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colorado basketball

Road to NCAAs starts with Big 12 road wins

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

Posted: 01/22/2011 01:00:00 AM MST

BOULDER — The way to finish in the top half of a conference and be considered for the NCAA Tournament is no secret: Hold serve at home and steal some wins on the road.

"It's a simple formula that everyone subscribes to, and it's the same in any (multiple-bid) league," Colorado men's basketball coach Tad Boyle said Friday before the Buffaloes (14-5, 3-1 Big 12) departed for today's game at Oklahoma (9-9, 1-3).

Winning every Big 12 home game but losing all the road games results in an 8-8 conference mark. That may not be good enough. Colorado already has notched a road victory over then-No. 21 Kansas State that is sure to catch the eyes of the selection committee. But with Kansas, Texas A&M, Kansas State and Texas

among the teams coming to Boulder, it will be a challenge for the Buffs to make a clean sweep at

home.

If CU loses at home to No. 2 Kansas next week, the Buffs must balance that setback by finding another road victory to finish 9-7 in the league.

"It's very important to win on the road," CU senior guard Levi Knutson said. "Every game is important. But obviously you have to be a little more together as a team on the road, a little more composed with the atmosphere and knowing not everything is going to go your way on the road.

"This is going to be a great opportunity for us (against Oklahoma). We felt like we let one go at Nebraska."

Playing stickier defense is critical on the road, CU coaches and players said. Colorado limited Kansas State to 40.4 percent shooting. Nebraska, which is often offensively challenged, hit 56.6 percent. In the 79-67 loss on Tuesday, Colorado couldn't answer Nebraska's 15-4 run in the second half.

"It's the same thing on the road every time," Boyle said. "If we defend and rebound we'll be fine."

This will be Colorado's final opportunity to get a victory in Norman as a member of the Big 12. CU hasn't won at Oklahoma since Feb. 9, 1980, when both teams were in the Big Eight. That's a string of 23 losses.

"It's been that long? I didn't know that," Boyle

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said. "I'm not going to mention that to our team until *after* the game."

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Notebook

Colorado: Buffs hope to rebound from a 79-67 loss at Nebraska on Tuesday that snapped a seven-game winning streak. . . . Senior guard Cory Higgins attempted just eight field goals against Nebraska and did not get to the free-throw line. . . . Sophomore Alec Burks went out of the game for three minutes of the second half with a minor leg injury but returned to lead CU with 22 points. . . . Altitude2 is Channel 105 for most Comcast subscribers along the Front Range.

Oklahoma: Sooners were a Big 12 power under coach Jeff Capel during the Blake Griffin days, but not anymore. Last season, OU posted a losing record (13-18) for the first time since 1980-81. . . . Andrew Fitzgerald, a 6-foot-8 sophomore forward, tops the Sooners with 14.1 points per game. He scored 20 in the Tuesday win over Texas Tech. . . . OU is last among Big 12 teams in scoring (66.9 for all games) and rebounding (31.7). . . . Sooners have won 40 of their past 41 games at home against unranked (AP) opponents — the exception was Texas Tech's win in Norman last year.

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CU Buffs must prove themselves today

Win today at Oklahoma would give CU needed boost

By Ryan Thorburn Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 01/21/2011 07:45:38 PM MST

NORMAN, Okla. -- There is no need to wait until March.

Colorado's performance today against Oklahoma at the Lloyd Noble Center (11:30 a.m., Altitude2) will go a long way in defining whether or not the Buffs are NCAA Tournament-worthy.

At least that's the feeling inside the CU locker room.

"It's huge," head coach Tad Boyle said. "What I've told our team is this is a game where we prove ourselves to be contenders in this league or pretenders in this league."

Boyle's candor is refreshing in the one-game-at-a-time world most coaches live in.

The Buffs (14-5, 3-1) got off to a fast start in Big 12 play before losing 79-67 at Nebraska on Tuesday. With No. 2 Kansas set to visit the Coors Events Center in three days, Boyle's team needs to take care of business against the uncharacteristically mediocre Sooners (9-9, 1-3).

Otherwise that 3-0 conference start could turn into 3-3 quickly.

"Coach told us (Nebraska) was an opportunity lost," Alec Burks said after scoring 22 points and grabbing eight rebounds in Lincoln. "We have to come back in the next practice and get back at it."

Boyle was beaming after Thursday's practice when asked how the Buffs responded after their first Big 12 bump in the road.

"I love it," he said. "I love our team ... the resiliency that we have."

Despite CU's improved talent, confidence and team chemistry, winning here will not be easy.

Oklahoma is coming off an 83-74 victory over Texas Tech in which all five starters, led by Cade Davis (25 points), scored in double figures. Despite their overall struggles, the Sooners are 9-1 at home.

Meanwhile, CU is 0-7 at the Lloyd Noble Center and 12-48 all-time in Norman.

"We have to have a great team defensive effort," Boyle said. "That's what we didn't have at Nebraska. That's what we're going to have to have at Oklahoma."

Slowing down Andrew Fitzgerald, a smooth 6-8 forward, will be one of the keys to the game for the visitors. That means Austin Dufault, coming off a quiet six-point, two-rebound performance at Nebraska, will have to be a factor.

"Austin has had a tremendous year so far when you look at his whole body of work," Boyle noted. "When he plays well, we're pretty good. He's an important part of what we do."

Nate Tomlinson and Shannon Sharpe, CU's point guards, did not score against the Huskers and combined for four assists and no turnovers.

Cory Higgins, who has also been running the point for Boyle at times, had just eight points and three turnovers in 37 minutes.

"I think our point guard play is fine," Boyle said. "In terms of production, I want five guys functioning together. On any given night those guys can go off."

If the Buffs get a team effort today they have a great chance of flying home from Norman victorious for the first time since Feb. 9, 1980.

Snapping a 23-game road losing streak to the Sooners -- even though Oklahoma will likely finish at or near the bottom of the conference standings -- would give CU the confidence of a contender entering the KU game.

"If we want to make a stand in this league, this is one of the games we need to go and compete in and give ourselves a chance to win on the road," Boyle said.

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Longmont, Colorado
Sunday, January 23, 2011

Publish Date: 1/22/2011

Today's CU basketball games

By Brian Howell
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CU men (14-5, 3-1 Big 12) at Oklahoma (9-9, 1-3)

When/Where: 11:30 a.m. today, at Lloyd Noble Center in Norman, Okla.

TV/Radio: Big 12/760 AM

The series: Oklahoma leads 87-49, including 48-12 in Norman.

Leading scorers: CU — Alec Burks (19.8 points per game); Oklahoma — Andrew Fitzgerald (14.1 per game)

Notes: CU has won 12 of its past 14 games. ... The Buffs have not won in Norman since 1980. ... Oklahoma is 9-1 at home this season. ... CU point guard Nate Tomlinson has 43 assists and just 23 turnovers in his 16 starts this season.

Missouri (9-9, 1-3) at CU women (10-7, 1-3)

When/Where: 4 p.m. today, at Coors Events Center in Boulder

TV/Radio: No TV/760 AM

The series: CU leads 40-27, including 21-8 in Boulder. The Buffs have won five of the past six against the Tigers.

Leading scorers: Missouri — RaeShara Brown (16.8 points per game); CU — Brittany Spears (17.5)

Notes: The Buffs hope to have guard Chucky Jeffery back today. She has missed two games with a concussion. She has averaged 15.3 points, 9.2 rebounds and 4.7 assists per game this year. ... Both teams have upset wins against top-25 teams during Big 12 play. ...