

Boyle not making excuses

Bufs look to end skid vs. No. 6 Kansas Tuesday night

By Ryan Thorburn Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

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In recent years there have been a lot of excuses made for Colorado basketball.

A lack of tradition, fans, size in the post, experience on the roster, and so on.

Tad Boyle is trying to bring some accountability to the job.

The first-year Buffs head coach understands greater expectations mean greater responsibility. When the athletic department and ticket-buyers support the basketball program with upgraded facilities and a full arena, the play on the court must also demonstrate a commitment to winning.

Boyle, the man who had to analyze the film, knows the bandwagon jumpers and critics are right: CU looked nothing like the team that opened Big 12 play 3-0 during road losses at Nebraska and Oklahoma last week.

The coach also realizes the Buffs' level of play will have to match the opponent tonight as No. 6 Kansas visits a sold-out Coors Events Center for the final time as a conference foe.

"We are generating some excitement in college basketball along the Front Range. That's going to be a process. It's not going to happen overnight," Boyle said Monday. "But I think the process has started, so that's a positive sign. We have to do our job, though.

"I feel like we've let our fans down with the way we have performed the last week after we left home. So we have to get back on the right track and reward them."

That will be easier said than done.

The Jayhawks (18-1, 3-1) are coming off their first loss of the season as Texas ended KU's 69-game home winning streak Saturday.

"Timing is everything sometimes," Boyle, a former KU player, said. "My philosophy has always been you just play them as they come."

It seems there is never a good time for the Buffs (14-6, 3-2) to play the Jayhawks. KU leads the all-time series 119-39, including a 28-1 record in Big 12 games.

"I don't think it changes at all, it's going to be a big game regardless," senior Cory Higgins said of CU limping into the game on a two-game skid. "Now it's even a bigger game."

Last season the Buffs had a chance to upset No. 1 KU with the score tied 60-60 on the final possession of regulation. A long 3-pointer by Higgins missed, and the Jayhawks escaped with a 72-66 overtime win at the Coors Events Center.

"We are not into moral victories," Jeff Bzdelik said after the bitter defeat last February. "It's all about winning. I want to win, and we have such a great atmosphere here inside of Coors. The fans were great, and I believe we are going to bust through."

Bzdelik busted out of Boulder two months later to accept the Wake Forest job. Now Boyle is responsible for getting the Buffs back on track and into the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 2003.

A win over his alma mater would certainly help make up for the head-scratching effort against an Oklahoma team that is

rebuilding.

"We're very disappointed with the last week how we played," Boyle said. "We opened some eyes there in the first week and a half. Maybe we're coming back to reality, I don't know.

"You just have to play the whole thing out."

After reflecting over the deflating losses in Lincoln and Norman, Boyle said the team "took a step back" with its interior defense and is lacking an offensive post presence.

CU settled for jump shots against the Sooners and finished 1-for-10 from 3-point distance.

In addition to attacking the rim via the drive -- something the Buffs did well during the fast conference start -- expect Higgins, Alec Burks and Marcus Relphorde to also post up in the paint at times.

At least 36 NBA scouts representing 22 teams requested credentials for tonight's game. In addition to Burks, a possible NBA lottery pick, they will be scribbling notes about several Jayhawks, including Markieff Morris (13.0 ppg, 8.5 rpg) and Marcus Morris (17.1 ppg, 6.9 rpg).

"I've got to get my guys to recover from that," KU head coach Bill Self said of the team's first loss of the season. "I never thought our guys would run the table, never even crossed my mind. But you can't let one (loss) become two, or two become three, or three become four. That's the whole thing. When momentum is going well, you extend it. When it's not, you have to cut it off as quickly as you possibly can."

"Tad needs to do it with his club, and certainly we need to do it with our club as well."

Self's team also wants to play well for teammate Thomas Robinson, who returned home to take care of his 9-year-old sister after the sudden death of their mother on Friday night.

The Jayhawks have won the past 15 meetings, including seven consecutive at the Coors Events Center dating back to CU's 60-59 upset of then-No. 6 KU on Jan. 22, 2003.

"At Colorado, the Kansas game is always a big one for our fans and our players," Boyle said. "Wherever KU goes throughout the league, they get a lot of attention and get everyone's best shot. ...

"Our players are going to have to be emotionally ready to play."

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colorado basketball

CU's Boyle and KU's Self both are Larry Brown proteges

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

Posted: 01/25/2011 01:00:00 AM MST

BOULDER — Hall of Fame coach Larry Brown has experienced more wonderful times throughout his basketball career than he could count. But Brown said one of his "greatest days" occurred recently, and he wasn't anywhere near a court.

Within hours, he watched weekend telecasts of victories by one of his former players (Colorado's Tad Boyle), by two coaches who learned the business under him (Kentucky's John Calipari and Kansas' Bill Self) and by a good friend (Villanova's Jay Wright).

"It doesn't get much better than that," Brown said during a telephone interview from his home in Villanova, Pa.

Brown, 70, said today won't rank among his best days because either Boyle or Self will end up on

the losing end. Sixth-ranked Kansas (18-1, 3-1 Big 12) visits Colorado (14-6, 3-2) tonight before an already announced sellout crowd at the Coors Events Center.

Boyle played in the backcourt for Brown during his final two years at Kansas and was named the Jayhawks' team captain for the 1984-85 season as a senior despite never being a full-time starter. Self was a starting guard for Oklahoma State but got his coaching start as a KU graduate assistant under Brown for the 1985-86 season.

Boyle and Self share common traits, Brown said.

"There are a lot of similarities," he said. "The kids come first with both of them. Everybody looks at them as being really nice guys, but there's a real toughness but fairness to both of them.

"Their values are the same. The program comes first. As talented as their kids may be, they have to learn to play the right way. That's playing hard, playing unselfishly, making their teammates better, having respect for the game."

Brown was fired as head coach of the Charlotte Bobcats on Dec. 22 but has indicated he would like to coach again. Charlotte was his 13th professional or college head coaching job, a resume that includes a 1974-79 stint with the Nuggets.

He remains on top of things, especially developments involving his former players and coaches. Last spring, Brown called then CU

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associate athletic director Tom McGrath and recommended Boyle as the choice to replace Jeff Bzdelik, who left for Wake Forest.

Almost two decades earlier, Boyle had phoned Brown when Boyle decided to walk away from a six-figure salary as a Boulder stockbroker to seek a career in coaching.

"He told me that he didn't have a lot of advice," Boyle said, "but if my teams rebounded and played defense, I'd have a chance to win just about every night out."

Boyle and Self say Brown was vocal and demanding as a coach, which may not feel so good in the short term but pays off in the long run.

"Coach Brown was what I call 'relentless,' " Boyle said of his KU playing days. "He kept pushing you every single day. He never let his foot off the gas pedal. But at the end of the season, or at the end of the game, you looked back and you thought, 'Man, he maxed out our team.' Or, 'He maxed out me as a player.' "

"I would have loved to have played for him," said Self, recalling the year he spent in Lawrence as a grad assistant observing Brown. "But I'm not sure that there wouldn't have been many times that I would have wondered why I decided to play for him. He was good, but so tough."

As Brown's graduate assistant, Self said he learned that the best coaches adjust to their team's strengths while maintaining a core set of

philosophies and principles. In 2000, Self coached Tulsa to the Elite Eight after receiving a phone call from Brown earlier in the NCAA Tournament.

"Coach Brown told me: 'I love your guys. Now do me a favor. I don't want you to yell at one player the rest of the way. No bad body language. No bad facial expressions,' " Self said.

"He knew that my team was already under enough pressure and there was no sense in me adding more pressure. That says a lot about Coach. He's a master at building up his guys the way he wants them, and then, boom, he just lets his team play."

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Kansas at Colorado

6 p.m., Altitude2, 760 AM

Spotlight on Marcus Morris: Kansas' 6-foot-9, 235-pound junior forward is performing to his billing as a preseason All-American. In the past five games, Morris has averaged 22.4 points and 9.2 rebounds. He leads the Big 12 in shooting percentage at 59.0. Along with twin Markieff Morris (6-10, 245), the Philadelphia natives make KU formidable up front.

Colorado: The Buffs are looking to regain their form after road losses to Nebraska and Oklahoma, but this series has not been kind to CU. The Buffs have lost 42 of the past 43

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meetings in the series, dating to 1991. Colorado won 60-59 in Boulder in 2003 — when Kansas was sixth in the polls like this week. That's also the last year CU reached the NCAA Tournament. . . . Sophomore guard Alec Burks averaged 3.7 turnovers in the three Big 12 wins, 6.0 in the two losses. . . . At least 38 NBA scouts representing 23 teams will be credentialed for the game, according to CU. . . . Doors open to the public at 4:30 p.m.

Kansas: The Jayhawks come off their first loss of the season, a 74-63 win by Texas that snapped KU's 69-game home winning streak. The Jayhawks dropped from No. 2 to sixth in the polls. "I never thought we'd run the table," KU coach Bill Self said. . . . Kansas will be without reserve forward Thomas Robinson, whose mother died of a heart attack Friday night in Washington. The team is scheduled to attend the funeral later in the week. . . . Preseason Big 12 freshman of the year Josh Selby, a 6-foot-2 guard, is shooting just 36.1 percent from the field.

Tom Kensler, The Denver Post

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Longmont, Colorado
Friday, January 28, 2011

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Shining Stars: Pro talent takes center stage when CU hosts KU

By Brian Howell
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The University of Colorado already has declared that tonight's game with Kansas is a sellout at the Coors Events Center.

Making up a good chunk of that attendance will be scouts — general managers, presidents, etc. — from NBA teams.

According to CU, 38 scouts from 23 teams will be on hand to watch the Buffs (14-6, 3-2 Big 12) and the No. 6 Jayhawks (18-1, 3-1).

They'll have plenty to watch. At least four legitimate draft prospects will be on the court in Boulder tonight.

CU sophomore Alec Burks has turned heads with his play this year. He's second in the Big 12 in scoring (19.6 points per game) and has been tearing up the boards lately, pulling down 8.4 per game in his last seven.

He is projected by many as a first-round draft pick if he leaves school this spring. A mock draft on nbadraft.net projects Burks as the No. 7 pick in the June draft. The Indiana Pacers and Minnesota Timberwolves have been to Boulder several times to see him play.

The same mock draft has four Kansas players — freshman Josh Selby (pick No. 24), sophomore Thomas Robinson (No. 22) and junior brothers Marcus (No. 14) and Markieff Morris (No. 26) — as first-round picks. (Robinson won't be in Boulder tonight; see below.)

In addition, CU's Cory Higgins and Kansas' Tyrel Reed and Tyshawn Taylor are potential pros.

The number of scouts in attendance won't faze Burks, he said.

"Nah, man, it's just another person that bought a ticket to me," he said

Whether he chooses to acknowledge them or not, Burks is impressing the scouts.

Even after last year, when he was named Big 12 freshman of the year, there was some thought that Burks would leave CU and go to the NBA. Now? It probably would be more surprising if he stayed for a third season.

"I don't know what I'm going to do yet," he said Monday. "I don't know if I'm going to leave or stay."

He added that after the season, he will "sort all that out."

Among tonight's scouts will be four representatives from the Philadelphia 76ers and three each from the Denver Nuggets, Portland TrailBlazers and Oklahoma City Thunder.



CU's Alec Burks takes a breath before shooting a free throw against Missouri on Jan. 8 at Coors Events Center. **Lewis Geyer/Times-Call**

Around the Big 12

Kansas' Robinson is going through a difficult time. His mother died of an apparent heart attack Friday. This came less than a month after his grandmother and grandfather — his mother's parents — both passed away. Robinson learned of his mother's death from his 9-year-old sister, according to a story on big12sports.com. Kansas coach Bill Self said Monday that Robinson will skip today's game so he can be with his sister in Washington, D.C.

Baylor made a lineup change Saturday against Oklahoma State, as Quincy Acy came off the bench. Acy had started every game but poured in 14 points off the bench to help the Bears snap a two-game skid. "Quincy plays with such intensity, sometimes it's good to bring him off the bench so it saves him from foul trouble and protects him a little bit more so he can play as hard as he does," Baylor coach Scott Drew said.

Acy also had 14 points off the bench in Monday's loss to Kansas State.

Texas A&M won 43 Big 12 games in the first 10 years of league history. In five seasons since, the Aggies have won 45 Big 12 games.

After Texas beat No. 10 Texas A&M and No. 2 Kansas last week, the Longhorns won a pair of awards Monday. Jordan Hamilton was named Big 12 player of the week, while Tristan Thompson was named Big 12 rookie of the week.

In women's basketball, Danielle Adams of Texas A&M was Big 12 player of the week, while Oklahoma's Aaryn Ellenberg was freshman of the week.

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Longmont, Colorado
Friday, January 28, 2011

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Once-hot Buffs look to rebound against Jayhawks

By Brian Howell
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BOULDER — What a difference a week makes.

At this time last week, the University of Colorado men's basketball team was 3-0 in Big 12 play. The Buffs had beaten two ranked teams in a row and were closing in on a ranking of their own.

After two straight losses to unranked opponents, the Buffs (14-6 overall, 3-2 in the Big 12) are looking to regroup.

"The feeling now is we have to rebound," sophomore Alec Burks said. "We have to come back after that and play our game, play the game that got us the first three wins."

The Buffs, who didn't receive any votes in the latest Top 25 poll, look to get on track tonight against No. 6 Kansas (18-1, 3-1).

"It's a great opportunity," head coach Tad Boyle said. "At Colorado, the Kansas game is always a big one for our fans and our players. Our guys are going to be ready emotionally, but we're going to have to play well."

That is something CU didn't do last week. The Buffs lost at Nebraska and then lost at Oklahoma in a game in which, Boyle said, "we didn't do anything well."

Losing two straight isn't what the Buffs had in mind after their first 3-0 start in Big 12 play since 1997.

"We're very disappointed, obviously, in the last week, the way we've played," Boyle said. "We opened some eyes there the first week and a half. Maybe we're coming back to reality, I don't know."

CU's track record suggests it'll give the Jayhawks a game. Last year, Kansas came to Boulder as the No. 1 team in the country, while CU had lost five of its first seven conference games. The Buffs took the game to overtime before losing 72-66.

This season, CU has played its best games against the top competition.

"It's a great opportunity for our team against a nationally ranked opponent," Boyle said. "Everybody knows the tradition of KU and what they mean to college basketball. It's another game, but I know it's not one of those games I'm going to have to get our guys hyped for."

No. 6 Kansas (18-1, 3-1 Big 12) at Colorado men (14-6, 3-2)

When: 6 p.m. tonight

Where: Coors Events Center in Boulder

TV/Radio: Big 12 Network/760-AM

The series: Kansas has dominated, going 119-39 all-time against the Buffs. The Buffs are 26-39 against the Jayhawks in Boulder.

Leading scorers: KU — Marcus Morris (17.1 points per game); CU — Alec Burks (19.6)

Notes: CU head coach Tad Boyle played at Kansas. ... Both teams are coming off losses. Kansas lost at home against Texas on Saturday, while CU has lost two in a row, at Nebraska and at Oklahoma. ... Morris is averaging 22.5 points and 9.0 rebounds in Big 12 play. ... Burks is posting 21.0 points and 8.6 rebounds in Big 12 play. ... CU's Levi Knutson has averaged 12.4 points per game off the bench in five Big 12 games. ... The Buffs are averaging 81.8 points per game but haven't scored more than 75 in their last four.

Brian Howell

No, but Boyle may need to make sure his guys don't get over-hyped.

"We're going to have to keep them focused and almost bring their emotions down a little bit before the ball goes up, because sometimes you can get too hyped," Boyle said.

In that regard, maybe the two losses last week will help the Buffs.

"It grounds you," Burks said. "Losing games shows that we aren't all the way there yet. We have to keep working — just do what we did to win the first three games."

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



TIME: 08:00 P.M. EST

Most times, a matchup with Colorado might have easily helped Kansas bounce back from a defeat.

The sixth-ranked Jayhawks, though, might have a tougher time with the Buffaloes on Tuesday night trying to regroup from their first loss this season thanks to the work of a former Kansas player.

The Jayhawks (18-1, 3-1 Big 12) scored the first 10 points against then-No. 10 Texas on Saturday but were outscored 51-28 over the final 20 minutes of a 74-63 loss, which ended the nation's longest home win streak at 69 games.

"It's a big game, but it's just one game," coach Bill Self said. "In the second half, (Texas was) terrific. Of course, we helped them be terrific. We give up 51 points in our building in a half. They deserve the outcome that they got today. We've got to rebound ... and hopefully not let one become two."

Judging by recent history, the Jayhawks would have a good chance to avoid consecutive defeats for the first time since Jan. 14-16, 2006.

Kansas has won 42 of 43 over Colorado and is searching for its 16th straight win in the series. It's won seven in a row in Boulder, Colo., but needed overtime there last season before prevailing 72-66 on Feb. 3.

The Jayhawks completed the sweep later that month, but coach Tad Boyle has the Buffaloes playing well in his first season.

Colorado (14-6, 3-2) is 11-0 at home and one win shy of matching its total from 2009-10. Boyle, who played for Kansas from 1981-85 and was team captain as a senior, led the Buffaloes past then-No. 9 Missouri on Jan. 8 to kick off a 3-0 start to Big 12 play, their best since going 6-0 to open 1996-97 - the conference's inaugural season.

Colorado, though, couldn't keep that momentum going as it dropped back-to-back road games at Nebraska and Oklahoma last week.

The Buffaloes had a season-low for points in Saturday's 67-60 loss to the Sooners. The team's two leading scorers Alec Burks (19.6 ppg) and Cory Higgins (16.1) scored 15 points apiece, but freshman guard Andre Robertson was the only other player to score more than seven.

Colorado shot 40.4 percent in the loss and has connected at only a 40.9 percent clip over the past three games after shooting 49.8 percent in its first 17.

"We should be ready for Kansas," Boyle told the school's official website. "We should have the eye of the tiger; we should have had (it) today. Today was the game. Now that this one's behind us, we've got KU. It's a great opportunity for our guys."

Burks, who is also the Big 12's second-leading scorer, sat out last season's home loss to Kansas with a sprained left knee and scored a team-best 17 points in the road loss. Kansas' Tyshawn Taylor and Markieff Morris were among five players in double figures in that victory.

His twin brother Marcus had five points in that game but scored 15 in the overtime win at Colorado. He enters this contest averaging 22.4 points over the last five games and as the Jayhawks' leading scorer (17.1 ppg).

The Jayhawks lead the series 119-39 heading into the final conference matchup in Boulder between the schools.

Colorado is heading to the Pac-10 next season. Barring a conference tournament contest, the teams meet for the final time as Big 12 foes Feb. 19 at Allen Fieldhouse.

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Big 12

Team	Conf. W-L	Tot. W-L
Texas	5-0	17-3
Kansas	4-1	19-1
Texas A&M	4-1	17-2
Missouri	3-2	17-3
Baylor	3-3	13-6
Colorado	3-3	14-7
Nebraska	2-3	14-5
Oklahoma	2-3	10-9
Oklahoma St.	2-4	14-6
Kansas St.	2-4	14-7
Texas Tech	2-4	10-11
Iowa St.	1-5	14-7

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Key Players

 Marcus Morris F, KS	26.5	Min. Per Game	29.8	 Alec Burks G, CC
	17.1	Pts. Per Game	19.6	
	1.5	Ast. Per Game	2.3	
	6.9	Reb. Per Game	5.7	
	59	Field Goal %	47.4	
	36.4	Three Point %	32.6	
	66.3	Free Throw %	82.9	

Head to Head

 Kansas Jayhawks 18-1	 Colorado Buffaloes 14-6	
SCORING	Jayhawks	Buffaloes

Points/Game	82.1	81.9
Field Goal %	51.4	48.6
Free Throw %	66.7	77.9
Three Point %	37	36.7
DEFENSE	Jayhawks	Buffaloes
Rebounds/Game	41.4	38.7
Steals/Game	8.9	7.7
Blocks/Game	4.8	2.9

Other Games

HALL	90	Final	FLA	104	Final	CONN	76	Final
CUSE	68		UGA	91		MARQ	68	
PUR	64	Final						
OHST	87							

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Posted on Mon, Jan. 24, 2011

KU-Colorado basketball preview

•**WHEN/WHERE:** 7 tonight at Coors Events Center in Boulder, Colo.

•**TV/RADIO:** Ch. 38; KCSP (610 AM)

•**ABOUT KANSAS (18-1, 3-1 Big 12):** The Jayhawks are looking to bounce back from their first defeat of the season, 74-63 to Texas on Saturday. ... Kansas averages 82.1 points and gives up 61.7, for a plus-20.4 scoring margin. ... KU begins a stretch in which three of the next four games are on the road. ... The Jayhawks are led by junior forward Marcus Morris, who has averaged 22.4 points in his last five games. KU could use a lift from freshman guard Josh Selby, who has averaged 7.6 points during that stretch.

•**ABOUT COLORADO (14-6, 3-2 Big 12):** The Buffaloes will play host to the Jayhawks for the last time as conference foes tonight. They are coming off a disappointing 67-60 loss at Oklahoma on Saturday. ... Colorado is 11-0 at home this season. ... Under first-year coach Tad Boyle, a former KU player, the Buffaloes are putting up 81.8 points per game with a scoring margin of plus-10.4. ... Colorado's most impressive wins have been at home against Missouri and on the road at Kansas State.

•**BOTTOM LINE:** The Jayhawks needed overtime to knock off the Buffaloes in Boulder last season, and Colorado looks like a better team. Kansas will have to play well to win this one.

P No. Kansas Ht. Yr. PPG

F 22	Marcus Morris	6-9	Jr.	17.1
F 21	Markieff Morris	6-10	Jr.	13.0
G 14	Tyrel Reed	6-3	Sr.	9.8
G 32	Josh Selby	6-2	Fr.	11.3
G 10	Tyshawn Taylor	6-3	Jr.	8.7

P No. Colorado Ht. Yr. PPG

F 5	Marcus Relphorde	6-7	Sr.	11.6
F 33	Austin Dufault	6-9	Jr.	8.7
G 10	Alec Burks	6-6	So.	19.6
G 11	Cory Higgins	6-5	Sr.	16.1
G 1	Nate Tomlinson	6-3	Jr.	2.7

| J. Brady McCollough, jmccollough@kcstar.com

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Posted on Mon, Jan. 24, 2011

KU's visit to Colorado might not be a pleasure trip

By J. BRADY McCOLLOUGH
The Kansas City Star

LAWRENCE | Over the years, the annual Kansas basketball trip to Colorado has become a fun-filled event for all those KU fans west of Salina who can easily see their Jayhawks in a cozy road environment.

Kansas hasn't lost in Boulder since 2003, only confirming the sense that the Coors Events Center might as well be Allen Fieldhouse West.

Tonight's game will be the last one for a long time, with Colorado leaving the Big 12 for the Pac-10 starting next season. And, unfortunately for Kansas, the swan song of this lopsided league series isn't going to feel like past years.

Colorado has as many Big 12 wins (three) as Kansas, and a sellout crowd will be on hand. Sure, a couple of thousand are likely to be wearing crimson and blue, but Colorado has been advertising this game as a "blackout," meaning that the KU faithful will really stick out in the crowd this time around.

In the past, when Kansas players mainly worried about their play being affected by the altitude, such a gimmick would have seemed forced and a little desperate. But the Buffaloes have wins against Missouri and Oklahoma State at home and a road upset of Kansas State under their belts. Even after losing back-to-back road games at Nebraska and Oklahoma, Colorado is building momentum under first-year coach Tad Boyle.

"They're no slouch," KU guard Tyshawn Taylor said.

Boyle, who coached four seasons at Northern Colorado, is a Kansas graduate who played guard for the Jayhawks during 1981-85. He took over at Colorado last spring after Jeff Bzdelik left to coach Wake Forest, and Boyle has canned Bzdelik's Princeton offense in favor of a system that encourages talented players such as sophomore Alec Burks, from Grandview, and senior Cory Higgins to play aggressively. It appears Boyle has brought an edge that was needed in Boulder.

"That's the way it should be," KU coach Bill Self said. "They're excited about what Tad is doing out there."

The Buffaloes should be smelling blood in the water after Kansas' first defeat of the season, a 74-63 loss to Texas on Saturday at Allen Fieldhouse. KU was playing just hours after finding out that sophomore forward Thomas Robinson's mother died on Friday night and ran out of gas in the second half against the talented and physical Longhorns.

"There's teams all across America, and 50 percent of them are gonna lose," Self said. "How do they bounce back? That's life. Certainly, we haven't experienced much of it. We definitely have to do that and hopefully not let one become two."

That is certainly the case tonight. Texas struck the first blow of the Big 12 title race, and now Kansas will have to play catch-up. Good thing for the Jayhawks, there's still a long way to go.

"We've been behind in the league race before," Self said, "but it puts us in a situation where there's very little margin for error."

An argument could be made that this year could be KU's toughest run to the title, and the reason for that is former North division doormats Colorado, Nebraska and Iowa State are improved this season. The Jayhawks have already been challenged by the Huskers and Cyclones.

"A lot of players from a year ago or two years ago have improved so much," KU guard Brady Morningstar said. "(Dante) Garrett from Iowa State, Burks and Higgins from Colorado, those guys are really good players, which makes their teams better, which makes the conference better, which is great for us. It's cool how you see teams evolve."

The Jayhawks will have to play tonight without Robinson, who will be in Washington, D.C., mourning with his family.

Kansas has to try to put aside the pain of that sad Saturday in Lawrence.

"Just stick together, and we gotta move on," KU forward Marcus Morris said. "If we dwell on this game, it's only gonna make us worse as a team."

Kansas at Colorado

•WHEN: 7 tonight



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New-look Buffs: Cory Higgins, Colorado put their trust in first-year coach Tad Boyle

Tony Harman/University of Colorado athletic department. [Enlarge photo.](#)

Colorado senior guard Cory Higgins elevates for a dunk during a game at the Coors Events Center in Boulder, Colo. The Buffaloes are 14-6, 3-2 in the Big 12, under new coach and former Kansas University player Tad Boyle (in background).

By [Eric Sorrentino](#)
 January 25, 2011

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When Colorado senior guard Cory Higgins first heard the news last April, he wasn't particularly fond of the development.

Coach Jeff Bzdelik, who shared a vision with Higgins of elevating Colorado basketball to a consistent contender in the Big 12, was leaving after three years to become the head coach at Wake Forest.

Life as Higgins knew it on the basketball court was about to change abruptly.

"I wasn't excited about the situation to begin with," Higgins admitted. "I don't think any senior would

have been."

Instead of promoting an assistant who was familiar with CU's players, the Buffaloes looked outside the program to Tad Boyle, who coached Northern Colorado the previous four years, to take over for Bzdelik.

Bzdelik's departure hit Higgins hard at first.

They both arrived in Boulder in 2007, Higgins as a freshman, Bzdelik as the first-year CU coach. Last season, the Buffaloes made

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KU vs. Colorado

For more on the Colorado-Kansas matchup, check out Big 12 blogger Eric Sorrentino's pre-game observations in [the latest Conference Chatter blog entry](#).



Tony Harman/University of Colorado athletic department

Colorado senior guard Cory Higgins shoots during a game at the Coors Events Center in Boulder, Colo. Higgins averages 16.1 points a game for the Buffaloes.

noticeable progress under Bzdelik, finishing 6-10 in the Big 12 and eighth in the conference standings. If that doesn't sound like progress, consider that Colorado finished last in the Big 12 in Higgins' freshman and sophomore seasons and won a total of four conference games from 2007-2009.

This year, with Higgins back for his senior season, along with sophomore star-in-the-making Alec Burks, CU was thought to have the pieces to make some noise in the league.

Still, Bzdelik bolted. Higgins, a 6-foot-5, 180-pound native of Danville, Calif., felt a natural sense of disappointment.

It didn't take long, however, for that disappointment to turn into excitement. All it took was Higgins' first meeting with Boyle.

Boyle, a former Kansas University guard from 1981-1985, held a team meeting with his new group shortly after accepting the CU job on April 19, 2010. After the meeting, he pulled Higgins aside.

No one else was around. Just the first-year CU coach and the fourth-year CU senior.

"My message to him was this: Listen, Cory, this is your senior year," Boyle said by phone on Monday. "I've been coaching college basketball for 16 years. But for you, you only get one crack at your career, and you're going into your senior year. You only have one senior year. I want to make it as special for you and all of our seniors as I can. The only way we do that is if we keep this group together."

Higgins said the candid meeting with Boyle made him connect with his new coach rather quickly.

"He wanted me to trust him," Higgins recalled. "And he asked for my trust. I could tell that from him just looking me in the eye that I could trust him."

Heading into today's 7 p.m. matchup against No. 6 Kansas (18-1, 3-1 Big 12) at the Coors Events Center, the Buffaloes (14-6, 3-2) are one of the surprise teams in the conference. They've already taken care of No. 11 Missouri and Oklahoma State in Boulder, and stunned Kansas State in Manhattan. CU sits in a tie for fourth in the league standings.

Colorado, like several teams in the Big 12, has had its share of road woes, losing at Nebraska and at Oklahoma. Nonetheless, these don't appear to be the same old bottom-feeder Buffaloes.

From the time Boyle held his first Colorado practice, a noticeable change from the recent past was evident.

- Boyle hands out tips of the day to his players. He does this daily. There's an offensive tip, a defensive tip and a quote of the day. It's fair to say that Buffaloes players are best-served learning all three quickly.

"It's almost like a homework assignment," said Higgins, who averages 16.1 points per game, second on the team to Burks' 19.6. "I thought it was pretty interesting. If you don't remember all three, then we're going to run. It just makes us more mentally in-tune in practice."

Higgins said sample tips included pressuring the ball, staying in your stance, sprinting to offense and sprinting to defense. The consequence for forgetting the tips results in extra conditioning. Boyle has the team run what Higgins called 22's. Down-and-back, down-and-back — the full length of the court twice — in 22 seconds or less.

"It's not too bad. But if you keep piling them on, they get pretty bad," Higgins said, laughing.

- Boyle conducts an intense box-out drill every day in practice. Why? Colorado ranked dead last in the Big 12 in rebounding for all three of Bzdelik's seasons in Boulder.

The box-out drill is rather simple. Shot goes up. You box your guy out and do anything you can to grab the rebound. All parts of the gym are fair game.

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"There's no out of bounds, so it's just the first one to get the ball," Higgins explained. "Guys are flying around, flying into chairs. It's pretty intense, but it's fun. I think (Burks) went up to the third or fourth row to get a ball one time."

Colorado grabbed only 28.5 rebounds per game last season. This year, they're already up to 36 per contest. And even though that's only good for ninth in the league, they're not last anymore.

• Boyle, 47, has altered Colorado's style of play. For the most part, Bzdelik engineered slower, more methodical offensive sets where CU would run the shot clock down to single digits with regularity. Not these Buffaloes.

"We want a high-possession game," Boyle said. "We want to get out and run. We play at 5,200 feet. I would say it's not a coincidence that the Olympic Training Center is in Colorado (Colorado Springs). It's not a coincidence that we have world-class runners and cyclists that train in Boulder, Colo. You train where we train, and you can go when you go down to sea level. When they come to play you? They're going to feel it. We have to take advantage of that."

Two of the last three years under Bzdelik, Colorado ranked 305th or slower out of 345 Div. I teams in the country in tempo. This season under Boyle, the Buffaloes are 126th in the country in tempo, averaging 68.4 possessions per game. The NCAA average is 67.2.

Under Boyle's leadership, Higgins said he hopes Colorado's rise in the conference standings continues. Colorado hasn't made an NCAA Tournament appearance since 2003. The highest CU has ever finished in the Big 12 standings was second, but that was back in 1996-97. Since then, the Buffs have been no higher than fourth.

"I think he's going to take us places we haven't been in the past few years," Higgins said of Boyle. "We're already a tight-knit group of guys. I think the chemistry is there. Our goal is to get to the NCAA Tournament. I don't think we should sell ourselves short of that."

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Column: Colorado coach draws on KU heritage

By [Kevin Haskin](#)

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THE CAPITAL-JOURNAL

Progress for Colorado basketball will be measured Tuesday both by amplification and colorization.

Who is represented in the crowd at the Coors Events Center was a concern Tad Boyle expressed before he ever coached his first game for the Buffaloes.

"The challenge we have is to create a homecourt advantage," Boyle said, "and get our crowd to come out and see Colorado, not who Colorado is playing."

He immediately recognized two solutions. Entertain fans, and do so by winning games.

Surging to an early lead in the Big 12 with three victories out of the chute, however, was stunning. The rapid start attracted a sellout the last time the Buffs played at home and for once, another capacity crowd — the first time CU has sold out two straight games in Coors Events Center — for Tuesday's visit from Kansas will wear black and cheer predominantly for the home team.

Few understand that particular dynamic in the series with KU as much as Boyle. He left his hometown of Greeley, Colo., to play for Ted Owens' Jayhawks in 1981 before finishing at KU in 1985 as a team captain for Larry Brown. So Boyle understands the Kansas basketball heritage, yet through his background as a kid he can trace spotty highlights at CU.

When he speaks, he does so with a commitment to Colorado, which has dropped two straight since its fast conference start, but at 14-6 overall is just one win shy of last year's total.

"This is where I want to be. This is not a stepping stone job for me or my staff," Boyle said. "What we want to do is put together a consistent team that can compete in the top half of whatever conference we're in."

To be competitive, Boyle will not resort to playing a deliberate style to compensate for any shortage in talent.

Instead, he recognizes a need to play at a fast tempo. The Buffs average 81.8 points, an eight-point increase over last season.

"We want to play a style that's fun to play," Boyle said. "With that, we play at 5,200 feet, we play at altitude. So with those things in mind, we want to play a high-possession game. We want to get up and down and share the basketball."

That style differed from Boyle's predecessor, Jeff Bzdelik, who left after three seasons to take over at Wake Forest. Nonetheless, Bzdelik played a key role in Colorado's surge this season. The top contributors for the Buffs are players Bzdelik recruited.

Yet in a sense, Boyle had to duplicate that effort when he was hired.

"When coaching changes occur, you've got to go in and re-recruit the guys who are there," said Boyle, who spent four seasons turning around a moribund program at Northern Colorado, where he went 25-8 last season and was coach of the year in the Big Sky, before moving to Boulder.

Boyle convinced senior guard Cory Higgins to get involved. Soon, most of the squad was retained, including Alec Burks, a gifted sophomore destined for the NBA.

In Boyle, the veteran Buffs had a coach who could empathize with their situation. By playing for two coaches at KU, Boyle gained a perspective for coping with a change in command. In addition, he learned to appreciate Brown and his demands.

"There were times you'd go back to your room at night and you weren't very happy with him," Boyle said. "But you look back at it now and I'd take a bullet for the guy. ... He expects so much of you and pushed you beyond your limits as a player. That's what makes him great."

One of Boyle's closest friends feels the same way. Mark Turgeon encouraged Boyle to get into college coaching. Boyle later assisted Turgeon, the Texas A&M coach, at Jacksonville State and Wichita State .

The first job Boyle accepted, on the Oregon staff, paid a whopping \$16,000 — a significant decline in pay grade for a stockbroker.

"I was the only one dumb enough to take it," Boyle said. "I was in a position where I could do it. I didn't have any debt. I'm a broker. I knew what to do with my money and I'd saved it."

His previous job makes him a natural to recruit talent.

"He's talked people into letting him handle their money for him," said Turgeon, "so he can build trust right away."

In many ways, coaching situations can be just as volatile as market trends.

"College basketball isn't something where you have a five-year plan," Boyle said. "You better have a day plan, because you don't know what's coming."

"You cannot make excuses. You concentrate every day on what you're doing to make your team better. If you do that, you'll be fine. I'm not going to make excuses at Colorado . If I do, you call me on it."

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