



With two home games left in his career, senior Cory Higgins says a win Saturday against Texas 'would be lovely.'
Photo Courtesy: Joel Broida



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Brooks: After Unsightly Win, CU Only Has Eyes For Texas

BOULDER - Coaches love decisive wins, but they simply *adore* wins driven by effort, those victories tucked away despite things having fallen as much out of place as in.

So it was Wednesday for Tad Boyle and his Colorado Buffaloes in the Land of Buddy Holly, otherwise known as Lubbock, Texas. Because they edged Texas Tech by three, the Buffaloes earned a passing grade on a night when passable often times didn't appear sufficient.

In the end, it was - much to the delight/relief of Boyle, who in his first season at CU has seen similar nights quickly slide the other way. But on this one, in spite of the aesthetics not being there, it all came together late and ended that way.

"That's a positive sign," Boyle noted a couple of days ago. "We missed some layups in transition, we missed some open shots that we normally would make by some of our better shooters and scorers. The progress we made was that we didn't let that affect the other end (defense).

BUFFALO EXTRAS



Game Notes #29: vs. 5/5 Texas

"We didn't always get stops down the stretch, but we got them when we had to. Our guys were focused . . . I can tell when we're dialed in defensively and when we're not. And we were; even when we didn't get the stops it wasn't because we fell asleep."

His team won a game that sends it into Saturday's encounter against No. 5/5 Texas (Coors Events Center, 2 p.m.) with a little extra fizz and renewed hope of playing into mid-March. Finishing the Big 12 Conference season as they opened it would be the biggest thing for the Buffs since Chauncey's final spin move at the Foam Dome.

Can the Buffs bid adieu to the Longhorns with what would be a signature win in a season of ebbs and flows? Say yes for these reasons: They're at home, they're healthy (point guard Nate Tomlinson is back), they're playing in front of an Events Center record fourth sellout crowd this season. Say no for just one reason: Texas is scary good, a potential Final Four entry.

Stellar CU senior Cory Higgins, who on Saturday will tie Will Smith (1996-2000) and Stephane Pelle (1999-2003) for most career games played at CU (123), agreed that he and his teammates will "just have to be at our best" to upset Texas.

But he added something I found interesting, and maybe it even offers some comfort for CU fans, given the often schizophrenic course the Buffs have taken through February. To me, it underscores what Boyle says about his team maintaining focus and an even keel through difficult times.

Said Higgins: "I wouldn't say we'll need our absolute best effort, because it's not like we need a miracle to beat (Texas). But if we come out like we should with the right mindset and play like we're capable, we'll be fine."

Tall order, to be sure, but it's not on a par with the USA vs. Russia in the '80 Winter Olympics.

I asked Boyle if he believes Texas is the most talented team in the Big 12. He answered:

"I think this: Kansas is the most explosive offensively, the most efficient offensively, and I think the numbers back me up on that. They're leading the country in field goal percentage. I think Texas, along with Nebraska, are the best defensive teams in our league.

"Texas is holding their opponents to 36 percent in field goal percentage - that's pretty darn stiff over a 28-game schedule. They really guard. I think they're the most physically talented and they guard the best.

"It starts with (senior point guard Dogus) Balbay . . . the reason he plays is not because of his jump shot. It's because he really guards - and the rest of the guys feed off of that. And they're long and they're athletic . . . so when you put all that together they've got a pretty good team."

Boyle could go on and on about the Longhorns . . . so we'll let him.

The fact that the Horns lead the Big 12 in rebounding (40.9 a game) "speaks to their athleticism and their mentality," Boyle said. "It's what you stress . . . I don't think it's a coincidence that the team that leads the conference in rebounding and field goal percentage defense is leading the conference. It's the reason I talk about that stuff over and over and over again. It's what gets you to the highest level."

Many teams visiting the Events Center come in concerned about the altitude and CU's preferred pace. Boyle doesn't expect Texas to enter with concerns about either.

"I think they'll run, especially off of misses, steals," he said. "One thing about getting stops is that it allows you to run. We've got to make sure that we don't turn the ball over. We've got to take better care of the ball than we have here recently. Against Texas, those turnovers or long rebounds turn into layups for them, as athletic as they are. Yeah, they'll come in and run with us. Transition defense is going to be a big part of our game plan."

Already this season, Higgins has moved into first place on CU's career charts for starts (121), minutes played (4,154) and free throws made (525). He feels good about his final CU season, but obviously he can feel better. What's lacking on his resume is a postseason appearance.

"I wouldn't trade anything," he said of his senior year. "It's the most successful season I've had since I've been here. So something's been going right. I feel real positive about my last year and leaving a stamp on this program."

Winning Saturday, said the stoic Higgins, "would be lovely - maybe our biggest home win since I've been here. We've had a few this year, but that would be great to keep that momentum going, especially into the last week."

The unprecedented fourth home sellout of season "just shows how far it's come these last four years," he added. "I'm just happy for the seniors that are here, that we got to experience this."

We can't predict Saturday's outcome, but this much we know: The sold-out house will rock - for the fourth time. Never happened before, and as Higgins noted, that's progress in a program begging for it.

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SHOW MENU



CU men look for signature victory

Bufs aim to keep up momentum with No. 5 Texas coming to town

By Ryan Thorburn Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

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LUBBOCK, Texas -- It's time for a storm-the-court moment at the Coors Events Center.

Kansas State had one after upsetting No. 1 Kansas in Manhattan. Nebraska had one after taking down No. 3 Texas in Lincoln.

Now the Buffs -- desperate to make up for some disappointing losses with a SportsCenter-worthy win -- return home to face the Big 12-leading and No. 5 Longhorns on Saturday in front of a full house.

Colorado is even more upbeat about the opportunity after holding on for a 71-68 victory against Texas Tech on Wednesday at United Spirit Arena.

"It helps our confidence, it helps our mojo, it helps our psyche. It's huge for us," head coach Tad Boyle said of the team's third true road win. "We know it's going to be an unbelievable challenge. Texas is as good a team as we've played all year long. But it's nice to be playing games that matter in February. It's been a while since Colorado has been in that position. This is our 17th win and we want to find our 18th."

The Buffs (17-11, 6-7) have surpassed last season's win total by two games and matched last year's conference win total with three games remaining in the regular season.

But with a senior class that includes Cory Higgins, Levi Knutson and Marcus Relphorde, the program's goal for the 2010-11 season is to play in the postseason.

CU is currently in a three-way tie for sixth place in the Big 12 standings with Nebraska (18-9, 6-7) and Baylor (17-10, 6-7).

A win over Texas could lead to a fantastic finish for the Buffs with only a road trip to last-place Iowa State and a home finale against the Cornhuskers remaining.

"It would be a big win for our program and a big win for our season," Relphorde said after scoring 15 points and grabbing six rebounds against the Red Raiders.

CU beat Texas Tech despite Higgins and Alec Burks combining to shoot 7-for-23 from the field. Boyle's team won the rebounding battle 40-34 while holding the Red Raiders to 41 percent shooting.

"It was defense, rebounding and playing tough," explained point guard Nate Tomlinson, who started and played 24 minutes on a sore right ankle. "The ball is not always going to go in and we have great offensive players who played defense."

Burks grabbed eight rebounds and finished with 14 points thanks to a 6-for-6 effort at the foul line. Four different Buffs scored in double figures, led by Knutson's 18 points off the bench on 7-for-14 shooting.

"I think we did a better job executing and sharing the ball so everyone was involved," Knutson said. "A lot of guys contributed. It was a great team win for us."

Notable

Andre Roberson has 203 rebounds after producing a game-high nine boards against Texas Tech. The 6-foot-7 forward, who also knocked down a key 3-pointer in the second half, is 15 rebounds behind Stephane Pelle for the CU freshman record. ... Roberson also leads the Buffs with 41 steals on the season, including three thefts in Lubbock. ... CU is 13-2 when outrebounding the opponent (lost at Oklahoma and Missouri).

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