

Boyle's CU Buffs playing smarter

CU men 4-0 in December

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The Buffs are Harvard educated.

Since the 82-66 loss to the Crimson on Nov. 28 in Cambridge, Mass., Colorado has won four consecutive home games behind a dramatically better defensive effort and unselfish play on the offensive end.

At Harvard, the Buffs mostly stood around and watched Cory Higgins (21 points) and Alec Burks (20 points) do their thing in front of a gaggle of East Coast NBA scouts.

Tad Boyle's talented new team -- which hosts Longwood today at the Coors Events Center (2 p.m., FSN) -- learned from the tough Ivy League lesson and has played a smarter brand of basketball while posting a 4-0 record in December.

"There was a team meeting and everybody just kind of expressed their feelings and we dealt with it as men and moved on," explained junior point guard Nate Tomlinson, who had eight assists and one turnover in 19 minutes on Friday night during CU's 89-61 victory over The Citadel.

As a team the Buffs finished with 23 assists on 34 made baskets and only nine turnovers against the Bulldogs. CU had five assists and 15 turnovers against Harvard.

Boyle said he could have screamed at the players until he was blue in the face, but the Buffs had to embrace a different mentality themselves in order to turn things around.

"I'm proud of them," Boyle said after a long practice on Saturday. "One thing we've talked about as a team is having our players take ownership in the program. Sometimes when things aren't going the way you want them to go, you need to change how you're playing. They have to take it upon themselves to change that."

Entering the weekend, CU ranked second in the Big 12 in turnover margin (+5.89) behind Missouri (+6.80). The Buffs were tied with Iowa State for second in assist-to-turnover ratio (1.40) behind Kansas (1.48).

Higgins, who had five turnovers and one assist at Harvard, finished with 18 points, five assists and no turnovers in 31 minutes against The Citadel. Austin Dufault, who gets a lot of touches among the trees in the post, only has three turnovers all season. Marcus Relphorde has 25 assists and 15 turnovers through nine games.

Backup point guard Shannon Sharpe has 15 assists and nine turnovers this season. Tomlinson has as many steals (11) as turnovers (11) this season.

"It's just getting more experience and learning how to play with these guys," Tomlinson said of his improved play. "And just being more confident out there."

Last season the Buffs finished third in turnover margin (+1.94) and fourth in assist-to-turnover ratio (1.08) in the Big 12 playing Jeff Bzdelik's Princeton-style offense, which shortened the games and limited possessions.

CU was seventh in the Big 12 in scoring offense last season (74.6 ppg). Under Boyle the Buffs are averaging 82.8 points per game, third in the conference behind Kansas (87.3) and Missouri (82.9) entering Saturday's action.

"We have guys with great basketball instincts," Boyle said. "So what it comes down to is are we making the right decisions or not? Sometimes that takes some time and sometimes you have to make some wrong decisions before you figure out what the right ones are."

TODAY: The Buffs (6-3) host Longwood (3-9) at 2 p.m. at the Coors Events Center.

BROADCAST: Television on FSN with Drew Goodman (play-by-play), Ceal Barry (analyst) and Marc Stout (sideline). Radio on KKZN (760 AM) with Mark Johnson (play by play) and Chris Lewis (analyst).

STORY LINES: The Buffs are coming off an 89-61 victory over The Citadel on Friday night. ... Alec Burks, the Big 12's leading scorer (20.3 ppg), led four CU players in double figures with 19 points on 7-for-8 shooting. ... Freshman forward Andre Roberson recorded his first career double-double with 11 points and 10 rebounds. ... Longwood is coming off a 91-54 loss at New Mexico on Friday night, a game the Lancers led 17-10 with 12 minutes to go in the first half at The Pit. ... Longwood, an independent, opened the season with a 113-75 loss at Kansas.

COACHES: Tad Boyle is 6-3 in his first season at CU after going 56-66 in four seasons at Northern Colorado. Mike Gillian is 66-158 in his eighth season at Longwood.

PROBABLE STARTERS: Colorado -- G Nate Tomlinson, 6-2, Jr., 3.9 ppg, 1.8 rpg; G Marcus Relphorde, 6-7, Sr., 11.3 ppg, 4.6 rpg; G Alec Burks, 6-6, So., 20.3 ppg, 4.2 rpg; G Cory Higgins, 6-5, Sr., 17.0 ppg, 3.8 rpg; F Austin Dufault, 6-9, Jr., 8.2 ppg, 4.7 rpg. **Longwood** -- G Antwan Carter, 6-6, Jr., 15.5 ppg, 10.0 rpg; G Aaron Mitchell, 6-2, Sr., 13.2 ppg, 5.6 rpg; G Jeremiah Bowman, 6-2, Jr., 10.6 ppg, 2.6 rpg; G Durann Neil, 6-2, Jr., 8.3 ppg, 1.4 rpg; F Jan van der Kooij, 6-7, Jr., 7.4 ppg, 5.5 rpg.

KEY STAT: CU point guard Nate Tomlinson had eight assists and one turnover in 19 minutes against The Citadel. The Buffs finished the game with 23 assists on 34 made baskets and only nine turnovers.

SERIES: This is the first meeting between the two teams.

UP NEXT: The Buffs will play New Mexico on Wednesday in the Las Vegas Classic at Orleans Arena (8 p.m., CBS College Sports).

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