

Bzdelik's squad aims for confidence boost

Bufs want to pack 3-0 record for road trip to Maui Invitational

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Aloha 3-0?

Jeff Bzdelik cringed when the subject of the EA Sports Maui Invitational came up after Tuesday's practice.

Colorado's players -- remember, these are college students -- can't help but think ahead to the possibilities out in paradise. They also acknowledge that it will be difficult to have success at the nation's most prestigious preseason tournament if they don't enter the event brimming with the confidence an unblemished record provides.

In order for the Buffs to have a swagger about them in Maui, Bzdelik's team must take care of business tonight against a talented Texas Southern team at the Coors Events Center (7 p.m., FSN).

"I think it's extremely important to win this game because of the confidence," Cory Higgins said. "We're going to be playing a great team every night and that confidence will help us out that much more."

CU is 2-0 after dining on cupcakes Arkansas-Pine Bluff and Coppin State. Bzdelik insists the Tigers -- led by Whitworth "Junior" Treasure -- are a much different animal.

"They're long. They're athletic. They're a very good basketball team. This will be a big test for us," Bzdelik said. "They're quicker, longer, more athletic and skilled than anybody we've played this year."

Treasure has been a nice find for the Texas Southern coaching staff, of which former Denver Nuggets guard Nick Van Exel is a member. The senior is averaging 24 points per game.

"He could play for anybody in the nation," Bzdelik said.

Higgins is also off to an impressive start, averaging 23.5 points while shooting 66.7 percent from the field, 71.4 percent behind the arc and 100 percent at the foul line.

An even more encouraging development is all of the help CU's star player has been getting from teammates. Alec Burks (18 points), Marcus Relphorde (14) and Dwight Thorne (13) also scored in double figures against Coppin State.

"I think we knew they were going to contribute because they've been doing it throughout practice, but now they're showcasing it for everyone who is watching," Higgins said. "It's more of a team effort with balanced scoring. The shot chart is pretty even throughout."

Bzdelik did his best to make sure the players weren't thinking about the trip to paradise by putting them through an early-morning practice and then showing them film of Texas Southern on Tuesday. Comparative scores usually don't mean much, but the Tigers are coming off a victory over an Idaho team that opened the season with a win at Utah.

"Everybody needs to be on edge. Players need to be on edge, (the media) keeps me on edge, everybody's on edge," Bzdelik said. "And that's a good thing, that's a motivating thing. Nobody should ever feel comfortable."

The Buffs will open the Maui Invitational against Gonzaga next Monday on national television. The long flight to Lahaina isn't going to be quite as fun if they're packing a 2-1 record.

"It's very important," Thorne said of winning tonight. "It will give us confidence to go out there and win the tournament. We are not going there to go 2-1 or 1-2, we are going to try and win. It's a business trip. I think if we have three wins under our belt it will give us confidence."

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