

Thorburn: Huskers, Buffs not so 'weak' after all

By Ryan Thorburn Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

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It would be interesting to know what Missouri Gov. Jay Nixon thought about Saturday's game at the Coors Events Center.

Colorado upset the Tigers, ranked No. 9 at the time, 89-76, behind 36 points from Grandview, Mo., native Alec Burks.

Last summer when CU and Nebraska officials announced they would be moving to the Pac-12 and Big Ten, respectively, Nixon said the Big 12 would be better off without "the two weakest basketball programs" in the conference.

The Huskers, also 1-0 in conference play, will take an 11-game winning streak into Columbia on Wednesday.

After reflecting on the loss in Boulder for two days, Missouri head coach Mike Anderson wasn't ready to start praising the Buffs.

"I was surprised by their play, to tell you the truth. We just showed up with the mindset of just playing offense, as opposed to defense," Anderson said Monday on the Big 12 coaches teleconference. "That wasn't the typical defense that we've been talking about that we built up to. So I think we took a step back.

"But let's give them some credit too. They're scoring more points than they have in previous years. But I just thought we had some opportunities. We came out a little flat."

The Buffs will be treated with more respect when they make their final conference road trip to Manhattan, Kan., on Wednesday. Kansas State head coach Frank Martin, unlike Anderson, actually recruited Burks.

"They feel good about who they are and they're playing their hearts out," Martin said. "We have to be prepared and excited to go."

Nebraska is 13-2 overall thanks to 10 wins at the Devaney Center. Doc Sadler's team will be playing its first true road games of the season this week at Missouri and Kansas.

"Are we ready for what's fixin' to happen this week? I don't know," Sadler said of the cruel back-to-back the conference schedule makers sent his way. "But are we more ready than we were last year? No doubt. ...

"I would hope that the guys are looking forward to it a heck of a lot more than I am."

The Buffs and Huskers won't be welcomed with open arms during their farewell tours. The other 10 teams aren't going to pencil in easy wins in Boulder or Lincoln, either.

Just ask Nixon. By now the Gov. must be aware that the Big 12's outgoing weakest links are a combined 25-6 overall and 20-0 at home.

Lost in Lubbock

This was supposed to be Pat Knight's breakthrough season at Texas Tech. The fourth-year head coach was coming off an NIT appearance and returning standout seniors John Roberson, Mike Singletary, Brad Reese and D'Walyn Roberts.

The Little General's senior class has been consistently inconsistent, however, which is why the Red Raiders are 8-8 overall and 0-1 in the Big 12.

"The sad thing is we finally got John going and Singletary and Reese don't show up," Knight said of Texas Tech's loss to Baylor on Saturday. "If you look at our stats all year long, two of them will play well and the other two won't. For us to do well I have to have all four of those guys playing well at once."

The Red Raiders are last in the conference in scoring defense (73.4 ppg) and field-goal percentage defense (.447).

Texas head coach Rick Barnes had trouble with senior leadership on a team that went from a No. 1 ranking to a first-round NCAA Tournament exit last season.

"Sometimes it just doesn't work out," Barnes said. "If leadership were easy to get we'd never talk about it. Sometimes you get caught off guard because you think you're going to have it and it doesn't materialize. ...

"But there is no doubt in my mind that Texas Tech can beat anybody on the schedule in this conference."

Jayhawks undefeated (again)

Three years ago, Kansas entered Big 12 play undefeated and went on to capture the national championship.

After Sunday's overtime win at Michigan, the Jayhawks are 15-0 entering their conference opener on Wednesday at Iowa State.

"That's all great, but it doesn't mean anything," KU head coach Bill Self said. "This team has been very fortunate during the non-conference schedule because we played just well enough to win in some games we could have lost. We're going to have to play much better in the conference."

The Jayhawks beat their non-conference foes by an average of 24.7 points. But there are no more Longwoods or UT-Arlingtons or UMKCs on the schedule.

"I look around, and this is not coach speak, where do you circle Ws in our league?" Self said. "You don't."

KU was 20-0 before suffering its first loss of the 2007-08 season.

Notable

The Big 12 has 10 teams with a .750 win percentage or higher, the most of any conference. ... The Big 12 is 217-6 at home in non-conference play over the last two seasons. ... Texas A&M's 69-51 win over Oklahoma was the largest margin of victory for the Aggies in the 35-game series with the Sooners. ... The Big 12 went 1-5 against the Big East during non-conference play and 3-5 against the ACC, but dominated the Big Ten (6-0) and Pac-10 (11-5).

Quotable

"Missouri lost to a team with good talent. We're going to beat each other up as we move forward," Texas A&M head coach Mark Turgeon on the Buffs' upset of the Tigers.

Big 12 power rankings

1. Kansas (15-0, 0-0) -- Jayhawks looking for seventh consecutive Big 12 title. **Up next:** Wednesday at Iowa State.

2. Texas A&M (14-1, 1-0) -- Mark Turgeon might be the best coach in the conference. **Up next:** Wednesday vs. Oklahoma State.

3. Texas (12-3, 0-0) -- Longhorns went 2-2 against ranked teams during tough non-conference slate. **Up next:** Tonight vs. Texas Tech.

4. Oklahoma State (13-2, 1-0) -- Cowboys coming off 76-62 win over preseason favorite Kansas State. **Up next:** Wednesday at Texas A&M.

5. Kansas State (12-4, 0-1) -- Wildcats haven't handled being the hunted all that well so far. **Up next:** Wednesday vs. Colorado.

6. Colorado (12-4, 1-0) -- We'll start the Buffs off in the spot because this is where they'll need to finish to make the NCAA Tournament. **Up next:** Wednesday at Kansas State.

7. Missouri (14-2, 0-1) -- The Tigers are vulnerable on the road but should recover from the loss in Boulder quickly. **Up next:** Wednesday vs. Nebraska.

8. Baylor (11-3, 1-0) -- Jury is still out on the Bears, who don't have a quality win yet this season. **Up next:** Tonight vs. Oklahoma.

9. Nebraska (13-2, 1-0) -- Huskers pack an 11-game winning streak with them on the trip to Columbia. **Up next:** Wednesday at Missouri.

10. Iowa State (13-3, 0-1) -- Hilton Coliseum will be rocking when the unbeaten Jayhawks arrive. **Up next:** Wednesday vs. Kansas.

11. Texas Tech (8-8, 0-1) -- Doesn't look like Pat Knight's going to get this program turned around. **Up next:** Tonight at Texas.

12. Oklahoma (8-7, 0-1) -- At least the Norman natives have spring football to look forward to. **Up next:** Tonight at Baylor.

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Burks, Olukemi Named Men's Basketball Weekly Award Winners

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Alec Burks (Colorado) and Jean-Paul Olukemi (Oklahoma State) have been selected the Phillips 66 Big 12 Player and Rookie of the Week, respectively, for games of January 3-9 in voting by a panel of media covering the Conference. It is the first weekly honor for both student-athletes.

PLAYER OF THE WEEK

Alec Burks, Colorado, So., G, 6-6, 195, Grandview, Mo./Grandview

Burks averaged 28.0 points in leading Colorado to victories over No. 8 Missouri (89-76) and Western New Mexico (92-70). The sophomore guard began the week with 20 points and eight rebounds in the win over WNMU, while dishing out two assists. He followed that with a career-high 36 points in the Buffaloes win over the Tigers, CU's first victory over a top 10 opponent since 2003. The Grandview-native also grabbed eight rebounds in that contest, connecting on 12-of-19 (.632) shots from the field. Burks' scoring mark versus MU was the second-highest point total by a Big 12 player this season. He leads Colorado and is second in the Big 12 with 20.1 points per game.



Courtesy: Big12Sports.com

ROOKIE OF THE WEEK

Jean-Paul Olukemi, Oklahoma State, So., G/F, 6-5, 215, La Habra, Calif./Stoneridge Prep/Vincennes University

Olukemi helped lead the Cowboys to two victories last week with 19.0 points and 7.5 rebounds per game. The sophomore came off the bench in both contests as Oklahoma State recorded victories over UT-San Antonio (79-63) and No. 17 Kansas State (76-62). He scored 16 points on 7-of-10 shooting versus UTSA before posting a career-best 22 points on 7-of-9 shooting in the league-opener against the Wildcats. He also had a career-high 11 rebounds versus KSU. He shot 73.7 percent from the floor in two games, including 2-of-3 (.667) from 3-point range. Olukemi is third on the team with 10.9 points per game and has scored in double figures in six straight contests.

2010-11 Phillips 66 Big 12 Men's Basketball Weekly Awards

Date	Player	Rookie
Nov. 15	Jordan Hamilton, Texas, G/F, So.	Jake Anderson, Iowa State, G, Sr.
Nov. 22	Jordan Hamilton, Texas, G/F, So.	Perry Jones III, Baylor, F, Fr./Melvin Ejim, Iowa State, F, Fr.
Nov. 29	Marcus Morris, Kansas, F, Jr.	Ricardo Ratliffe, Missouri, F, Jr.
Dec. 6	Marcus Denmon, Missouri, G, Jr.	Ricardo Ratliffe, Missouri, F, Jr.
Dec. 13	Marshall Moses, Oklahoma State, F, Sr.	Melvin Ejim, Iowa State, F, Fr.
Dec. 20	Khris Middleton, Texas A&M, F, So.	Josh Selby, Kansas, G, Fr.
Dec. 27	Markieff Morris, Kansas, F, Jr.	Tristan Thompson, Texas, F, Fr.
Jan. 3	Marcus Denmon, Missouri, G, Jr.	Matt Pressey, Missouri, G, Jr.
Jan. 10	Alec Burks, Colorado, G, So.	Jean-Paul Olukemi, Oklahoma State, G/F, So.

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Buffaloes, Burks deliver statements

By BLAIR KERKHOFF
The Kansas City Star

The polls have closed, and no votes for Colorado.

But that doesn't mean the Buffaloes haven't made an impression.

Colorado's 13-point victory over Missouri on Saturday was the program's first in a Big 12 opener since Chauncey Billups was the driving force of the 1996-97 season.

It also marked the first victory over a top-10 Big 12 team — Mizzou was ranked ninth — since 2003, and Colorado improved to 12-4 overall.

The Buffaloes received no votes in either the Associated Press poll or USA Today poll of coaches, and you get the sense from coach Tad Boyle that's there's more work to do.

"Every game in the Big 12 is a statement game," Boyle said. "What makes that one a great one was we beat a really good basketball team."

The victory was easily Colorado's best of the year. The Buffaloes defeated Indiana, and that looks good. But the Hoosiers are 9-8 and have lost six straight.

There were earlier losses by Colorado to Harvard and San Francisco, and the promise of an improved season with returning standouts Alec Burks and Cory Higgins seemingly hadn't been fulfilled.

The victory over the Tigers, led by Burks, could change that. Burks, a former Grandview High standout, poured in a career-high 36 and took over the game down the stretch, personally thwarting any chance of a Mizzou comeback.

"He's a special player," Boyle said. "He's a guy when the ball is in his hands you feel like something good is usually going to happen."

How did Burks get away from the Kansas City area? Kansas State recruited him. Missouri told him it would not, and Kansas did not recruit him.

Colorado did. Early. As a sophomore in high school, Burks stood 6 feet 2 when former coach Jeff Bzdelik first saw him. By his senior year, after he had committed to Colorado, Burks had grown to 6-6.

In an interview last year, Bzdelik said: "We were in the right place at the right time. Sometimes you have to be lucky."

That's how teams get good, and Boyle said Burks, already with terrific leaping ability and a soft shooting touch, can get better.

"With a player like Alec you pick your spots," Boyle said. "When do you make plays for yourself and when do you make plays for your teammates?"

In three words: Ranking the Big 12

Team	Comment
1. Kansas	Nothing comes easily
2. Texas	Couldn't beat Kemba
3. Missouri	Ambushed in Boulder

4. Texas A&M Great season going
5. Oklahoma State Olukemi impressive newcomer
6. Kansas State Looking for answers
7. Baylor Jones stepping up
8. Colorado Buffaloes, Burks rising
9. Iowa State Heartbreaker in Lincoln
10. Nebraska 11-game winning streak
11. Texas Tech Facing long season
12. Oklahoma The struggles continue

Three quotes

- “The officiating in this league has improved tremendously.”

Texas Coach Rick Barnes comparing the way games are called now as opposed when he came to the Big 12 in 1999.

- “I think he’s the most important figure in Iowa State sports history.”

Cyclones coach Fred Hoiberg on his coach Johnny Orr. The school will open a sports bar in Hilton Coliseum, “Johnny’s” in time for Wednesday’s game against Kansas.

- “When it’s all said and done, it will benefit our team quite a bit.”

Nebraska coach Doc Sadler on his team finding ways to win close games against Southern California and Iowa State.

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CU's Burks hits it big

By Brian Howell
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Fans of the University of Colorado already know Alec Burks is one of the most talented basketball players to come through Boulder in the past several years.

The sophomore is gaining national recognition, too.

On Monday, Burks was named the Big 12 player of the week after his career-high 36 points helped CU upset then-No. 9 Missouri 89-76 on Saturday.



Colorado's Alec Burks applauds his team's victory over Missouri on Saturday. Burks was named the Big 12 player of the week. **Lewis Geyer/Times-Call**

"Anybody that saw that game on Saturday or even saw the highlights knows that Alec Burks is a special, special player," CU head coach Tad Boyle said. "It means a lot. It's great recognition for him and our basketball program and certainly a well-deserved honor for him."

Burks averaged 28.0 points per game last week in two wins. In addition to the Missouri game, he had 20 points against Western New Mexico. He had eight rebounds in each game.

"Alec is a special player," Boyle said. "He's a guy, when the ball is in his hands, as a coach you feel like something good is usually going to happen. He took his game to another level on Saturday. He was feeling it."

Burks' honor came four days after he was named to the John R. Wooden Award midseason list. Burks was one of 30 players around the country named to the list. The Wooden Award is one of the most prestigious awards in college basketball.

NO LOVE FOR THE BUFFS?: Colorado is off a 12-4 start after its upset of Missouri.

To this point, Missouri is the only significant win under the Buffs' belt. And, they still have plenty to prove.

Still, how did CU not get a single vote in this week's Top 25 poll?

Utah State, Wichita State, Missouri State, Richmond and Coastal Carolina all received at least one vote.

The Buffs have won nine of their past 10 games and were impressive against Missouri. National voters apparently need to see more.

Should the Buffs win both games this week — at No. 21 Kansas State (12-4) and at home against Oklahoma State (13-2) — they'll surely open more eyes around the country and garner some votes.

AROUND THE BIG 12:

- On Dec. 8, CU's Cory Higgins missed 3-of-6 free throws in the final 26 seconds of regulation against Colorado State. In eight games since then, Higgins has made 29-of-30 free throws.

- In non-conference games this season, the Big 12 had an 80.5 winning percentage — the best in league history.
- Five Big 12 teams are ranked this week — No. 3 Kansas, No. 12 Texas, No. 14 Texas A&M, No. 15 Missouri and No. 21 Kansas State.

Baylor and Oklahoma State also received votes.

- Ten of the league's 12 teams have already notched at least 11 wins.
- Kansas (15-0) is one of just five undefeated teams in the country. Duke (15-0), Ohio State (16-0), San Diego State (17-0) and Syracuse (16-0) are the others.

"We're doing OK," Kansas coach Bill Self said. "We're a pretty solid team, we're pretty balanced team. We don't do a lot of things great, but we do a lot of things pretty well. I like them, but still a lot of room for improvement."

- Nebraska is 13-2 and has won 11 straight.

The Cornhuskers, who finished last in the Big 12 a year ago, will be tested this week when they visit No. 15 Missouri and No. 3 Kansas.

"Very impressed," Self said about Nebraska.

- Texas opens Big 12 play tonight against Texas Tech. Under coach Rick Barnes, the Longhorns are 11-1 in Big 12 openers.
- Jean-Paul Olukemi of Oklahoma State was named the Big 12 rookie of the week. He averaged 19.0 points and 7.5 rebounds in two wins last week.

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