rebounds — Ark.-Pine Bluff 33 (Calvin 7), Colorado 25 (Tomlinson 6). Assists — Ark.-Pine Bluff 10 (Calvin, Glass, Moore, Washington 2), Colorado 15 (Tomlinson 7). Total Fouls — Ark.-Pine Bluff 28, Colorado 20. A — 5,086.

Burks brought aggressiveness and energy to the lineup in his collegiate debut.

"I take it to everybody," he said. "That's my mentality. I had little mistakes, but it's my first game, so I played through them. I think I did a good job."

Tomlinson did well, too. He had seven points and tied his career highs for assists (seven) and rebounds (six). He played 32 minutes.

"Nate came off the bench and played great," McClain said.

While Burks shined in his CU debut, junior college transfer Marcus Relphorde did not. He started but played just 18 minutes because of foul trouble, finishing with six points. During the first 3:11 of the game, he had two turnovers and two fouls and a missed 3-pointer.

"I just came out, I guess, too hyper and got some early fouls," he said. "It was kinda hard to get adjusted, but I'm just glad to have the first game out of the way."

The Buffs took over with a 16-5 run that gave them a 34-16 lead late in the first half. They weren't as crisp during the second half, but their lead never dipped below 15 points.

"We found a way to get a good gap at halftime and then just kind of finish the game," McClain said.

NOTES: Jo Jo Hunter (Jan. 20, 1980) and Chauncey Billups (Feb. 17, 1996) also went 16-for-16 at the line for the Buffs. ... In addition to Relphorde and Burks, freshmen Shane Harris-Turks and Keegan Hornbuckle made their CU debuts. ... The Buffs are 13-1 in their last 14 season openers. ... Their 88 points were their most since scoring 91 in a double-overtime win against Baylor on March 13, 2008, during the Big 12 Tournament.

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collegiate debut.

"I think I played good," said Burks, who was 2-for-5 from the floor and 9-for-13 from the line. "I had some mistakes but it was my first game and I played through them."

Nate Tomlinson started all 28 games he played in last season, but due to the emergence of Burks, the sophomore point guard came off the bench and finished with seven points, seven assists and just one turnover in 32 minutes.

"We keep telling this team it's not going to be about one person, it's about the team," McClain said. "I think Nate did a great job of coming off the bench. That showed great character on his part."

Dwight Thorne ran the point to begin the game and finished with 10 points and six turnovers in only 20 minutes of action. Dufault (10 points) and Crawford (10 points) also scored in double figures.

"Every day at practice it can change. If you want to take a day or two off someone will take your spot," McClain said. "Everybody wants to talk about who starts, but it's about who finishes."

Despite getting outscored 50-45 in the second half and out-rebounded 33-25 in the game, McClain was able to play all 12 healthy bodies on the roster and got points and rebounds out of nine of them.

"I hope that everybody else can see that we're a much more balanced team this year and an all-around better team," Higgins said.

Colorado 88, Ark.-Pine Bluff 72

ARK.-PINE BLUFF

FG FT Reb

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

Weathers 19 2-7 0-0 1-6 1 1 4

Glass 29 5-10 3-6 2-4 2 3 13

Calvin 32 7-11 7-8 4-7 2 3 21

Wshngtn 34 6-8 0-0 1-3 2 3 12

Twnsnd 32 4-10 0-0 0-2 1 3 10

Martin 5 0-1 0-0 1-1 0 4 0

Moore 7 0-2 0-0 0-0 2 3 0

Ootesey 0 0-0 0-0 0-0 0 0 0

Collins 15 1-4 0-0 2-3 0 3 2

Smith 6 1-2 0-0 0-0 0 2 3

Davis 6 0-2 0-0 1-1 0 1 0

Lasker 5 0-0 0-0 0-0 0 0 0

Tidwell 10 3-4 1-4 1-3 0 2 7

Totals 200 29-61 11-18 14-33 10 28 72

Percentages: FG .475, FT .611.

3-Point Goals: 3-15, .200 (Townsend 2-6, Smith 1-1, Washington 0-1, Collins 0-1, Weathers 0-1, Martin 0-1, Moore 0-1, Calvin 0-1, Glass 0-2).

Team Rebounds: 3.

Blocked Shots: 1 (Townsend).

Turnovers: 22 (Townsend 4, Weathers 4, Washington 3, Calvin 3, Glass 2, Lasker, Tidwell, Collins, Martin, Moore).

Steals: 7 (Washington 3, Townsend 2, Tidwell, Calvin).

Technical Fouls: None.

COLORADO

FG FT Reb

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

Rlphrde 18 3-8 0-0 0-4 1 4 6

Dufault 25 3-4 3-4 1-3 1 4 10

Burks 29 2-5 9-13 0-2 3 1 13

CHiggins 33 5-8 16-16 1-2 2 2 26

Thorne II 20 3-5 2-2 0-1 0 3 10

Tmlnsn 32 2-5 2-2 0-6 7 3 7

HrrsTnks 7 2-2 0-0 0-2 0 0 4

Coney 1 0-0 0-0 0-0 0 0 0

Crawford 22 3-4 2-3 0-2 1 1 10

Hrnbackle 12 1-2 0-0 1-1 0 2 2

Beckley 0 0-0 0-0 0-0 0 0 0

Eckloff 1 0-0 0-0 0-0 0 0 0

Totals 200 24-43 34-40 3-25 15 20 88

Percentages: FG .558, FT .850.

3-Point Goals: 6-15, .400 (Crawford 2-2, Thorne II 2-3, Tomlinson 1-2, Dufault 1-2, [C.Higgins](#) 0-1, Burks 0-2, Relphorde 0-3).

Team Rebounds: 2.

Blocked Shots: 3 (Harris-Tunks 2, Crawford).

Turnovers: 20 (Thorne II 6, Relphorde 3, Dufault 3, Harris-Tunks 2, Crawford 2, Tomlinson, Hornbuckle, [C.Higgins](#)).

Steals: 9 (Harris-Tunks 2, Relphorde 2, Dufault, Burks, Crawford, Thorne II, [C.Higgins](#)).

Technical Fouls: None.

Ark.-Pine Bluff 22 50--72

Colorado 43 45--88

A -- 5,086.

Officials -- Rick Hartzell, Jeff Malham, Rick Fields.

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CU Buffs boast balanced attack against Arkansas-Pine Bluff

By Ryan Thorburn Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 11/14/2009 12:01:36 AM MST

Five different Buffs scored in double figures.

And Marcus Relphorde wasn't one of them.

That's a good sign for Colorado, which is expecting the versatile point-forward to have a major impact in Big 12 play, after getting a 88-72 victory over Arkansas-Pine Bluff on Friday night at the Coors Events Center anyway.

The balanced Buffs should be even more dangerous if Relphorde can stay out of foul trouble. The 6-7 transfer was whistled for three personals in the first half and picked up his fourth with 15:52 remaining. He scored six points and grabbed four rebounds in only 18 minutes of action.

"I just came out too hyper and caught some early fouls," Relphorde said. "It's kind of hard to get adjusted, but I am just glad I have the first game out of the way and I'm looking forward to the next one. We played hard and I'm glad we got the win."

Relphorde was 3-for-8 from the field with an assist, two steals and three turnovers. He is the first junior college transfer on CU's roster since Dominique Coleman (2005-06).

"I think he got a couple silly fouls early on," CU associate head coach Steve McClain said. "He was a little anxious on offense. But our kids played through each other's mistakes and that's a good thing to see happen."

Three true freshmen also made their CU debut on Friday. Alec Burks started instead of Nate Tomlinson and finished with 13 points. Shane Harris-Tunks (four points, two rebounds in seven minutes) and Keegan Hornbuckle (two points, one rebound in 12 minutes) also had their moments.

"When we would make a mistake, I didn't see guys getting down," McClain said. "I saw guys picking each other up."

This is the third consecutive year Jeff Bzdelik's staff has started a true freshman in the season opener. Cory Higgins started his first game (Nov. 9, 2007) and scored 10 points against New Mexico; last year Austin Dufault (13 points) and Tomlinson (12 points) started against Arkansas-Pine Bluff.

Back in the saddle

McClain -- running the team for Bzdelik, who was dealing with a family emergency out of state -- improved to 2-0 as a head coach at the Coors Events Center. During his final season at Wyoming his Cowboys defeated the Buffs 76-73 on Nov. 26, 2006.

Knutson out

Levi Knutson did not play and is out indefinitely with a right hip injury. The junior guard has undergone surgery on both hips during an injury-plagued career at CU.

Knutson, who was injured during a recent scrimmage at Utah, has played through pain in 62 games with two starts.

New uniforms

The Buffs also debuted new uniforms on Friday. For the first time since the 1990-91 season, Joe Harrington's first year as head coach, CU donned predominantly silver jerseys.

Notable

Higgins, who was 16-for-16 at the line, tied a CU record for most free throws made in a game without a miss. Chauncey Billups (Feb. 17, 1996) and Jo Jo Hunter (Jan. 20, 1980) also had 16-for-16 nights at the line during their careers. ... The Buffs now lead the series with Arkansas-Pine Bluff 3-0, including a 76-56 victory in last year's season opener. ... It was the 22nd time Higgins has led CU in scoring and the 45th time he has scored 10 points or more.

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Balanced Buffs too much for Golden Lions

Higgins scores 26 in season-opening victory

By David Starcer on November 14, 2009



As far as season-openers go, it might have been a sight to behold for Colorado Buffaloes men's basketball fans.

Junior guard Cory Higgins led the way with 26 points and Colorado won its home opener for the second straight year, defeating the Arkansas-Pine Bluff Golden Lions 88-72 Friday in front of 5,086 at the Coors Events Center.

CU knocked off the Golden Lions in its season-opener last year 76-56, a contest in which four Buffaloes scored in double figures. It was more of the same on this night as five Buffs, including four starters, reached double figures. Freshman point guard Alec Burks, who had 13 points in his collegiate debut, started in place of sophomore Nate Tomlinson.

"I think I played good," Burks said. "I had some little mistakes, but you know, it's my first game so I played through them."

The diaper-dandy went 9-of-13 from the free-throw line and was unafraid to take the ball strong to the hole.

Higgins didn't have a bad night either, especially at the charity strike where he went a perfect 16-of-16. Free-throw shooting had been an Achilles heel for CU in the past, but not on this night as the team shot a collective 34-of-40 for a whopping 85 percent. The junior lauded his teammates' play as they stepped up on the offensive end to take a little pressure off his shoulders.

"When everybody's aggressive, it takes our whole team to another level," Higgins said. "It's great just having guys that can bring that to the table."

It wasn't just Burks who came to Higgins' aide. Senior Dwight Thorne II and sophomore Austin Dufault scored 10 points apiece and had solid performances in the starting lineup. Junior sharpshooter Casey Crawford added 10 off the bench by hitting two three-pointers and drawing a foul on another. As for Tomlinson, the Australian showed no signs of remorse for being relegated to the bench, tallying seven points and seven assists in 32 minutes.

"It's great to have a guy with all the experience he (Tomlinson) gained last year coming off the bench," Higgins said. "He's just going to add another spark. That means we're not going to lose anything when he comes in."

There were a couple of sour notes for the Buffs on Friday. One surprise came before the game when it was announced that CU head coach Jeff Bzdelik would not be on the bench as he had to fly east to tend to an undisclosed "family emergency." Associate head coach Steve McClain stepped in as interim head coach and filled in nicely for Bzdelik. McClain wasn't at a loss for head coaching experience as he was the head man at Wyoming from 1998-2007, where he had a 157-115 record. McClain said after the game that Bzdelik was doing fine and Higgins added that Bzdelik had sent the team numerous text messages wishing them good luck.

"Literally, he's our leader," Higgins, referring to his head coach, said. "When we heard that news, it probably pumped everybody up more because we knew we had to step up and we definitely wanted to make sure we didn't have a letdown while he was gone."

From start to finish, McClain was animated on the Colorado sideline, which is a stark contrast to the Zen-like stoicism Bzdelik exhibits. McClain's personality definitely seemed to rub off during the course of the game, especially when CU was down early.

"I've always believed this: if you don't have that passion....and you don't have that energy...how can you expect your team to?" McClain said. "I felt like we had talked to those kids about bringing energy. I wanted to bring that for them, too."

A prime example of McClain's energy came on a fast break less than eight minutes into the game. After getting a steal, Tomlinson fed Higgins on a beautiful behind-the-back pass that Higgins slammed with two

hands while getting fouled. The old-fashioned three-point play put the Buffs up for good and got the crowd energized for the remainder of the game.

Junior Marcus Relphorde had a bit of an underwhelming Colorado debut, scoring six points on 3-of-8 shooting in 18 minutes on the floor. Relphorde was in foul trouble early, picking up his third at the 12-minute mark of the first half. He played with four fouls the majority of the second half. Despite not getting off to the start he wanted, Relphorde's feelings after the game summed up the general consensus of the team.

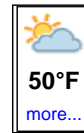
"Just glad to have the first game out of the way," Relphorde said. "Looking forward to the other ones, glad the team played hard and got this win."

Contact CU Independent Staff Writer David Starcer at David.starcer@colorado.edu.

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Sports

23 TURNOVERS DOOM GOLDEN LIONS IN SEASON-OPENER

By Ryan Thorburn/Special to the Commercial
 Sunday, November 15, 2009 3:40 PM CST

BOULDER, Colo. — For the second consecutive season Arkansas-Pine Bluff's long road to Southwestern Athletic Conference play began here with a thud.

Colorado, picked to finish last in the Big 12 preseason coaches poll, played like a team with something to prove during an 88-72 victory over the Golden Lions late Friday night at the Coors Events Center.

The Buffs (1-0) shot 57.1 percent in the first half and led 43-22 at the intermission before cruising to a win in both team's season opener. CU defeated the Golden Lions 76-56 in the 2008-09 opener here.

"We had too many lost balls," UAPB coach George Ivory said after his team allowed the Buffs to score 23 points off 22 turnovers committed by his team. "We just weren't communicating."

The Golden Lions (0-1) had pretty good balance with four players scoring in double figures, led by Terrance Calvin's 21 points on 7-for-11 shooting. Calvin also had a team-high seven rebounds to help his team win the rebounding battle 33-25.

Tyree Glass (13 points), Tavaris Washington (12) and Savalace Townsend (10) also scored in double figures. Lebaron Weathers, who scored 22 points and grabbed 10 rebounds last season against CU, was held to four points and six boards this time.

Defensively, it was a struggle as five Buffaloes finished in double figures. Cory Higgins, an All-Big 12 third-team selection last season, finished with 26 points on 5-for-8 shooting from the field and a 16-for-16 night from the line.

"Colorado did a great job executing their offense," Ivory said. "They did a great job offensively."

CU shot 55.8 percent from the field in the game, including a 6-for-15 effort from 3-point range.

Ivory's team was 11-for-18 (61.1 percent) at the foul line. CU shot 40 free throws, making 34 of them (85 percent).

"There was overall a lot of free throw shooting in the game," Ivory noted of the Big 12-officiated contest. "We had 18 and Colorado had 40."

Entering the matchup, CU coach Jeff Bzdelik, who was not at the game while attending to an unspecified family emergency, was worried about facing a more experienced Golden Lions roster that returns all five starters from last season and 11 lettermen. But the Buffs' promising young freshman shooting guard, Alec Burks, played well in his first collegiate start with 13 points, three assists, two rebounds and a steal.

"It takes the pressure off everybody," said Higgins, CU's leading scorer and rebounder last season, of having another talented and aggressive player in the lineup. "When everybody is aggressive it just takes our team to another level. It's just great having guys that can bring that to the table."

The Golden Lions will play at the University of Denver from the Sun Belt Conference today at Magness Arena. The Pioneers (0-1) play a Princeton-style very similar to CU's offense.

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