

Bzdelik`s squad turns attention to rebounding

Colorado beat on boards 33-25 in season opener

By Ryan Thorburn Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

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Jeff Bzdelik liked what he saw on the laptop screen.

Colorado`s head coach watched his team`s season opener on the internet in North Carolina after dealing with a family emergency on Friday.

"Jeff said he had a good picture on Buff TV," said associate head coach Steve McClain, who ran the bench during CU`s 88-72 victory over Arkansas-Pine Bluff at the Coors Events Center. "He thought defensively, the first half especially, we were good. In the second half we didn`t play as well."

And so McClain, who also ran practice on Saturday morning, had the attention of the young Buffs as preparations for Monday`s game against Coppin State began.

The Buffs (1-0) were outscored 50-45 in the second half and out-rebounded 33-25 for the game by the Golden Lions of the SWAC.

The looming EA Sports Maui Invitational isn`t going to be paradise for CU if the players don`t start cleaning the glass a little better.

"The two areas we have to work on as we get to bigger games are interior defense and back-side rebounding," McClain said. "What we`ve got to come back and work on is our defense. We got caught in some areas where we didn`t get the back-side rebounder down where he needed to be. And so we`ve got to focus on that for a couple days."

Arkansas-Pine Bluff grabbed 14 offensive rebounds that led to 13 second-chance points. Point guard Nate Tomlinson was CU`s leading rebounder with six.

"I wouldn`t say it`s a concern," Cory Higgins said of the home team losing a little bit of intensity after building a 24-point lead with 18:05 remaining. "We know what we did and we know what we have to do."

Bzdelik was scheduled to return home on Saturday night. CU`s third-year head coach plans to be back on the bench Monday night.

Point taken

Tomlinson, coming off the bench for the first time in his CU career after starting all 28 games he played in as a freshman, gave the team a spark with seven assists and only one turnover in 32 minutes.

"As long as we won, that`s all I really care about," Tomlinson said when asked how he felt about not starting.

Dwight Thorne, who had six turnovers and no assists, and Alec Burks, who had three assists and no turnovers, each played some point guard when Tomlinson wasn`t on the floor.

"Six turnovers, that`s something I`ve got to work on. I didn`t expect to have those," Thorne said. "Starting out at point guard is a little different for me, but I`ll be able to adjust quickly."

Sigh of relief

Levi Knutson said X-rays on his injured right hip were negative and showed no structural damage.

The junior guard, who has had surgeries on both hips during his CU career, did not play in the opener.

"I'll be back soon," said Knutson, who was the first player to arrive at practice on Saturday.

Notable

Higgins (16-for-16) made five more free throws than Arkansas-Pine Bluff attempted (11-for-18). ...

Shane Harris-Tunks, a 6-11 freshman from Australia, led the Buffs with two blocked shots. He also scored four points, had two assists and two steals in just seven minutes of action. ...

Arkansas-Pine Bluff forward Lebaron Weathers, who scored 22 points and grabbed 10 rebounds against CU last season, was held to four points on 2-for-7 shooting with six rebounds on Friday.

Quotable

"There was overall a lot of free throw shooting in the game, we had 18 and Colorado had 40," Arkansas-Pine Bluff head coach George Ivory said after the Big 12 officials were finally done blowing the whistle. "They did a great job offensively."

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Opinion: The good, the bad, and the in-between

Room for improvement for CU men's basketball team

By Brent Wilson New on November 15, 2009

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Call it what you want. Sure, the Colorado Buffaloes men's basketball team played a school who, to most, comes from the traffic jam between Little Rock, Ark., and Louisiana. It's a team even microscopes would consider small. But say what you want because any kind of victory for the Buffs is a much-needed one.

From Game 1 to down the road, we will see if Colorado really is good, bad, or somewhere in-between. But on Friday night, we saw a range of all three.

The good: The Charity Strike

Friday night's game was littered with fouls and the Buffs took advantage of it.

Arkansas-Pine Bluff gave Colorado 40 freebies and alongside Cory Higgins' 16-of-16 effort, the Buffs were 85 percent from the free-throw line. If you persistently get to the line, however it may be, flop like a goose, scream bloody murder – and you make the free ones, you are going to be in arm's reach in most games this season. Veto one Kansas and one Texas.

"Anytime you can get to the line, it's easy points and basically you've just got to focus and knock every one down," Higgins said.

And the truth shall set you free!

And in that comes the attitude.

The Buffs showed Boulder a new attitude Friday. They were a team who made a lot of mistakes but it never prevailed over their high energy. This team will have kinks, they will play confused from time to time, but what they showed Boulder on Friday is heart. And they will play with a lot of it.

The bad: 72 points given up

Pine Bluff shot 60 percent from the field and scored 50 points in the second half of Friday's game. To say the Buffs' defense was garbage to finish the game would be an insult to garbage.

If Pine Bluff can put up 50 in a half against this team, for love of all man do not, I repeat do not pay for parking when Kansas and Texas comes to town.

Unfortunately for CU, the Big 12 Conference is loaded with offensive power and they aren't going to be able to outscore half of their opponents this season. So, the defensive mindset for the Buffs has to come sooner rather than later.

The in-between: The maturity

These aren't the completely inexperienced Buffaloes we saw last season.

Last year, Colorado not only would have let Pine Bluff score 50 points, but they would have eroded in both aspects of their game. And then who knows, we might have seen a down-to-the-wire game that would have put CU in an early confidence black hole. But we didn't see that. Nor could we have.

Last year, the Buffs didn't have this mature leader in Higgins — he was not ready for it. But this year, he's doing the basics to lead his team to another level.

Whenever a guy gets to the charity strike 16 times and hits them all, you know he is playing with extreme confidence. If there's one thing CU needs, it is an absurd amount of confidence.

With all that said, the Buffs still have a lot of room to grow. When they take a 20-some odd lead into halftime, they have to be prepared to drive the stake in. They can't be sending guys to line (Pine Bluff had 18 free throws) or turning over the ball over (20 times in the game). They need to learn how to close games when conference play begins or they are going to end up on the wrong side of a lot of them.

That is exactly what happened last season.

So wherever the Buffs are in let's say a month or two, if they are on the path to being a good team more than a bad one, that's all we can ask for.

Contact CU Independent Staff Writer Brent Wilson New at Brent.new@colorado.edu.

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