



Senior Marcus Relphorde (5) has scored in double figures in two of the past three games.
Photo Courtesy: Tony Harman



02/08/2011 B.G. Brooks, Contributing Editor

Brooks: 2,4,6,8 . . . Time For Buffs To Separate

BOULDER - Suddenly, it's crunch time. A couple of mornings ago, Tad Boyle had another name for it: Separation Week. That fits, too, especially considering the crowd huddled behind the first two entries in the Big 12 Conference basketball standings.

BUFFALO EXTRAS



Game Notes #25: vs. Texas A&M

With Valentine's Day approaching - that constitutes a public service announcement - there's usually some daylight, some order at least, among the 12 pack. Not so this season.

Following Texas (8-0) and Kansas (8-1) is a jumbled assortment of four- and five-loss teams - eight to be exact. Only streaky Texas Tech (3-6) and snake-bit Iowa State (1-8) are outside that mix - and the Red Raiders could play themselves back into a mid-tier finish while the Cyclones seem relegated to soiling someone's March fantasy.

"I don't know if I've seen it like this," KU Coach Bill Self said. "I've said all along that parity sometimes gives the appearance of mediocrity - and that's not the case at all. There are good teams."

Colorado (4-5) is among the able eight. It's not healthy at this time of season to look at what might have been, but it's almost impossible not to sneak a peek at the recent past. Boyle's bunch is a better road team, but not yet a consistently good road team. The memory of conference losses at Nebraska, Oklahoma and Baylor are hard to flush - particularly the latter pair in light of OU (4-4) and Baylor (5-4) being perched ahead of CU in the standings.

That's the dark side, but we're here to show you the light. The Buffs have seven games remaining - four of them (Texas A&M, Kansas State, Texas, Nebraska) in the Coors Events Center, where they're 12-1 this season.

Remaining road trips are to Kansas, Texas Tech and Iowa State - and the latter two opponents have lost five games apiece this season on their respective home courts. As for playing Kansas at home . . . you know that story and we'll spare you the grisly details.

So, Boyle is right on - this is Separation Week for his Buffs. They catch No. 22 Texas A&M (4-4) Wednesday in the Events Center (7 p.m.) and semi-resurgent K-State (4-5) in the Events Center on Saturday (7 p.m.).

Win both and *voila* . . . CU achieves some separation in the standings, matches its Big 12 win total from last season (6-10) and inches toward a possible Big Dance berth - a dream that seemed to be materializing nicely when the Buffs opened 3-0 in the conference.

"It's a huge week for us; the fact that we are at home and you have to take advantage of that - especially with the jumble there in the middle of the league," Boyle said. "You never know where your next win's going to come from. Home games are the ones you have to take advantage of, no doubt."

Boyle's players say they don't need to be reminded of the week's importance. "Saying it's big is an understatement," noted senior guard Levi Knutson. "We've got two games against teams that have been in the NCAA Tournament and are potential NCAA teams again. That's a group we'd like to join, and we can if we take care of business."

"Everybody knows there are a bunch of teams in the thick of things . . . (Boyle) doesn't need to say it. We know how important it is and we also know we can't look past Wednesday."

A game past the halfway point of Big 12 play, we've seen enough of CU to make a couple of observations - one of which was made above (better on the road, still not consistently good). The other: Given their offensive shortcoming inside (the lack of a physical presence), the Buffs' nightly margin for an off-night by anyone is pretty thin.

Boyle has them compensating well on the boards and, for the most part, defending ably. But if they don't get consistently good offensive performances from at least four (five is even better) players, they have problems with bigger, better teams.

Boyle believes they know that: "Our guys, we've experienced enough success (and) failure to understand the difference between the two. I think that's the key this time of year; guys have to be dialed in to whatever it is you need to do to be successful."

Which brings us to senior Marcus Relphorde . . . Boyle has called the gifted 6-foot-7 Relphorde his team's "X factor" - and CU needs the X-Man at the top of his game for Separation Week.

Maybe Relphorde's two most recent games are a good indication of that happening: In last week's home blowout of Iowa State, he scored 15 points. In the loss at Missouri, he contributed his third career double-double (13 points, 12 rebounds). Those two performances are in contrast to forgettable outings at Nebraska (nine points, two rebounds), Oklahoma (six, four) and Baylor (four, two). The Baylor game aside, he's added 15, 15 and 13 points to the usually steady productivity of Alec Burks and Cory Higgins.

A&M Coach Mark Turgeon is most cognizant of Burks' and Higgins' size and ability: "Both of them have a chance to be pros . . . they're tall and long and create matchup problems for us; our guards are a little bit shorter."

But Turgeon adds: "You put Relphorde and their other shooters around them - Levi Knutson - they spread you out so much. They're really hard to guard."

The Aggies opened 17-1, but the past three weeks have brought four losses in five games, including defeats in the past three. A&M would like to hold Wednesday's game in the mid-60s: the Aggies are averaging 65.8 points and allowing 65.9 in conference play. (The Buffs are at 75.2 and 74.3 in those categories.) Turgeon isn't likely to land in the Events Center and pull a Fred Hoiberg, emulating the first-year Iowa State coach who wanted to match CU's up-and-down

tempo at altitude. Bad choice.

But Knutson makes a good point: While conceding the Buffs "obviously want the pace in our favor at home," he adds, "It's more about us getting stops on defense."

If this is Separation Week for the Buffs, it's Reclamation Week for the Aggies. Said Boyle: "There are two sides to every coin . . . the one side is side is they have been struggling, but the other side is they're going to come out kind of like a wounded dog right now. They're a little dangerous. There's no doubt they'll be ready to play. This is an important game for them to get back on track. But we're kind of the same way. We've lost a few lately that we'd like to have back. So we feel like we need the game as well. It's going to be a heck of a dog fight."

Staying with that canine theme, the Buffs would be wise to fetch a W - a couple of them, in fact - and let the hounds go their separate ways.

Contact: BG.Brooks@Colorado.EDU

SHOW MENU



Thorburn: Separation week looms for CU Buffs

By Ryan Thorburn Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 02/07/2011 11:40:38 PM MST

Texas, Kansas and everyone else.

It appears the Big 12 has two teams capable of making a run to the Final Four and 10 also-rans.

Right now seven teams are either 5-4, 4-4 or 4-5 in conference play.

The mediocrity in the middle of the standings will likely mean fewer teams from the conference making the NCAA Tournament after a record seven Big 12 programs received dance invitations last March.

But the parity gives capable but inconsistent teams like Colorado a chance to make a run for a top-four finish down the stretch. Seeds 1-4 get opening-round byes at the conference tournament in Kansas City.

"That's why February is going to be such a big month," Baylor head coach Scott Drew said during Monday's Big 12 coaches teleconference. "You can be in third and lose a game and then be in seventh or eighth."

Or vice versa.

The Bears (15-7, 5-4), after a disappointing January, have started to make their move and are currently third in the standings.

Texas A&M and Oklahoma are tied for fourth with 4-4 records. CU, Missouri, Oklahoma State and Kansas State are all 4-5.

"It's all mumble-jumbled right now," Missouri head coach Mike Anderson said. "I think you'll start seeing the true picture evolve in the next two weeks."

It's not an exaggeration to say this is a make-or-break week for the Buffs with games against the Aggies (17-5 overall) and Wildcats (16-8) at the Coors Events Center. Two wins will likely move CU into the top four with a couple winnable road games (at Texas Tech and Iowa State) on the horizon.

"It's a huge week for us because of the fact that we are at home and you have to take advantage of that," Tad Boyle said. "This is separation week the way we look at it."

The Big 12 is the only conference to have all members ranked in the RPI top 150.

According to the NCAA's official RPI numbers on Monday, Kansas (2), Texas (7), Kansas State (29), Missouri (31), Texas A&M (33) and Oklahoma State (45) were all ranked in the top 50. Baylor (77), CU (86) and Nebraska (91) are in the top 100. Oklahoma (116), Iowa State (143) and Texas Tech (150) are the weak links.

"Parity sometimes gives the appearance of mediocrity, and that's not the case at all, there's good teams," KU head coach Bill Self said. "You have one bad week or one hot week and that's the difference between getting in or not."

Griffin watch

Oklahoma head coach Jeff Capel said he still talks to Blake Griffin almost every day and stays up late watching Los Angeles Clippers games.

The former Sooners star has taken the NBA by storm with his powerful dunks and nightly double-doubles. Griffin was recently named to the All-Star team, an amazing turn of events considering he missed the entirety of his official rookie season with a serious knee injury.

"We're really excited for him and happy for him. We're not really surprised," Capel said. "I always thought he would be even better in that league than he was here, just because it's more open and he's playing with better players. ...

"He is obsessed with being the best he can be."

Burks watch

Griffin left OU after his sophomore season. CU's Alec Burks, who is averaging 19.8 points and 5.9 rebounds, will have to make a similar career decision in a few months.

NBAdraftnet.com currently projects the 6-6 sophomore as the 12th pick in the 2011 NBA draft. The popular web site recently interviewed Burks about his professional hoops dreams.

"The biggest factor in me leaving Colorado is I have to be certified top ten or a lottery pick," Burks said. "If I'm certified top ten or lottery pick, I would feel like I'd have to leave, but if I'm not where I feel like I need to be, I'll just come back another year so I can prove everybody wrong so I can get that lottery or top ten spot."

Pullen on track

Jacob Pullen is starting to play like the preseason Big 12 Player of the Year after a disappointing start to conference play for Kansas State. The senior point guard was named the Big 12 Player of the Week after averaging 19.5 points and 7.0 assists in wins over Nebraska and Iowa State.

Pullen was suspended for by the NCAA for three games in December for receiving impermissible benefits. He seemed to struggle with the outside expectations of the Wildcats, the preseason pick of the coaches to win the Big 12, early in the season.

"When I started doing a better job of helping him, he started doing a better job of playing and helping our team win," K-State head coach Frank Martin said. "Him being a four-year guy that has been through the ropes with me here from Day One, I just assumed he would be able to handle it. Obviously, I needed to do a better job of helping him prepare for the expectations and all those things."

Martin said the loss to CU in Manhattan on Jan. 12 was the turning point for Pullen and the talented team.

"That's when I finally saw the light," Martin said. "He didn't do a very good job of leading, and that's where I had to help him."

K-State's next game is Saturday in Boulder.

Hoiberg heartbreak

Pullen hit the game-winning shot in the Wildcats' 86-85 victory over Iowa State on Saturday at Hilton Coliseum. The Cyclones are now 14-10 overall and 1-8 in the Big 12.

In six of the 10 losses Iowa State has either led or been tied in the final minute, including four conference games.

"I just watched the game again and I feel sick after watching it," first-year Iowa State head coach Fred Hoiberg said. "We played our guts out."

Problems in Stillwater

On Monday morning the Big 12 announced that Oklahoma State's Darrell Williams was the conference's Rookie of the Week after averaging 16.5 points and 12.5 rebounds during wins over Missouri and Oklahoma.

Moments later, news broke that Williams, a 6-8 junior, has been charged with rape and sexual battery.

"I just got back in from recruiting, so I don't know anything about that," said Oklahoma State assistant Chris Ferguson, a last-minute replacement for head coach Travis Ford on the weekly media teleconference.

Ford was unavailable because he was "in a meeting."

Notable

Baylor is 8-1 over the past two seasons against the other Texas teams in the Big 12. ... Iowa State lost to Kansas State despite making 22 of 24 (91.7 percent) free throws. ... Texas freshman Tristan Thompson leads the conference with 52 blocks. ... Texas A&M has eight wins over ranked opponents the last two seasons.

[Close Window](#)[Send To Printer](#)

Ryan Thorburn's Big 12 Power Rankings: Feb. 8

By **Ryan Thorburn** Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 02/07/2011 10:53:30 PM MST

(Previous week's ranking and team's record in parentheses)

- 1. Texas (1/20-3, 8-0)** -- Longhorns get to 20 wins at earliest date in program history (Feb. 5). **Up next:** Wednesday at Oklahoma.
- 2. Kansas (2/23-1, 8-1)** -- Jayhawks have posted 22 consecutive 22-win seasons. **Up next:** Saturday vs. Iowa State.
- 3. Missouri (4/18-6, 4-5)** -- Mike Anderson's team is fierce at Mizzou Arena but 0-5 on the road in conference play. **Up next:** Saturday vs. Oklahoma.
- 4. Texas A&M (3/17-5, 4-4)** -- Mark Turgeon is not looking forward to facing former assistant Tad Boyle in Boulder. **Up next:** Wednesday at Colorado.
- 5. Baylor (6/15-7, 5-4)** -- Bears coming off big road win at College Station. **Up next:** Wednesday vs. Nebraska.
- 6. Colorado (7/15-9, 4-5)** -- Time for the Buffs to win some games and get back on the bubble. **Up next:** Wednesday vs. Texas A&M.
- 7. Kansas State (8/16-8, 4-5)** -- Jacob Pullen is starting to lead a Wildcats resurgence. **Up next:** Saturday at Colorado.
- 8. Oklahoma State (9/16-7, 4-5)** -- Darrell Williams has the Cowboys in the headlines for the wrong reasons. **Up next:** Saturday at Nebraska.
- 9. Nebraska (5/15-7, 3-5)** -- Looks like spring football might be the only March madness in Lincoln. **Up next:** Wednesday at Baylor.
- 10. Oklahoma (10/12-10, 4-4)** -- CU would like another shot at these guys in Kansas City. **Up next:** Wednesday vs. Texas.
- 11. Texas Tech (11/11-13, 3-6)** -- Pat Knight's team is improving but played Kansas and Texas last week. **Up next:** Saturday vs. Texas A&M.
- 12. Iowa State (12/14-10, 1-8)** -- Cyclones have led or been tied in the final minute of six losses. **Up next:** Saturday at Kansas.

Close Window

Send To Printer

[Print page](#)[Close window](#)

Longmont, Colorado
 Tuesday, February 08,
 2011

Publish Date: 2/8/2011

Buffaloes enter crucial month for run at 3rd spot in Big 12

By Brian Howell
 © 2011 Longmont Times-Call

With seven games left in the regular season, there's a great opportunity in front of the University of Colorado men's basketball team.

Of course, there's also a great opportunity in front of just about everyone in the league at this point.

CU is 15-9 overall and 4-5 in the Big 12, putting it in ninth place.

However, the Buffs are just a game behind third-place Baylor (15-7, 5-4). There are seven teams in the Big 12 with either four or five conference wins.

Texas (20-3, 8-0 in league) and Kansas (23-1, 8-1) are running away with the league, but the race for third ought to be a tight one.

"If you look at all the BCS conferences across the board, you just have logjams," Baylor coach Scott Drew said. "I think that's parity and great coaching. February is going to be such a critical month for everybody.

"In the Big 12, you have a situation where you win a game and now you could be in third; you lose a game, you're in seventh or eighth. Things change drastically, so you have to make sure you're ready for every game."

For Colorado to make a run at third, it will have to play exceptional basketball down the stretch. Of the seven remaining games, three are against ranked opponents — vs. No. 22 Texas A&M (17-5, 4-4), at No. 2 Kansas and vs. No. 3 Texas.

The Buffs also have home games against Kansas State (16-8, 4-5) and Nebraska (15-7, 3-5) and road games at Texas Tech (11-13, 3-6) and Iowa State (14-10, 1-8).

This week, the Buffs host Texas A&M and Kansas State.

"It's a huge week for us because of the fact that we are at home, and you have to take advantage of that," CU coach Tad Boyle said. "This is a separation week, the way we look at it. We have to separate ourselves."

The Buffs — and several other teams — have some work to do to prove they are the third-best team in the league.

"I think it's still a question mark," Missouri coach Mike Anderson said when asked who is No. 3 at this point. "It's going to be who is playing well in this next stretch."

AROUND THE BIG 12



Colorado's Shannon Sharpe drives through Iowa State traffic at Coors Events Center in Boulder on Feb. 1. CU may be in ninth place in the Big 12, but it's only a game out of third. **Joshua Buck/Times-Call file**

As of Sunday, Kansas ranked second in the country in RPI (Rating Percentage Index), which ranks teams based on strength of schedule and how a team does against the schedule. Only BYU (22-2) was ahead of the Jayhawks.

RPI ratings for other Big 12 teams: Texas (No. 7), Missouri (30), Kansas State (31), Texas A&M (32), Oklahoma State (46), Baylor (77), Colorado (87), Nebraska (92), Oklahoma (115), Iowa State (143) and Texas Tech (150).

The Big 12 is the only conference with all of its members in the top 150.

Colorado is 4-3 against teams rated in the top 50 but just 1-6 against teams rated between 51 and 150. The Buffs are 9-0 against teams rated below 150.

Texas A&M, which visits CU on Wednesday, has lost three in a row and four of its past five.

Texas has played the last 144 minutes, 4 seconds of game action — about 16 minutes shy of four full games — without trailing.

Texas is halfway to a perfect Big 12 record. Just one team in league history — Kansas in 2001-02 — has finished a perfect 16-0 in league play.

The Longhorns have a good shot to get there, though. None of their final eight games are against ranked teams. The toughest games could come at Colorado (Feb. 26) and at Baylor (March 5).

Oklahoma State (16-7, 4-5) has won two in a row after dropping three straight.

Jacob Pullen (Kansas State) was named the Big 12 player of the week, while Darrell Williams (Oklahoma State) was the Big 12 rookie of the week.

In women's basketball, Brittany Chambers (Kansas State) was named Big 12 player of the week, while Jordan Hooper (Nebraska) was Big 12 freshman of the week.

Brian Howell can be reached at
bhowell@times-call.com.