

Bufs fall just short in bid to upset Gonzaga

Zags rally past CU in final minutes of Maui opener

By Ryan Thorburn Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

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LAHAINA, Hawaii -- Cory Higgins is one of the few visitors in the history of this island who isn't just happy to be here.

Colorado's best player might as well have been in Ames or Lincoln or Siberia for Monday's post-game press conference in the bowels of the Lahaina Civic Center.

The Buffs nearly pulled off some March madness in November but lost 76-72 to Gonzaga in the first round of the EA Sports Maui Invitational.

Higgins was miserable in Maui after CU was unable to beat Cinderella at its own game and upset the Zags.

"Everybody keeps doubting us," Higgins said. "We went out there feeling like we had something to prove."

The Buffs showed a national television audience that they belong in this field and are capable of competing with a great program on a big stage.

But after a great start -- CU led by 15 points in the first half -- the young men in black couldn't quite finish off a talented Gonzaga squad that appears to be built for another NCAA Tournament run.

"What I like is it really hurts," said CU associate head coach Steve McClain, who ran the bench for Jeff Bzdelik after he flew from Maui to Chicago late Sunday to be with his ailing mother. "Because the kids expected to win. That's what I like. And that's what I told them in the locker room after the game, for the first time since we've been at CU they walked on the floor believing they were going to win the game."

The Buffs (3-1) got off to a strong start as Marcus Relphorde buried a 3-pointer for the first points of the game. The Zags answered and led 10-5 after a 3-pointer by former ThunderRidge High School star Matt Bouldin.

CU then embarked on one of the best runs the program has had in years.

The exciting spurt included a steal and dunk by Higgins, back-to-back treys from Casey Crawford and Keegan Hornbuckle, and back-to-back layups in transition by Crawford and Relphorde to give the Buffs a 22-18 lead.

Three more shots from behind the arc -- by Crawford, Alec Burks and Austin Dufalt -- extended CU's advantage to 31-21 with 7:31 in the half.

Gonzaga head coach Mark Few had no choice but to call timeout and smile as the boys from the Big 12 splashed six of their first eight (75 percent) 3-point attempts.

"They run an intricate offense, the Princeton-style offense, and when you don't have a lot of time to prepare, you can get sliced and diced. We got sliced and diced," Few said. "We were under fire from a very skilled team. I'd call them a great offensive team right now."

Burks scored on an offensive rebound and Higgins cashed in another open look from behind the arc to make the score 36-21 with 5:32 remaining.

The Buffs finally cooled off a little bit down the stretch but still led 40-29 at the intermission.

CU shot 55.6 percent (15-for-27) from the field and 63.6 percent from behind the arc (63.6 percent) in the first half. Gonzaga shot 39.1 percent (9-for-23) and made three of its six 3-pointers.

Seven different Buffs scored in the first 20 minutes, led by Crawford with eight points. Steven Gray kept the Zags within striking distance with 14 first-half points in 18 minutes.

"I was a little surprised," Bouldin said of CU's impressive first 20 minutes. "But I knew they were capable. I thought they just came out guns a blazin` and executing really well and getting our bigs in some uncomfortable situations. When a team is that hot, I guess they're just that hot."

Few wisely switched to an aggressive zone defense that slowed down the tempo and forced CU to hold on without getting any open looks from behind the arc. The Buffs did not make a 3-pointer after the intermission (0-for-4), and Bouldin scored 16 of his 21 points in the second half.

"They started playing a little more zone and doing more switching. In the first half they were getting caught," Crawford said. "It was a little more difficult (offensively) because we had to just drive."

After a field goal by Shane-Harris Tunks with 12:25 remaining, the Buffs still had an 11-point lead (56-45).

The Bulldogs (3-1) answered with a 12-1 run and tied the score 57-57 on an old-fashioned three-point play by Elias Harris with 8:23 left.

With 4:35 remaining, Bouldin gave Gonzaga its first lead (67-65) since an 18-15 cushion early in the first half.

"We were getting beat to the ball, we were getting out hustled, they seemed to want that game a little more in the first 20 minutes," Few said. "But it's a great sign that my guys were able to get into halftime and turn things around."

A tough basket in the paint by Burks brought CU within 70-69 with 1:03 remaining, but Bouldin answered with a field goal on Gonzaga's next possession.

The Buffs had possession of the ball trailing 73-70 when Nate Tomlinson aggressively drove into the lane and was unable to draw a foul or find an open teammate before committing a costly turnover.

"I felt like with 19 seconds left we didn't have to shoot a three. We still had a timeout, and Nate felt like he'd drive in there and get a foul," McClain said. "He didn't get it. He'd be the first one to tell you he wishes he would have just planted, turned around and thrown it back to somebody."

"There were a lot of plays in that game where somebody could have done something better, but we didn't. You give Gonzaga credit for that."

A layup by Higgins, who finished with a team-high 19 points, made it a two-point game with 4.6 ticks left. Bouldin calmly iced the game at the line after getting fouled on the in-bounds play.

That was the difference between one star smiling at his post-game press conference and the other feeling miserable in paradise.

Win or lose, both teams must have a short memory with tough opponents waiting today and a third game to be played on Wednesday.

"I like our character, I like our attitude, I like the fact that we went out there like we were going to win the game," McClain said.

Gonzaga 76, Colorado 72

COLORADO

FG FT Reb

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

Rlphrd 24 4-7 1-2 1-2 2 4 10

Dufault 26 3-4 0-2 0-2 1 2 7

Burks 23 5-6 0-0 1-6 0 3 11

CHiggins 35 7-16 4-5 0-6 2 4 19

Thorne II 16 0-1 2-2 0-2 0 2 2

Tmlnsn 33 1-5 6-7 0-1 8 2 8

Hrs-Tnks 6 1-1 0-0 0-0 0 4 2

Crawford 23 4-8 0-0 0-2 1 5 10

Hrnbackl 14 1-1 0-0 0-1 1 1 3

Totals 200 26-49 13-18 4-24 15 27 72

Percentages: FG .531, FT .722.

3-Point Goals: 7-15, .467 (Crawford 2-4, Burks 1-1, Hornbuckle 1-1, Dufault 1-1, Relphorde 1-2, [C.Higgins](#) 1-4, Thorne II 0-1, Tomlinson 0-1).

Team Rebounds: 2.

Blocked Shots: 4 (Crawford 2, Harris-Tunks, [C.Higgins](#)).

Turnovers: 15 (Burks 5, [C.Higgins](#) 4, Tomlinson 2, Harris-Tunks, Thorne II, Relphorde).

Steals: 8 ([C.Higgins](#) 3, Crawford 2, Relphorde, Hornbuckle, Harris-Tunks).

Technical Fouls: None.

GONZAGA

FG FT Reb

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

Harris 32 2-5 4-7 2-10 0 2 8

Sacre 33 4-10 2-6 1-7 0 4 10

Goodson 31 1-3 0-0 0-0 2 3 2

Bouldin 38 6-11 8-8 0-5 5 1 21

Gray 38 6-12 11-14 4-4 0 2 27

Arop 3 1-1 0-0 0-0 0 0 2

Vilarino 9 0-0 2-2 0-0 0 3 2

Gibbs 4 0-0 0-0 0-0 0 0 0

Olynyk 12 2-5 0-0 2-3 2 1 4

Foster 0 0-0 0-0 0-0 0 1 0

Totals 200 22-47 27-37 10-30 9 17 76

Percentages: FG .468, FT .730.

3-Point Goals: 5-12, .417 (Gray 4-7, Bouldin 1-3, Harris 0-1, Olynyk 0-1).

Team Rebounds: 1.

Blocked Shots: 1 (Harris).

Turnovers: 11 (Gray 3, Olynyk 2, Harris 2, Bouldin 2, Goodson, Sacre).

Steals: 7 (Bouldin 3, Goodson 2, Harris, Gray).

Technical Fouls: None.

Colorado 40 32--72

Gonzaga 29 47--76

A -- 2,400.

Officials -- Mike Stuart, Doug Shows, Ryan Wells.

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CU impresses in Maui opener

By Ryan Thorburn Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 11/24/2009 12:01:56 AM MST

LAHAINA, Hawaii -- The Buffs made Jeff Bzdelik proud.

Colorado played at a very high level Monday on college basketball's largest early-season stage without the third-year head coach, who flew from Maui to Chicago late Sunday to be with his ailing mother.

The Buffs executed Bzdelik's offense flawlessly in the first half, held their own on the glass against a much bigger opponent, and nearly pulled off an upset of Gonzaga in the opener of the EA Sports Maui Invitational.

Associate head coach Steve McClain had not heard from Bzdelik as he prepared to leave the Lahaina Civic Center following CU's 76-72 defeat.

"I haven't talked to him and knew I wouldn't," McClain said. "When we talked yesterday when he was leaving he said, 'I won't call you. You know what we're going to do.'"

"I'm sure Jeff watched the game and I'm sure he's proud of these kids."

Bzdelik put the Buffs through some intense practices and had the game plan for Gonzaga in place before his sudden departure. CU was the sharper team and led by as many as 15 points in the first half after executing the offense to near perfection.

"I thought Colorado did a phenomenal job preparing for us," Gonzaga head coach Mark Few said. "Steve McClain knows us and they were ready. It was obviously a game they were pointing towards. They spread us out and made shots."

McClain coached Wyoming to a major upset over Gonzaga in the 2002 NCAA Tournament. After the Buffs made seven of their first 11 3-pointers in the first half it looked like they would be the surprise team in the winner's bracket here.

The Bulldogs (3-1) didn't panic, however, and held CU without a 3-pointer in the second half. Gonzaga was able to slow the game down with a zone defense and pulled out the victory at the foul line where Few's team made more free throws (27) than the Buffs attempted (18).

"We're going to get to the point where we walk on the court and believe we're going to win every time, like Gonzaga does," McClain said. "I give Mark credit. I know people still sometimes talk about them as a mid-major program. I don't know why you would. That was a Big 12 type of environment out there."

CU athletic director Mike Bohn, who is doing his best to enjoy Maui while mulling over the future of football coach Dan Hawkins, appears to have a great situation on the men's basketball bench.

Bzdelik is one of the most respected coaches in the country. And McClain's experience as a head coach has helped the Buffs get off to a strong start this season.

"The first game when I had to sub in for Jeff, I told the players, 'What if today is the only day you get to play this game, what do you want people throughout the country to think of your program?'" said McClain, who coached CU to a win over Arkansas-Pine Bluff when Bzdelik was in North Carolina attending to a family emergency involving his daughter. "I want them to feel the same way (today), whether it's Arizona or Wisconsin. We've got to play with that desperate energy again. It doesn't matter who it's against."

Crawford plays big

Casey Crawford looked like the player Wake Forest once believed would be a perfect fit in the ACC.

The 6-9 Wake Forest transfer, who was inconsistent for CU last season, came off the bench and gave McClain a huge lift with 10 points, two blocks, two steals, two rebounds and an assist in 23 minutes.

Crawford's performance helped the under-sized Buffs compete in the paint with the Zags.

"I don't like to use the word compete. I don't go out there just to compete," Crawford said. "We didn't come all the way to Hawaii to compete, we came to win. Yeah, we played pretty well, but we didn't do enough to win."

Four different players scored in double figures for the balanced Buffs. Cory Higgins (19 points) and Alec Burks (11 points) each had six rebounds.

Gonzaga out-rebounded CU 30-24 and scored 15 second-chance points. McClain's bench outscored Few's reserves 23-8 and both teams scored 30 points in the paint.

Quick turnaround

CU had to wait about eight hours to find out who today's opponent was. McClain said opening the tournament is an advantage for the Buffs, who will face the winner of the Arizona-Wisconsin (Monday's fourth game) at 2 p.m. today (ESPN2).

"I was kind of glad we had the first game. Win or lose, you get more recovery time and more time to get off your feet and get ready," McClain said. "I think it's kind of fun to open a tournament. The excitement in the gym had a great feel to it."

Bouldin impressed

Matt Bouldin, a former ThunderRidge High School star who grew up in Highlands Ranch, spent part of his offseason working out with some of the Buffs in Boulder.

The Gonzaga star said he was still a little surprised with how well CU played in the first half and relieved to beat his home state university.

"It meant a lot," Bouldin said. "I've been playing with those guys all summer long. I've known a lot of them since high school and grade school. It was nice going against them, but I really wanted to win."

Shorthanded Buffs

Levi Knutson dressed for the game and went through warm ups before Monday's game after missing the first three games with a hip injury. The junior shooting guard was not used by McClain.

Junior forward Trent Beckley was unable to play due to a stomach virus. He joined Shannon Sharpe (knee injury) and Rick Higgins (redshirting) on the end of the bench.

Quotable

"I told the kids, 'You didn't come here to play one game. You came here to get better every day,'" McClain said. "All that means is you have to go back out (today) and bring it again. It's easy to bring it in the first game. And that's going to be my challenge to them here tonight."

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Under the Rim

CU basketball with Ryan Thorburn

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McClain was impressive

Written by [ryan](#) in Monday, November 23rd 2009 under [Uncategorized](#)
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LAHAINA, Hawaii — Dave Odom told me this before the tournament tipped:

“I don’t think there will be a team in this tournament better coached than Colorado,” said the former Wake Forest and South Carolina head coach, who is now serving as the director of the EA Sports Maui Invitational. “There may be several teams in this tournament that have more talent, but not better coached. He will get the maximum out of his team.”

Odom, of course, was talking about Colorado head coach Jeff Bzdelik.

There is no question the Buffs were well prepared for Gonzaga, seizing a 15-point lead before an impressive offensive barrage was slowed down by the Zags’ zone defense and too many whistles from the zebras.

Bzdelik is the one who came up with the game plan. But the third-year head coach was unable to be here for the game after flying to Chicago to be with his ailing mother.

Even in defeat, CU fell 76-72, I was very impressed with how associate head coach Steve McClain handled his bench and the big stage.

It’s clear that CU men’s hoops has two quality head coaches. Too bad McClain doesn’t know as much about football.

The longtime Wyoming head coach does know how to address the media after a tough defeat. Knowing Cory Higgins and the other players he brought to the podium were listening closely to every word he said:

“What I like is that it really hurts. Because the kids expected to win.”

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ARIZONA SCOUTING REPORT

Colorado (3-1) vs. Arizona (2-1) • Lahaina Civic Center • 2 p.m. • ESPN2 • 1290-AM, 107.5-FM

Compiled by Bruce Pascoe

SIDELINES

Probable starters

Arizona

G Nic Wise (5-10, senior)

G Solomon Hill (6-6, freshman)

G Brendon Lavender (6-5, sophomore)

F Jamelle Horne (6-7, junior),

F Derrick Williams (6-8, freshman)

Colorado

G Dwight Thorne II (6-3, senior)

G Cory Higgins (6-5, junior)

G Alec Burks (6-6, freshman)

F Marcus Relphorde (6-7, junior)

F Austin Dufault (6-9, sophomore)

By the numbers

91Percentage of games Arizona has won when scoring 80 or more points since the beginning of the 1997-98 season, counting its 87-70 win over NAU in the season opener.

Going home today

Although Arizona was designated as the visiting team Monday, wearing blue against the red-and-white Badgers, its status on the lower half of the bracket for tonight's game dictates that the Wildcats will wear home white jerseys today.

A recruiting trail tale

As a Virginia assistant coach in the 1980s, Maui Invitational chairman Dave Odom recruited Sean Miller along with Chris Corchiani and John Crotty.

"We would have been happy with any of them," Odom said. "I used to get up on Monday morning, take a plane to Miami to spend a day with Chris, take a plane to Pittsburgh the next day to spend a day with Sean and his family, and then went over to Newark, drive to the Shore to spend time with John and his family."

HOW THEY MATCH UP

- The series: Arizona is 4-8 all-time against Colorado but has not played the Buffaloes for 35 years despite their proximity. UA swept a home-and-home series during the 1973-74 and 1974-75 seasons.

- Colorado overview: Just 1-15 last season in the Big 12, Colorado is picked to finish last in the conference again this season. But coach Jeff Bzdelik has upgraded the talent level, and his Princeton-style offense always has the potential to scare teams if the Buffaloes can hit outside shots — as they did in the first half of Monday's game against Gonzaga. Juco transfer Marcus Relphorde adds athleticism and size inside, and guard Cory Higgins is the team's undisputed go-to man. Defensively, the Buffs deploy a matchup zone.

- Who's out: Colorado: Freshman guard Shannon Sharpe is out for the season following knee surgery. UA: Wing Kevin Parrom (foot stress fracture) will not return until at least mid-December.

KEY PLAYERS

Cory Higgins

Colorado

The Buffs junior guard knows how to fill box scores with the ability to shoot from all over the floor, pass well and defend.

Kyle Fogg

Arizona

Colorado's increasingly balanced, shifting offense will test Fogg, whom UA coach Sean Miller wants to be a defensive stopper.

HE SAID IT ...

"They really shoot it from five spots, get you spread out. ... Our team has not seen anything like the way they play.

UA associate head coach Archie Miller

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