

Lappe's squad aims to build off big win

Bufs likely need to win two of last three to secure WNIT bid

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Not once during the past couple of weeks did first-year head coach Linda Lappe feel like she was starting to lose her basketball team.

And the hard knocks were mounting up for the Colorado Buffaloes:

CU had lost three games in a row by an average of 27 points. While the Buffs were in each game at points, they eventually suffered crippling collapses, with the letdowns coming in various manners.

The Buffs had lost six of their last seven games, with all six losses coming by double digits and four coming by at least 26 points.

With two top-20 teams left on the schedule, postseason hopes were dim.

Such circumstances would have been enough to make plenty of teams crack. The Buffs themselves were all but finished at a similar juncture last year.

Then came Wednesday's inspiring 73-68 upset victory over No. 16 Oklahoma. Outside of a tense final minute in which CU had trouble with the Sooners' full-court press while trying to preserve the lead, the Buffs never appeared rattled. And they were anything but indifferent.

The win was their second over a ranked foe this season, the first time they've accomplished such a feat since the 2007-08 campaign.

"To the credit of our team, they've been great," Lappe said after the victory. "They come every single day ready to work, and you wouldn't know how the previous game went, except for the fact that we want to work harder (after the losses) and make sure it doesn't happen again. I haven't thought for one second that our players have given up."

Now the Buffs (13-13, 4-9 Big 12) have to use the momentum they crafted Wednesday by leading the entire second half and fighting off multiple runs by a talented OU squad.

These Buffs have had these moments before. They knocked off then-No. 17 Iowa State one game only to fall to a struggling Oklahoma State squad in the next. They turned in a sound win over Missouri only to follow with an ugly home loss against Kansas State. They routed rival Nebraska only to drop three more in a row against beatable foes.

"This is too much momentum to let down," CU guard Chucky Jeffery said. "I think we can only go up from here. We can't have no more backslides. We're up right now, and we've just got to end our season strong."

An NCAA tourney berth is still a longshot. But with one victory over OU, playing beyond the Big 12 tournament seems possible again, especially if the Buffs keep packing the offensive punch they did Wednesday.

They broke the 60-point mark for just the third time this season in Big 12 play. After averaging 46.7 in the three previous losses, they scored 39 in the first half and were on the attack throughout.

Taking that attitude on the road will likely be the difference between earning a WNIT bid or not.

The Buffs need to win two of the final three regular season games to ensure themselves of a .500 record -- and likely WNIT berth -- regardless of how they fare in the Big 12 tournament.

One of those games is the finale at home against No. 3 Baylor on March 5. The other two are against teams the Buffs have beaten, Mizzou (Saturday) and NU (Wednesday), but are on the road where CU is winless this season. Oh, and the Tigers (12-15, 4-9) and Huskers (13-14, 3-10) will also be kicking and scratching trying to reach the postseason.

"We just have to keep the confidence and know that we can't be one-hit wonders," Lappe said. "We can't be a team that beats Oklahoma and then loses a game maybe you shouldn't. We have to be able to sustain it. We have to be able to stay mentally tough. And we have to get our first road win of the year.

"We were willing to do (against OU) whatever it took to get the win, and that's just the mentality that we have to have every single game."

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