

Buff basketball team wins Maui finale

CU tops Chamindade

By Ryan Thorburn Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

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LAHAINA, Hawaii -- Colorado was the warm-up band fans ignore while drinking beer in the parking lot.

Despite playing valiantly in their first two games -- agonizing losses to Gonzaga (76-72) and Arizona (91-87) -- the Buffs found themselves in the last-place game of the EA Sports Maui Invitational on Wednesday morning (9 a.m. local time).

Most of the hoops junkies decided to skip the early game at the Lahaina Civic Center and spend some time on the beach or the golf course until the big-name programs took the court in the evening.

CU got off to a predictably sluggish start -- missing nine point-blank shots in the first half, including a breakaway dunk that Alec Burks inexplicably clanked off the back of the rim -- and failed to put host Chaminade away.

To their credit, the Buffs kept their composure and closed the game with a 26-14 run in the final 10 minutes before flying home with a 73-58 victory over the Division II Silverswords.

When the Buffs took their largest lead (73-58) with 30 seconds left, associate head coach Steve McClain called a quick timeout to let them enjoy the moment.

"I don't think people understood this about us: We came with the goal to win this thing," McClain said. "And we had played our tails off two nights in a row. I knew today wasn't going to be pretty, but I also wanted to see them fight hard enough to get a win and go home 1-2. That's what I told them during that timeout."

After a 3-pointer by 5-foot-6 guard Steven Bennett -- who kept Chaminade in the game by knocking down five of the seven shots he took from behind the arc -- CU trailed 36-35 with 14:12 remaining.

"We came out slow but we definitely respected them," Austin Dufault said. "There was not a lack of respect for Chaminade. They're a good team."

Cory Higgins, who was averaging 23.4 points per game, picked up his second foul with 11:17 left in the first half and headed to the bench. CU's star did not have a point at the intermission and finished with six points, four assists, four rebounds and three turnovers.

"Tired maybe, but that's not really an excuse," said Higgins, who went basket for basket with All-American candidates Matt Bouldin and Nick Wise in the first two games. "We just wanted to come out and get the win. My teammates picked me up."

The Silverswords took their first lead at 19-18 after Waly Coulibaly capped a 9-0 run with the home team's fourth 3-pointer of the half.

Dwight Thorne splashed a trey with four seconds left to give the Buffs a 27-24 lead at halftime. CU shot 33.3 percent (9-for-27) through 20 minutes; Chaminade shot 25 percent (7-for-28) but out-rebounded the Buffs 21-15.

"The first half was ugly," McClain said. "In the second half, especially late, we got back to looking like we had the first two nights. We got a good flow going, which will carry us into the next game."

A 3-pointer by Marcus Relphorde gave CU the lead back for good at 38-36 with 14:20 remaining. The 6-7 point-forward added another try with 7:26 left to give his team a 10-point cushion and the Buffs cruised from that point.

"We had to put that behind us," Higgins said of blowing a 15-point lead against Gonzaga and losing in overtime to Arizona. "And come out here and at least get one win."

The Buffs (4-2) will host San Francisco on Dec. 1 at the Coors Events Center.

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CU wins despite off game for Higgins

By Ryan Thorburn Camera Sports Writer
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LAHAINA, Hawaii -- Cory Higgins only scored six points.

And the Buffs won.

Even though Colorado was playing a Division II opponent, that's a good sign for this young team.

"It shows we have a bench, we have depth and somebody different can step up and score every night," CU associate head coach Steve McClain said after the Buffs' 73-58 victory over host Chaminade in the seventh-place game of the EA Sports Maui Invitational. "It doesn't have to be on Cory's shoulder every night. He didn't care. All he wanted to do was win. I think it was a positive."

Nine different CU players scored, including four in double figures. Alec Burks and Marcus Relphorde each had 13 points to lead the way.

"I take away a lot of experience playing against some good teams," said Burks, a true freshman, who also had four rebounds and two steals. "That's going to help the rest of the season."

Austin Dufault had a great tournament after getting off to a slow start to the season back in Boulder.

The 6-9 sophomore, who had his first career double-double during Tuesday's loss to Arizona, finished with 12 points on 5-for-6 shooting with four rebounds, three steals and an assist against Chaminade.

"Last year we came out to Hawaii (for the Rainbow Classic), and I had a pretty terrible tournament to be honest," Dufault said. "I didn't think I played very well. ... I didn't want that to happen again in this tournament."

Dwight Thorne played his best game in Maui, scoring 10 key points when his teammates were struggling to make baskets. The team's only senior finished with three assists and no turnovers.

Bench mates

Before the season, Jeff Bzdelik said Shane Harris-Tunks wasn't ready for the Big 12. CU's head coach, who missed the Maui Invitational to attend to his ailing mother in Chicago, might have a different opinion of the 6-11 freshman center now when they reunite in Boulder.

Harris-Tunks sparked the lethargic Buffs with six points on three-for-three shooting and seven rebounds.

"Shane is getting more and more confidence. He has done a good job of watching Casey (Crawford) and Austin and the veteran guys run the offense," McClain said. "I think he's getting a better feel for the game."

Harris-Tunks is a good passer but he did commit a couple of costly turnovers against the small Chaminade team.

"He about made me pull my hair out when he threw a couple of those passes but he isn't afraid to throw them and that's a good thing," McClain said. "He'll learn when they're all packed in there to just pass it back out, set a screen and move. He has grown a lot in the last week."

Nate Tomlinson, who played with Harris-Tunks growing up in Australia, was also solid off the bench with eight assists, five steals, five points and four rebounds.

Levi Knutson made his first appearance for the Buffs this season and finished with four points in seven minutes.

Notable

The Buffs out-rebounded Chaminade 36-31 and had a 24-8 scoring edge in the paint. ... CU improved to 4-5 all-time in Hawaii. ... The Buffs wore their all-black road uniforms in all three games at the Maui Invitational.

Quotable

"It's hard when you catch the ball on the first pass to not let it fly when you're wide open," McClain said on CU's questionable shot selection in the first half. "Yet if you do that a bunch and you're not making them, then the game kind of gets to the point where you don't have a good flow. There became a point when they were making them and we were making them. That's the point when it became a fun game to watch and coach and play in."

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