



Andre Roberson recorded 14 rebounds in Thursday's win.
Photo Courtesy: Associated Press



03/10/2011 B.G. Brooks, Contributing Editor

Higgins' Strong Second Half Sends Buffs Into Big 12 Semis

KANSAS CITY, Mo. - A little dancing music, please. Colorado closed strong Thursday to eliminate Kansas State 87-75 from the Big 12 Conference postseason tournament and likely assure itself a berth in the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 2003.

Official word won't come until Sunday when the 68-team NCAA is announced, but the Buffaloes' win against the No. 19/23 Wildcats appears to be the resume-builder CU lacked when it arrived here Monday.

In their last season in the Big 12, the Buffs move into the conference semifinals for the first time. CU meets top-seed Kansas, a 63-62 winner Thursday against Oklahoma State, on Friday at 5 p.m. (MST). KU (30-2) defeated CU twice in regular-season play. The Big 12 tournament winner receives an automatic NCAA bid.

BUFFALO EXTRAS



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[Box Score](#)

Just as Alec Burks did the day before in the second half against Iowa State, Cory Higgins asserted himself Thursday in the final 20 minutes, scoring 19 of his game-best 28 points. Burks had 29 on Wednesday, 25 in the last half.

Burks scored 24 Thursday and got help from freshman Andre Roberson, who had a double-double (11 points, 14 rebounds), and senior Marcus Relphorde, who added 10 points.

No. 5 seed CU is 21-12, having won 21 games for only the third time in the program's history. No. 4 seed K-State lost for only the second time in nine games - both to CU - and is now 22-10. The Wildcats' late surge had returned them to the national rankings.

The Buffs' 58-56 win last month in Boulder allowed them a sweep of the regular-season series for the first time since the 2003-04 season. CU won in Manhattan 74-66 in January.

In those second of those two games, the Buffs defended Wildcats guard Jacob Pullen as well as any other team in the league. After scoring 22 points against CU in Manhattan, he was held to 12 in Boulder. Mostly shadowed by Higgins, Pullen scored nine in Thursday's first half and finished with 18.

CU led early by a point (3-2) on a trey by Higgins, then fell behind by as many as seven points (21-14) with 12:35 left before the break. But the Buffs found the energy - a large dose of it provided by the 6-foot-7 Roberson - to go on a 21-8 run and take their largest lead of the half at 35-31.

But over the final 1:30 of the half, the Buffs got ragged after an 8-2 surge pushed the Wildcats up 39-37. CU's only points during that span was a drive to the basket by reserve Javon Coney, who had scored 11 points all season.

On CU's final three possessions before intermission, traveling calls on Nate Tomlinson and Burks, followed by a charge whistled on Higgins, negated any chance of CU pulling even or going ahead at halftime.

Instead, the Buffs trailed 39-37 and went to the locker room hoping their best basketball of the afternoon was ahead of them. It was.

Both teams shot over 50 percent from the field in the first 20 minutes, K-State checking in at 53.3 (16-of-30) and CU at 52.0 (13-of-25). The Buffs outrebounded the Wildcats in the first half 15-13, with Roberson - coming off a career-best 15 boards against Iowa State - grabbing seven of his total. Burks led all first-half scorers, with his 16 points surpassing his totals in both of CU's previous games (12, 8) against K-State.

The Buffs shot 58 percent for the game (29-of-50), while the Wildcats were at 42.4 percent from the field (28-of-66). CU hit six of its nine three-point attempts (66.7 percent) and outrebounded K-State 35-29. Each team scored 36 points in the paint.

Over the first 6 minutes of the second half, there were seven lead changes and two ties. K-State broke the last tie (48-48) with a three-pointer from the right corner by Will Spradling and a free throw by Curtis Kelly to take a 52-48 lead with 14:12 to play.

Kelly's foul was the third called against Burks, who immediately went to the bench. But he was

there for fewer than 3 minutes.

Higgins countered that KSU mini-run with a pair of free throws, but Pullen trumped those with a three-pointer from the left wing to give K-State a 55-50 advantage - the Wildcats' largest since 25-20.

But Higgins wasn't willing to let the afternoon slip away so easily. Getting to the rim and scoring on the next two possessions, he brought the Buffs to 55-54.

CU never trailed by more than three points over the next 3 minutes and regained the lead (58-57) on a pair of free throws by Levi Knutson with 9:12 to play. He followed his first two points of the game with a trey after a ball fake, sending CU up 61-57 with 8:19 remaining.

The lead didn't last. Pullen tied the score at 62-62 at the 7:01 mark, but another two jumpers by Higgins restored the Buffs' four-point lead (66-62).

CU missed a chance to possibly deflate K-State when Knutson misfired on a three-point attempt just inside the 5-minute mark. That gave the Wildcats an opportunity to pull to within two - and they got it on a Rodney McGruder follow, closing to 66-64.

After Coach Tad Boyle called a timeout with 4:28 remaining, the Buffs took a 68-64 lead when Burks successfully followed his miss at the rim. The Wildcats lost possession at their end on a player control foul and Higgins made them pay, sticking a jumper from the free throw line to make it 70-64 with 3:29 left.

CU appeared to have caught a break when Jamar Samuels missed the front end of a one-and-one with 3:07 left. But Kelly snared the rebound and put it back in. The Buffs' lead was 70-66, and after a held ball at the other end, Spradling hit a three to cut the deficit to 70-69

Relphorde responded with a monster trey from in front of his bench, giving CU a 73-69, but Spradling accounted for four straight points - the last two on a layup following a steal that Higgins believed should have been a foul at midcourt. Once again, K-State was a point back at 73-72.

Burks' two free throws gave CU a 75-72 lead with 1:26 left, and Relphorde followed with a pair at :59.9 to push the advantage to 77-72. After he rebounded a Spradling miss, Roberson was fouled and added one more foul shot (78-72) six seconds later.

K-State lost the ball on the inbounds play, and the Wildcats went straight to full foul mode. Higgins made another pair of free throws, Roberson followed with a layup and Burks' two foul shots sealed it.

For good measure, Relphorde converted a three-point play with 13.7 left, completing a 14-3 run over the final 86 seconds. CU had its stunning 12-point win and its rare trifecta against K-State. The (Big) Dancing undoubtedly was underway in Boulder.

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SHOW MENU



Senior Cory Higgins was an offensive and defensive force Thursday against Kansas State.
Photo Courtesy: Joel Broida



03/10/2011 B.G. Brooks, Contributing Editor

Brooks: Has CU Taken The Guesswork Out Of Selection Sunday?

KANSAS CITY, Mo. - No one out-guesses the NCAA Tournament Selection Committee, but by late Thursday afternoon here in a jubilant Colorado locker room the guesses were rampant - and most of them were educated.

For the third time this season, CU had put away Kansas State, with Win No. 3 coming in the quarterfinals of the Big 12 Conference postseason tournament. Considering the spoils, it was the most impressive win of the three, the fifth-seeded Buffaloes securing a first-time spot in the Big 12 semifinals against top-seeded Kansas (5 p.m. MST, Friday).

By most accounts - but remember, the only account that matters belongs to the NCAA Selection Committee - the Buffs also secured their first NCAA berth since 2003 and only the third in 41 years. CU now has wins against four Top 25 teams and six wins against teams in the Top 50 RPI. K-State, the No. 4 Big 12 seed, entered the tournament on an impressive roll, having won seven of its past eight games with the only loss in that stretch occurring in Boulder (58-56).

If the Buffs did what was required of them to reach the Big 12 quarterfinals, outlasting Iowa State

77-75 on Wednesday, they boldly one-upped themselves on Thursday against K-State, punishing the Wildcats in the final minutes of an 87-75 win.

KSU Coach Frank Martin could do little but pay homage: "Lot of credit to Colorado . . . they took it to us. We couldn't defend them. They beat us three times, so they're just better than we are. There's no ifs, ands or buts about it. It's been proven on the floor."

CU players conceded their chances of cavorting in next week's Big Dance climbed after Thursday's win. "I think we have a pretty strong case now," said senior Levi Knutson, "but we're trying to stay focused on this tournament. One of our goals as a team was to win a championship; this is a huge opportunity to do that. We'll see what happens."

Added senior guard Cory Higgins: "I think we have a very strong argument (for the NCAA Tournament). But we're just focused on one game at a time; we're still here to win the tournament."

If the Buffs can accomplish that, the Selection Sunday suspense settles elsewhere. The Big 12 tournament winner receives one of 31 automatic berths in the 68-team field.

"My only thought is if we win it, there's ain't no thought . . . that's your ticket-puncher right there," said sophomore guard Shannon Sharpe.

True, but Thursday's win - largely directed by Higgins' second-half heroics (19 of his 29 points in the last 20 minutes) - looks to be CU's insurance policy. The Buffs haven't beaten the Jayhawks since 2003, losing 17 straight since.

CU Coach Tad Boyle, a 1985 KU grad, called the Jayhawks "a juggernaut in so many ways. You have to try and get to their shooters as best you can, they spread the floor, they're strong inside . . . they're just a good team. What are they, 30-2? But you've got to play the game, and the way these guys are playing right now, the way they're feeling good about themselves . . . I love our team."

There was a lot to love about Higgins, the long-suffering senior who said he "can't put into words" what the prospect of reaching the NCAA Tournament means to him. "This is the highest point I've been at in my college career. Just to experience this with these guys around me, especially the people who've been through it, and especially after the lows of Colorado basketball . . ."

In the final 3 minutes Thursday, when K-State twice closed to within a point, Higgins said Boyle "pulled us in and told us we had been battling adversity this whole year, so those next couple of minutes weren't going to be anything we hadn't seen.

"We just stuck together - that was the biggest thing. We were still confident we were going to get the win, as long as we got back to what we did well."

Alec Burks, who backed up Higgins with 24 points (Burks has 53 in CU's two games here), said Higgins "showed everybody what I've been talking about all year; he's one of the best players in the country and he doesn't get a lot of credit for what he does. But he proved it in the second half by leading us, taking us on his back and getting us this win."

As much as Higgins did for CU offensively, he might have been prouder of the defensive clamp he applied to K-State guard Jacob Pullen. Boyle had told his players they would have to match the

intensity and physical play of Martin's team, which looked to Pullen to provide the spark in both areas.

Pullen scored a team-best 18 points (forward Curtis Kelly also had 18), but he hit only six of his 19 field goal attempts and was 3-for-11 from the three-point arc. Higgins was a ball-and-chain for Pullen.

"He was complaining to the refs a lot, saying he was bumped and all," Higgins said. "My goal was to make him as uncomfortable as I could. He's a great player and you can't let him get into his zone, because when he's there, there's nothing you can do about it.

"That was a point of emphasis in this game - try to take Pullen out of his game as much as possible and me guarding him this game was going to be a big part of that. I was focused in on the defensive end and I was going to let the offense take care of itself."

As is becoming the custom, CU entrusted Roberson with most of the board work. He responded with 14 rebounds, giving him 29 in two games here and his 11th time this season with 10 or more. He also scored 11 points, giving him 20 points in two games.

The 6-foot-7 Roberson also delivered what Boyle called "a big-time block" in the final seconds (he had three for the game). "He's growing up fast," Boyle said.

Added Burks: "He's showing the country what he can do. He's one of the best rebounders in the country and he's proving that every day. (K-State) thrives off of second-chance shots, but with him getting the rebounds that didn't happen."

Four of Roberson's double-figure rebounding efforts have come in CU's past five games. He's obviously acclimated himself to play at this level - and he's not surprised. "That was my idea of what I wanted to do . . . it's just good that it happened, you know?" he said. "It's a great accomplishment and hopefully I can keep it going."

From their first two meetings with the Wildcats, the Buffs knew they were playing what Boyle described as "the Big 12's most physical team." Matching that was CU's challenge, and Boyle kept the challenge going all game long, updating rebounding statistics and shooting percentages at timeouts and pushing his players.

"I knew it was what we had to do, knowing they're physical inside and the refs were going to let a lot of stuff go," Roberson said. "I just knew we had to get in there and grind it out with them."

Burks said K-State "tried to punk us . . . we fought back and showed that we're tough, too. We were tough enough to win."

"We've played good basketball against them," Knutson added. "We beat a good team three times. We had to grind it out, rebound, defend . . . and execute against their pressure defense. Each game was a good win for us."

KU comes next and improbable as Jayhawks fans consider, the Buffs would like nothing more than win their first Big 12 championship on their way to the Pac-12. "We've done a lot of special things over the conference season - 21 wins, beating some tops team," sophomore forward Austin Dufault

said. "But we've got a lot to add on if we can go out and get that one (Friday).

"It always comes down to the (selection) committee; you never know which way the committee is going to go. We can't be satisfied with just winning two here. Go out (Friday) and play hungry like we have the last two games . . . who knows?"

Reaching the Big 12 semifinals, said Sharpe, "feels special, but I feel like we ain't done yet. We got a lot more to do."

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SHOW MENU



CU Buffs likely punch ticket to NAAs

Higgins leads Buffs into Big 12 semifinal matchup with Kansas

By Ryan Thorburn Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 03/10/2011 03:47:44 PM MST



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KANSAS CITY, Mo. -- Frank Martin will coach in the NCAA Tournament next week.

And through college basketball's most intense stare he sees a Colorado team that is superior to No. 19 Kansas State.

The Buffs tamed the Wildcats 87-75 on Thursday in the quarterfinals of the Big 12 Tournament at the Sprint Center.

It was the same script as CU's 74-66 win in Manhattan on Jan. 12 and the 58-56 win in Boulder on Feb. 12.

The better team found a way win.

"They took it to us," Martin said. "We couldn't defend them. They beat us three times, so they're just better than we are. There's no ifs, ands or buts about it. It's been proven on the floor."

And so there is not much left to prove when CU makes its first appearance in the semifinals in the 15-year history of the Big 12 Tournament against top-seeded Kansas today (5 p.m., Altitude2).

Or is there?

The Buffs (21-12) appear to be a lock for the expanded 68-team NCAA Tournament at this point. They can erase all doubt by snapping a 17-game losing streak to the Jayhawks.

"I think if we beat the Jayhawks we're in," CU head coach Tad Boyle said with a smile outside a jubilant locker room. "I will say that. ... We're trying to win a championship just like anyone else. We've got just as much a right and ability to do it. That's what we came here to do."

When you have a lethal one-two punch like Cory Higgins and Alec Burks, anything is possible in March. The dynamic duo combined for 52 points on 17-for-29 shooting against Kansas State.

Burks had 16 of his 24 points in the first half. Higgins scored 19 of his 28 points in the second half.

"I think me and Alec really feed off each other," Higgins said. "It's hard for teams to shut down both of us, so we just tried to pick each other up during the game."

Jacob Pullen gave Kansas State a 55-50 advantage and the momentum after a 3-pointer with 13:06 left. But Higgins scored eight straight points for the Buffs to bring them back, and a 3-pointer by Levi Knutson gave CU a 61-57 lead.

Pullen evened the score at 62-62 with another deep ball. Higgins took over for another crucial stretch and put CU up by six points (70-64).

It appeared that Pullen had gotten away with a foul in Higgins during the Wildcats' final comeback, forcing CU's senior leader to cough up the ball at mid-court and setting up an easy layup by Will Spradling that cut the deficit to 73-72 with

1:37 left on the clock.

Burks drew a foul on the other end and quieted the partisan crowd by sinking two free throws.

Andre Roberson swatted a Rodney McGruder layup attempt on the next possession, and the Buffs went 8-for-9 at the line from that point to slam the door on the Wildcats for the third time.

"Coach told us in the huddle that we've responded all year in times of adversity," Higgins said after CU closed the game with a 14-3 run in the final 86 seconds. "It was nothing we haven't seen. We just had to come back and do what we do well and execute. We were confident we were going to come out with the win regardless."

The Buffs out-rebounded Kansas State 35-29 and shot 58 percent from the field while holding the Wildcats to 42.4 percent.

"They're a real physical team. Every time we played them we talked about matching them and taking it to another level," CU point guard Nate Tomlinson said. "I think we take that real personal, and they bring the best out of us."

Roberson finished with 11 points and 14 rebounds off the bench after grabbing 15 boards in the 75-73 victory over Iowa State on Wednesday.

"We did everything we could to pressure the rim and we never got to the foul line," Martin said. "And that freshman kid (Roberson) protects that rim."

After greeting Martin for the third time with a winning handshake, Boyle will almost certainly be joining him in the NCAA Tournament next week.

That means a lot at CU, a program that has only been invited to the Big Dance twice in the previous 41 years.

"The word pride comes to mind," Boyle said when asked about this March run to the NCAA Tournament. "Pride in Colorado basketball, pride in what we represent, and mostly pride in these young men. They battled."

Colorado 87, Kansas State 75

COLORADO (87)

FG FT Reb

Min M-A M-A O-T A PF PTS

Dufault 15 2-3 0-0 1-3 0 3 4

Tomlinson 16 1-1 0-0 0-2 1 0 3

Relphorde 21 3-3 3-3 0-2 1 4 10

Burks 35 7-14 8-8 3-6 5 3 24

Higgins 31 10-15 7-9 0-1 1 2 28

Sharpe 12 0-4 0-0 0-2 0 0 0

Coney 9 1-1 0-0 0-0 0 3 2

Roberson 31 4-6 3-5 4-14 1 1 11

Knutson 27 1-3 2-2 0-3 2 1 5

Mills 3 0-0 0-0 0-0 0 0 0

Totals 200 29-50 23-27 9-35 11 17 87

Percentages: FG .580, FT .852.

3-Point Goals: 6-9, .667 (Burks 2-3, Relphorde 1-1, Higgins 1-1, Tomlinson 1-1, Knutson 1-3).

Team Rebounds: 2.

Blocked Shots: 5 (Roberson 3, Coney, Burks).

Turnovers: 16 (Relphorde 4, Higgins 4, Burks 3, Roberson 2, Tomlinson 2, Dufault).

Steals: 5 (Higgins 2, Burks 2, Relphorde).

Technical Fouls: None.

KANSAS ST. (75)

FG FT Reb

Min M-A M-A O-T A PF PTS

Kelly 35 7-11 4-6 5-10 3 2 18

Samuels 33 4-10 0-1 5-8 1 3 8

Pullen 38 6-19 3-3 1-3 7 3 18

Southwell 9 0-0 0-0 0-0 1 1 0

McGruder 28 3-10 4-4 2-2 2 2 11

Peterson 11 2-3 0-0 0-1 2 5 4

Irving 4 0-0 0-0 0-0 0 0 0

Henriquez-Roberts 12 1-4 0-0 0-2 0 1 2

Spradling 30 5-9 1-2 1-1 0 3 14

Totals 200 28-66 12-16 15-29 16 20 75

Percentages: FG .424, FT .750.

3-Point Goals: 7-23, .304 (Spradling 3-6, Pullen 3-11, McGruder 1-4, Samuels 0-2).

Team Rebounds: 2.

Blocked Shots: 5 (Henriquez-Roberts 2, Southwell, McGruder, Kelly).

Turnovers: 11 (Samuels 5, Pullen 4, Kelly, Southwell).

Steals: 9 (Kelly 2, Pullen 2, Samuels 2, Spradling 2, Peterson).

Technical Fouls: None.

Colorado 37 50--87

Kansas St. 39 36--75

A -- 18,910.

Officials -- Gerry Pollard, Kelly Self, Terry Davis.

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CU's Boyle is proud of Buffs, Bears

By Ryan Thorburn Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 03/11/2011 12:14:46 AM MST

KANSAS CITY, Mo. -- Jeff Bzdelik took the Denver Nuggets to the NBA playoffs after a nine-year drought and got Air Force into the NCAA Tournament and to an NIT Final Four.

Had Bzdelik stayed at Colorado and guided the Buffs to an NCAA Tournament ... well, he would probably have ended up in the Colorado Sports Hall of Fame some day.

That spot might be reserved for Tad Boyle now.

Not only is the Greeley native on the verge of leading CU to the Big Dance in his first season as head coach, Boyle also recruited and developed the players at Northern Colorado who earned that program's first NCAA Tournament bid by winning the Big Sky Tournament on Wednesday.

"That would make me feel pretty darned special," Boyle said on the possibility of the Buffs and Bears both playing in the NCAA Tournament next week. "The Northern situation's a lot different than the Colorado situation. It's apples and oranges. But at the end of the day, it's about educating young men. It's about getting them to buy into a belief system and a culture where every day you wake up and try to get better."

The Buffs proved to be better than Kansas State for the third time this season during Thursday's 87-75 victory over the Wildcats in the quarterfinals of the Big 12 Tournament at the Sprint Center.

CU is no longer considered a bubble team by most credible bracket prognosticators after advancing to the semifinals for the first time in the 15-year history of this conference tournament.

"We've proven it," forward Austin Dufault said when asked if the Buffs had played their way into the 68-team field. "We have a few bad losses, but that was really early on in the year. We've been growing the whole season and playing better and better. I feel like we're playing at our peak now."

Four years ago, UNC finished 4-24 in Boyle's first season. Last year they won 26 games and participated in the CBI Tournament.

The Buffs (21-12) became only the third team in the 108-year history of CU basketball to win 21 games. The program is seeking its third NCAA Tournament berth in the last 41 years.

"These young men are trying to make a statement and leave their footprints in the sand of time," Boyle said. "I'm extremely proud of the Buffaloes, I'm extremely proud of the Bears, and it would be a great day on Sunday if we both got in."

KU one more time

The Buffs will face top-seeded Kansas in the semifinals tonight (5 p.m., Altitude2) looking to snap a 17-game losing streak to the Jayhawks.

KU won 82-78 on Jan. 25 at the Coors Events Center and 89-63 on Feb. 19 at Allen Fieldhouse.

"I think we have a lot to prove. We feel like we let one slip away at our place. We felt like we should have won that," CU point guard Nate Tomlinson said. "Then when we went and played them there, that just wasn't us. They've beaten us twice, and that pisses us off a little bit."

The Jayhawks (30-2) shot 20 percent (5-for-25) from 3-point distance in the quarterfinals but escaped with a 63-62 victory over Oklahoma State.

"It would have been real interesting if they got upset," said Boyle, a former KU player. "But they didn't. We're going to expect their best shot, and hopefully we can give them ours."

Boyle will let his team sleep in and the Buffs will not have a shoot-around before tonight's game after grueling wins over Iowa State (75-73) and K-State in a 24-hour period.

K-State series update

Kansas State still leads the all-time series 97-48, including a 10-4 edge in neutral-court games. CU broke a nine-game losing streak against the Wildcats with the regular-season sweep.

The Big 12 series was tied 16-16 entering (1-1 in the conference tournament) entering Thursday's meeting.

Notable

CU improved to 4-4 against ranked teams this season. ... The Buffs are 9-14 all-time in Big 12 Tournament games but 3-1 as the No. 5 seed. ... Alec Burks was named to the National Association of Basketball Coaches District 8 First Team along with Kansas' Marcus Morris, Baylor's LaceDarius Dunn and Texas' Jordan Hamilton and Tristan Thompson. ...

Quotable

"Against K-State, if we play like we did (against Oklahoma State), we'll go home sad," Kansas head coach Bill Self when asked about a possible rematch with the rival Wildcats before the Buffs' made the question moot a couple hours later.

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THE DENVER POST

college basketball

CU appears NCAA-bound after another quality win

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

Posted: 03/11/2011 01:00:00 AM MST

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Colorado can all but start packing its bags for its first trip to the NCAA Tournament since 2003 — after all the work here is finished, of course.

Nobody in the CU locker room — or the shocked, purple-clad spectators among the 18,910 at the Sprint Center here Thursday — could imagine the Buffaloes making a bigger statement to the NCAA Tournament selection committee than upsetting 19th-ranked Kansas State for a third time this season.

The convincing 87-75 victory sends the fifth-seeded Buffaloes (21-12) into the Big 12 Tournament semifinals for the first time in their 15th and final try before heading to the Pac-12. Colorado will face top-seeded Kansas today.

But no matter

what happens today, the Buffs' resume should be

good enough, with marquee conference wins over the likes of Texas, Missouri and Kansas State.

"We feel that if we beat teams like this, we should be in the NCAA Tournament," said CU sophomore guard Alec Burks, a Kansas City native who once again felt at home with 24 points. "That's what NCAA Tournament teams do."

The NCAA selection committee is already sequestered in an Indianapolis hotel suite, stuck in front of computer screens while deliberating the beauty marks and warts of dozens of candidates for 37 at-large bids.

Just three days before the Selection Sunday announcement of the 68-team bracket, Colorado looked polished and formidable. The Buffs made key plays down the stretch and outscored the hottest team in the conference 14-3 in the final 86 seconds.

Contributions came from almost every name on Colorado's roster. Senior guard Cory Higgins led all scorers with 28 points. Burks handed out five assists and recorded two steals in addition to his 24 points. Freshman forward Andre Roberson outplayed Kansas State at its own game by controlling the paint with 14 rebounds, while also contributing 11 points.

Marcus Relphorde was the fourth Buff to reach double-figure scoring (10). Even seldom-used senior walk-on Javon Coney got in for nine minutes when others were in foul trouble.

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"I don't know if we've had their number," Buffs senior guard Levi Knutson said. "I guess you could say that, because we beat a good team three times. But I think we just play good against them."

The afternoon didn't always look rosy. Kansas State led by as many as seven points in the first half and was still up 55-50 when senior guard Jacob Pullen buried a 3-pointer from the left corner with 13:07 remaining.

But Higgins retaliated with a driving shot from off the glass. Then, after a Kansas State miss, the senior guard banked in another shot off a pretty feed from Knutson.

FG FT Reb

CU (21-12) Min M-A M-A O-T A PF PTS

Dufault 15 2-3 0-0 1-3 0 3 4
Tomlinson 16 1-1 0-0 0-2 1 0 3
Relphorde 21 3-3 3-3 0-2 1 4 10
Burks 35 7-14 8-8 3-6 5 3 24
Higgins 31 10-15 7-9 0-1 1 2 28
Sharpe 12 0-4 0-0 0-2 0 0 0
Coney 9 1-1 0-0 0-0 0 3 2
Roberson 31 4-6 3-5 4-14 1 1 11
Knutson 27 1-3 2-2 0-3 2 1 5
Mills

3 0-0 0-0 0-0 0 0 0

Totals 200 29-50 23-27 9-35 11 17 87

March Madness

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Percentages: FG .580, FT .852. **3-point goals:** 6-9, .667 (Burks 2-3, Relphorde 1-1, Higgins 1-1, Tomlinson 1-1, Knutson 1-3). **Team rebounds:** 2. **Blocked shots:** 5 (Roberson 3, Coney, Burks). **Turnovers:** 16 (Relphorde 4, Higgins 4, Burks 3, Roberson 2, Tomlinson 2, Dufault). **Steals:** 5 (Higgins 2, Burks 2, Relphorde). **Technical fouls:** None.

FG FT Reb

KSU (22-10) Min M-A M-A O-T A PF PTS

Kelly 35 7-11 4-6 5-10 3 2 18
Samuels 33 4-10 0-1 5-8 1 3 8
Pullen 38 6-19 3-3 1-3 7 3 18
Southwell 9 0-0 0-0 0-0 1 1 0
McGruder 28 3-10 4-4 2-2 2 2 11
Peterson 11 2-3 0-0 0-1 2 5 4
Irving 4 0-0 0-0 0-0 0 0 0
Hnrquez-Ro. 12 1-4 0-0 0-2 0 1 2
Spradling 30 5-9 1-2 1-1 0 3 14

Totals 200 28-66 12-16 15-29 16 20 75

Percentages: FG .424, FT .750. **3-point goals:** 7-

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23, .304 (Spradling 3-6, Pullen 3-11, McGruder 1-4, Samuels 0-2). **Team rebounds:** 2. **Blocked shots:** 5 (Henriquez-Roberts 2, Southwell, McGruder, Kelly). **Turnovers:** 11 (Samuels 5, Pullen 4, Kelly, Southwell). **Steals:** 9 (Kelly 2, Pullen 2, Samuels 2, Spradling 2, Peterson). **Technical fouls:** None.

Colorado 37 50 — 87

Kansas State 39 36 — 75

18,910. Officials —Gerry Pollard, Kelly Self, Terry Davis.

A —

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THE DENVER POST

woody paige

Paige: State's hoop status boosted by Bz

By Woody Paige
The Denver Post

Posted: 03/11/2011 01:00:00 AM MST

The signs at the border should state: Welcome to Colorful Colorado: Hoops and Hopes and Hickenlooper live here.

In that order of importance.

Woodja believe? The uncommon state of Colorado has come within a nudge of sending three teams to the NCAA basketball tournament.

With more than a little bit of help from Coach Bz.

Jeff Bzdelik — the former Nuggets, Buffs and Falcons coach — must be awarded an assist as two Colorado universities, Colorado and Northern Colorado, join the Class of 2010-11.

However, Bzdelik is the cigarette butt of jokes today in Winston-Salem, N.C.

Bzdelik, the current Wake Forest coach, finished his first season on Tobacco Road on Thursday

with a loss to Boston College in the ACC Tournament. The Demon Deacons will hold a Wake wake after becoming the first conference team to lose 24 games in one season, and win just one conference game.

"It was my most challenging year of coaching basketball," said Bzdelik, who guided the Nuggets to one playoff series, the Falcons to one NCAA Tournament and the Buffs to 12th twice and eighth in 2009-10 in the Big 12.

After last season, he bolted Boulder, setting in motion a chain reaction that resulted in Tad Boyle moving from the University of Northern Colorado to the University of Colorado and B.J. Hill, who had been hired by Boyle as an associate coach in Greeley, being elevated to UNC's head coaching job.

The Bears officially are in their first NCAA Tournament by winning the Big Sky Conference Tournament on Wednesday night. They had bopped Northern Arizona, then Montana, and people in Greeley are dancing in the streets and at the meat-packing plant.

The Buffs are waiting now to be invited officially to the NCAA, after their second victory Thursday afternoon in their final Big 12 Conference Tournament. They rallied late to defeat Iowa State on Wednesday, and took down Kansas State on Thursday with another late run.

Lamentably, there was no trifecta for Our State and Colorado State, which lost to New Mexico on Thursday in the Mountain West Conference

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THE DENVER POST

Tournament.

Those three schools had to play tournament tall to be considered by the NCAA. The Bears and the Buffs have been; the Rams fell short.

Two is better, though, than the usual none.

Bzdelik brought most of the current CU players to Boulder, and, in turn, Boyle lured a majority of the current UNC players to Greeley.

The two small cities are about 60 miles in driving distance, but they are worlds apart.

Accolades all around — for Hill, who in 2008 was an assistant at something called Indian Hills Community College in something called Ottumwa, Iowa; for Boyle, who was a schoolboy star at Greeley Central and a guard at Kansas, and even for Bzdelik, who probably wishes he had stayed in Boulder, where they smoke something other than cigarettes.

Bzdelik was responsible for seniors Cory Higgins and Levi Knutson and freshman Andre Roberson (who was being courted by CU before Boyle joined the Buffs) — all of whom came up big in an incredible third triumph over K-State this season. And, of course, Alec Burks, the buzz of the Big 12 Tournament, was Bz's best find. Without him, the Buffs would end up in the NIT, with the Rams.

Yet, Colorado's major miss was Devon Beitzel. The Buffs didn't care a whit about the spunky all-state scoring guard from Centaurus High. He

passed on Dartmouth and Princeton, instead went to UNC, redshirted as a freshman and, as a senior, has just been named the MVP in the Big

[Submit Your Question](#)

**WOODY'S
MAILBAG**

The Denver Post

Post sports columnist Woody Paige fields your questions. Look for Woody's Mailbag on Thursdays.

Sky Tournament and an academic All-American.

Perhaps someday he'll coach one of the Colorado schools to an NCAA Tournament bid. Or Knutson, the Buffs' senior guard from Arapahoe High School, might be a future, successful NCAA coach around these parts with his basketball acumen.

One, or both, could be playing in the NCAA regional at The Can.

Who says Colorado kids can't play the game?

Who can't get goose bumps thinking about the present and future of the state's college basketball? Air Force got to .500 and the University of Denver is competitive under coach Joe Scott.

And CSU was so close to glory.

Back off, North Carolina. Move over, Michigan.

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THE DENVER POST

cu men's basketball

Higgins enables offense, denies Pullen on defense

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

Posted: 03/11/2011 01:00:00 AM MST

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Colorado defeated No. 19 Kansas State by a dozen points Thursday, and the victory margin can, for the most part, be explained by a tale of two players.

Colorado senior guard Cory Higgins hit 10-of-15 shots and scored 28 points. Kansas State senior guard Jacob Pullen struggled to reach 18 points, missing 13 of his 19 shots.

Higgins, who has faced Pullen at least twice a season for four years, drew the defensive assignment and did about as well as anybody can do against the preseason Big 12 player of the year. With basketball smarts learned on the Chicago playgrounds, Pullen is usually tough in the clutch and one of the nation's toughest matchups.

But Higgins stayed in his face for nearly every second that the two were on the court together.

"My goal this game was just to make him as uncomfortable as I could," Higgins said. "You can't let him get into a zone. When he gets there, there is nothing you can do about it."

Pullen entered the game averaging 19.6 points per game.

"Cory, I thought, was terrific today against him," CU coach Tad Boyle said. "I know (Pullen) ended up with 18 points. But he had to work for every one of them."

In three games against CU, Pullen combined for 17-of-47 from the field, including 10-of-31 in the last two.

"We've done a pretty good job on Jacob Pullen all year long as a team," Boyle said.

That's not easy. Then again, neither is defeating the Wildcats three times this season. No other team beat them more than once.

"We just made some bad decisions offensively," Pullen said.

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All Things Colorado Sports — Blogs — The Denver Post

MARCH 11, 2011, 12:45 PM

Once again, CU to face an angry Jayhawks team

By **TOM KENSLE** |  No Comments

[1]

Kansas' Marcus Morris. (Getty)

KANSAS CITY, Mo. – Wouldn't you know it, in tonight's Big 12 Tournament semifinal Colorado once again will be facing a Kansas team that is coming off a disappointing performance and no doubt is anxious to make amends.

Kansas has lost just twice this season. Each time, they faced Colorado in the next game and beat the Buffs.

This time, the Jayhawks come off Thursday's hold-your-breath, 63-62 squeaker over Oklahoma State. Kansas shot 35.9 percent from the field, and needed a desperation jump shot from long range by Oklahoma State sophomore Jean-Paul Olukemi to miss at the buzzer.

"Every time, every time," Boyle said smiling, when asked Thursday about the bad timing of games against Kansas. "I hope they shoot like that again, but I don't think they will. I don't expect them to play tomorrow like they did today."

More from All Things Colorado Sports

- [KSU's Martin: CU bad matchup for us](#) ^[2]
- [CU vs. Kansas telecast on Altitude2](#) ^[3]
- [Has CU played its way past Dayton?](#) ^[4]

TEA Top 25

L TOTAL W-L

#2 Kansas	14-2	30-2
#10 Texas	13-3	26-5 Final
#21 Texas A&M	10-6	24-7
#23 Kansas State	10-6	22-10
Missouri	8-8	23-10 KST
Colorado	8-8	21-11 KU
Baylor	7-9	18-13 62
Nebraska	7-9	19-17 63
Oklahoma State	6-10	19-18 62
Oklahoma	5-11	14-18 63
Texas Tech	5-11	13-19 Final
Iowa State	3-13	16-16 69

[View expanded standings »](#)

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. -- When Colorado waltzed in and beat nationally ranked Kansas State two months ago, ending a nine-game losing streak to the Wildcats, [Cory Higgins](#) sounded a warning.

"It's a whole new Colorado," the senior said. [Final](#)

Indeed, it is.

Higgins scored 28 points, [Alec Burks](#) added 24 and the Buffaloes made it three in a row over Kansas State on Thursday, ousting the Wildcats (No. 23 ESPN/USA Today, No. 19 AP) 87-75 in the quarterfinals of the Big 12 tournament.

Fast Facts



- The Buffaloes beat the Wildcats for the third time this season and won for the sixth time in the last eight games.

- Colorado posted its sixth win over an RPI top 50 team this season.

- The loss snapped Kansas State's six-game winning streak.

- Cory Higgins (28) and Alec Burks (24) combined for 52 of Colorado's 87 points.

- The Buffaloes shot 58 percent from the field, hit 6 of 9 3s and made 23 of 27 from the line. The only other team this season to shoot at least 58 percent from the field, 66.7 percent from 3-point range and 85 percent from the line was Syracuse against DePaul last week.

- Colorado advanced to the semifinals of the Big 12 tournament for the first time.

-- ESPN Stats & Information

Kansas State had dominated Colorado for years. But now, for the first time in a series that began in 1933, the Buffaloes have beaten the Wildcats three times in one season.

"We beat a great team three times," Higgins said. "It can't be a fluke all three times."

Colorado (21-12) was the only team to beat the streaking Wildcats (22-10) in their final nine games. And the latest win was a big one for the Buffaloes as they try to secure an NCAA tournament bid in their final season as a member of the Big 12 before packing up for the Pac-12.

"People will see the results of this game and see the fact that K-State's playing at a high level," Colorado coach Tad Boyle said. "Those guys are good and they're playing very, very well right now. We beat a good team. We're not backing into this thing. I try not to talk about things I don't have control over. But this is our sixth top-50 RPI win of the season. I don't know how many bubble teams have six."

[Jacob Pullen](#) and [Curtis Kelly](#) had 18 points apiece for Kansas State, which rode a six-game winning streak into the tournament. Kelly also had 10 rebounds.

"They beat us three times, so they're just better than we are, no ifs, ands or buts about it," Kansas State coach Frank Martin said. "That's been proven on the floor."

Higgins had 19 points in the second half, picking up the slack while Burks struggled with three fouls and spent much of the time on the bench. The Buffaloes closed the game on a 14-3 run, sinking eight straight free throws during one stretch. They were 23 of 27 from the line.

"We feed off each other," Higgins said of himself and Burks. "Throughout the year we talk to each other during the game. It's hard for teams to shut down both of us. We just pick each other up."

[Andre Roberson](#) had 11 points and 14 rebounds for Colorado.

Burks, shadowed by Pullen, picked up three quick fouls in the second half and went to the bench. But Higgins took control and scored 10 straight points, keeping Colorado close until its all-Big 12 guard got back in the game.

Kelly's tip-in and [Will Spradling](#)'s 3-pointer sliced Colorado's lead to 70-69 before [Marcus Reiphorde](#) hit a 3-pointer from the baseline. After Spradling's driving layup cut it

to 73-67. Top 25

and hit both ends of a 1-and-1.

With 1:23 to go, Kansas State inbounded the ball and Spradling put up a 3-pointer that missed. Burks batted away [Rodney McGruder](#)'s follow attempt and [Devon Peterson](#) was called for a foul. Relphorde, with 59.9 seconds to go, made both foul shots for a 77-72 lead. Roberson made a foul shot and Higgins made two before Roberson's layup gave the Buffs, a longtime Big 12 doormat, a comfortable lead.

"We made some bad decisions," Pullen said. "We did the same thing that plagued us when we weren't doing well in the Big 12. We were undisciplined, we gave up some easy shots and we made some bad decisions on offense and it cost us the game. At this time of year, you can't have those type of breakdowns or those type of lapses, or you'll never be able to beat a good team."

Earlier, with Burks on the bench, Higgins hit two free throws, Pullen canned a 3-pointer for a 55-50 lead, and then Higgins went inside for a contested bucket and followed that with a driving layup that cut the lead to 56-54.

After Peterson scored for Kansas State, Higgins answered with another basket.

[Levi Knutson](#)'s two foul shots and long 3-pointer put Colorado on top 61-57.

The Wildcats tied it 62-all on Pullen's 3-pointer. Then Higgins hit a fallaway jumper and followed that with a driving layup. Burks, with just his second bucket of the second half, tipped in a shot and Higgins made a floater in the lane, capping an 8-2 run for a 70-64 lead with 3:31 to play.

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Posted on Fri, Mar. 11, 2011

Colorado takes air out of K-State

By KELLIS ROBINETT
The Kansas City Star

Kansas State's players were spread out across their locker room at the Sprint Center, sitting in a state of disbelief.

The Wildcats' late-season surge had fizzled just moments earlier in an 87-75 loss to Colorado — and their status as one of the hottest teams in all of college basketball had just come to an end. But they didn't want to admit it.

After winning six straight games to climb back into the national polls and earning the respect of experts and fans all across the country by decisively beating Kansas and Texas along the way, they stumbled in a familiar way during the quarterfinals of the Big 12 tournament Thursday afternoon.

Colorado, the last team to defeat the Wildcats in early February and the only team that had beaten the Wildcats twice during the regular season, took them down again.

"They beat us three times," K-State coach Frank Martin said. "So they're just better than we are. There's no ifs, ands or buts about it. It's been proven on the floor."

Indeed, no matter how much K-State has changed during this wacky season, Colorado has remained the same. Only this time, the defeat truly stung — to the point of anger.

"It's aggravating because I don't think they're better than us," said senior forward Curtis Kelly, who scored 18 points and grabbed 10 rebounds in the loss. "I don't think they're better than us in any shape or form. I think we're a better team than them. I think we have a better core of guys than them."

"They have a lot of role players and two outstanding NBA prospects. ... In my mind, I know we're better than them, but unfortunately the stats and the record don't show that."

Not in any shape or form.

First came a 74-66 home loss that drove Martin to change his team's offensive scheme. Then there was the 58-56 loss at Boulder that came down to an official review of a Rodney McGruder three-pointer that barely didn't get off in time. Thursday's matchup was supposed to be different, with K-State players openly requesting to play Colorado for a shot at revenge.

And early on, it looked as if the Wildcats were going to get it. Behind the strong shooting performances of Kelly and senior guard Jacob Pullen, who scored 18 points and recorded seven assists, they took a 23-16 lead less than 9 minutes in.

But then Colorado sophomore Alec Burks, who put together his second straight big game with 24 points, six rebounds and five assists, and senior Cory Higgins, who led all scorers with 28 points, got to work. With less than 3 minutes remaining before halftime, Colorado, 21-12, took a 35-31 lead.

K-State, 22-10, composed itself and held a 39-37 advantage at the break, but by that point things were spinning out of control. Despite defending Burks and Higgins twice before, the Wildcats' were no match for them on the perimeter.

"Our guys were dialed in," Colorado coach Tad Boyle said.

Once they proved they could beat K-State off the dribble and get to the basket, they began driving at will.

"That's the problem with playing Colorado," Martin said. "They're a hard matchup for us, because their two wings are real good off the dribble, and our weakness the whole year has been our ability to guard the dribble."

Still, Pullen — a two-time All-Big 12 defender — Shane Southwell and Will Spradling have been effective in that area lately. On this day, they simply couldn't slow Colorado down.

"That's what we knew they were going to do," said Spradling, who scored 14 points. "We just had to guard the ball. We didn't do it. Normally we get blocked shots at the rim. We didn't get many blocks today either."

As K-State's defense began to break, its offense did, too. When the second half began, the Wildcats got the ball in good spots and took open shots. But they missed them.

Their energy level began to fade; players said they felt "lackadaisical".

"Nobody was ready to play tonight," Jamar Samuels said.

K-State still managed to take a 57-54 lead midway through the second half and pulled within 73-72 on a Spradling layup with 1:32 to go. The crowd was at its peak and K-State was in position to steal the game.

But walk-on Devon Peterson committed two fouls, and K-State missed four of five three-pointers after that, with Spradling and Pullen each misfiring on two.

"We weren't on cue today," Pullen said. "That's the part that is really appalling. You don't understand that we can do that, especially after the way we lost to them twice this season."

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Posted on Thu, Mar. 10, 2011

Bubble bitter for some, tasty for Colorado

BLAIR KERKHOFF COLLEGES

Winner, winner chicken dinner for Colorado if Alec Burks has his way.

The Buffaloes paid the obligatory visit to a barbecue restaurant earlier in the week, and you can't go wrong with any mixed plate, which is why some in the locker room were clamoring for a trip to Gates.

But Burks, Grandview's favorite hoops son, knows about all the good local eats, and he's thinking Go Chicken Go for the chicken and gizzards.

Yes, hoops taste good for Colorado, which gave itself a chance to order from another KC menu after beating Kansas State 87-75 in the quarterfinals of the Big 12 tournament.

An outcome that quieted a mostly purple crowd in Sprint Center will be digested in a conference room in Indianapolis by 10 folks gathered around a rectangular table (description courtesy of NCAA selection-committee sherpa Greg Shaheen and his twitter account) and buried in the study of imperceptible teams.

For about a dozen or so programs, conference tournament week is the final opportunity to build their Big Dance qualifications, and so often the late statements aren't positive.

In the Big 12, losses by Nebraska and Baylor in Wednesday's first round proved they were unworthy of the 68-team field.

Oklahoma State nearly blasted its way onto the bubble by taking kingpin Kansas to the final possession. But close doesn't count. Cowboys coach Travis Ford was convinced his team was in with a victory. A one-point loss simply meant a good day wasn't good enough.

The only Big 12 team remaining to prove itself was Colorado, and the Buffaloes did just that against the league's hottest team — except when the Wildcats see the Colorado black and gold.

K-State has now won eight of 10 games — with an 0-2 mark against Colorado.

Coach Tad Boyle's team is likely to spark a lively selection-committee conversation. No at-large candidate — assuming the Buffaloes lose today — provides a wider range of credentials.

"Everybody has bad losses, Colorado included," Boyle said. "But we have got some great wins."

Yessir. Six against the nation's top 50 RPI teams, and four against the top 25. Know how many others in the Big 12 have as many? None.

And as The Star's Mike DeArmond pointed out, how can Kansas State be in and not a Colorado team that is 3-0 against the Wildcats?

The short answer is that won't happen, but the Buffaloes have marks against them. They didn't play a great nonleague schedule, and that matters. Still, the abundance of high-quality victories should be enough.

One more erases any doubt, but just as Colorado can't lose to Kansas State, it can't seem to put itself in a winning position against Kansas, at least when it comes to the schedule. The Jayhawks own two losses this season, and the next opponent after both was Colorado.

Thursday, Kansas came as close as possible to a loss.

"Every time, every time," Boyle said with smile of catching a KU team motivated by a previous outcome. "I don't expect them to play tomorrow like they did today. We're going to get their best shot."

This is all new and heady stuff for Colorado. The Buffaloes have reached the NCAA Tournament twice as a Big 12 member, the first time in the inaugural year led by Chauncey Billups, then in 2003.

I asked Burks if the lack of tradition was a problem for him when sorting out his college offers and he reminded me such a consideration did not apply to him.

"It was one of my few offers, the best situation for me, so I took it," he said.

Missouri, Burks' AAU coach told him, wasn't interested. Kansas didn't recruit him, and Kansas State offered, but by then Burks was too far along with Colorado.

He's headed to the NBA after this season — how could he not? But he gets to put off that talk for at least another week because there will be more games to play, likely in the NCAA, and before then, more hometown culinary experiences.

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Men's Basketball

FRIDAY, MARCH 11, 2011

KU wanted 'Cats, but CU will do

By Gary Bedore



Photo by Nick Krug

Kansas players Tyshawn Taylor, left, Josh Selby and Thomas Robinson celebrate a bucket and a foul created by teammate Mario Little against Oklahoma State with time dwindling in the second half on Thursday, March 10, 2011 at the Sprint Center in Kansas City.

KU vs. Oklahoma State

Box Score

Keegan ratings

Kansas freshman Josh Selby focused on team goals during recent struggles

Oklahoma State's Marshall Moses: Fifth foul a 'terrible call'

Stop and go: Defensive stand puts KU in semis

Marcus Morris plays like Player of Year

Kansas City, Mo. — Truth be known, Kansas University's basketball players wanted to play Kansas State in the 2011 Big 12 tournament.

"Just because they beat us," KU junior center Markieff Morris said of an 84-68 decision on Feb. 14 in Manhattan, which followed the Jayhawks' 90-66 victory over the Wildcats on Jan. 29 in Allen Fieldhouse.

There will be no Sunflower Showdown Part Three during the 2010-11 postseason.

Upstart Colorado defeated KSU, 87-75, in a Big 12 quarterfinal Thursday, setting up today's 6 p.m. KU-CU semifinal matchup in Sprint Center.

KU beat the Buffs, 82-78, on Jan. 25, in Boulder, Colo., and again, 89-63, on Feb. 19 in Allen Fieldhouse.

Videos

KU vs. Oklahoma State



Kansas defeated Oklahoma State 63-62 in the first round of the Big 12 Tournament on Thursday, March 10, 2011 at Sprint Center in Kansas City, Mo.

Photo Gallery

KU vs. Oklahoma State



Photo Gallery

KU fans watch the Jayhawks take on the Cowboys at Power & Light District in Kansas City



With the Big 12 Tournament in Kansas City, Jayhawk fans crowded into the Power & Light district for its Fan

"In a perfect world for us, if somebody gets you, you want a chance to get 'em back. That's how it works," said KU coach Bill Self, who understands why the Jayhawks wanted to play the 'Cats. "Our guys will be focused no matter what.

"We played well against them (the 21-12 Buffs) at home. They almost got us on the road. (Alec) Burks and (Cory) Higgins are terrific. (Levi) Knutson is a good player. (Marcus) Relphorde is a tough match for anybody. He's a three man playing a four, and they are fighting for their life."

The Buffs, who may already have locked up a spot in the NCAA Tournament, would solidify a spot with a victory over No. 2-ranked KU today.

"We're not taking anybody lightly. Some might say we took them lightly today, but we didn't have it offensively," senior Mario Little said after KU's narrow 63-62 victory over Oklahoma State. "We're not taking anybody lightly."

The Jayhawks have won 17 in a row and 44 of 45 versus CU.

Of course, this is a different Buffs team, led by KU grad Tad Boyle.

"They present a heck of a challenge," Boyle said of KU. "I hope they shoot from the perimeter tomorrow like they did today (5-25 from three vs. OSU). Because what makes them so hard to guard is they've got inside post presence from multiple guys. And they've got some pretty good capable shooters surrounding them.

"They're a good team. It's going to be a heck of a challenge. But our guys are ready for it. It's time for us, hey, let's go ball. We know what we have to do. Let's let it all hang out, we've got nothing to lose, and we're going to be loose, but we'll be ready."

Burks, a sophomore guard from Grandview, Mo., scored 24 points versus K-State off 7-of-14 shooting.

Fest. The game was broadcast on multiple TVs and many of the nearby bars opened early.

"It's love," Burks said of his thoughts playing so close to home. "I'll always come back to Kansas City and put on a great show. It's love because I'm from here, so I love

playing in Kansas City."

The Jayhawks definitely respect Burks, who scored 25 versus KU in Boulder and 15 in Lawrence.

"Him and Marcus could have got half player of the year with each other," Markieff Morris said. Instead Marcus was Big 12 player of the year, with both Burks and Morris first-team all-league picks. "He definitely led his team to a remarkable season. He is a tough challenge for us."

"He definitely could have been player of the year," Marcus said.

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KANSAS CITY, Mo. – Every February, the folks at NCAA headquarters do what they can to simulate the men's [basketball](#) tournament selection process for a large group of media folks who visit.

The same procedures and scenarios the committee will face are introduced to 20 writers and broadcasters assembled in a large conference room. The one situation they cannot manufacture, though, is the that which confronted Colorado as the Buffaloes arrived here Monday afternoon to compete in the Big 12 Tournament:



Kansas State's Jacob Pullen pressures Colorado guard Alec Burks. (AP Photo)

How desperately do the Buffs want to be a part of the NAAs?

Seems they want it a lot.

"We're still trying not to focus on that," guard Levi Knutson said. "We're here to win this tournament, and then we'll let the chips fall where they may after that."

The plan to win here remained alive Thursday when guard Cory Higgins played a sensational [game](#), scoring 28 points on a variety of balletic drives through the heart of the defense, and backcourt partner Alec Burks added 24 in an 87-75 victory over previously red-hot Kansas State.

The victory lifted the Buffs to 21-12 overall. It was their fourth win against an RPI top 25 team and evened their top-50 record at 6-6. They have three defeats the committee will hold against them (Iowa State, San Francisco and Oklahoma, all on the road) but might very well have assured themselves of their first NCAA trip since 2003. CU didn't just sweep Kansas State, it went 3-0 against the Wildcats.

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"These young men are trying to make a statement and leave their footprints in the sands of time," CU coach Tad Boyle said. "And the only way you can do that is wear your work boots every single day and come to the gym – like we came to the gym ready to go."

No one in authority ever has said there is such a thing as an elimination game, but it's obvious from past decisions that teams that indicate they're really not all that interested aren't that interesting to the folks on the section committee.

The Buffaloes needed to advance out of the Big 12 first round to have a chance at the NCAA Tournament, and they handled that by the narrowest of margins against the weakest team the league had to offer, a mere two points over Iowa State.

It was more [comfortable](#) this time, but certainly not the laughter the final score suggests. It was a one-point game with 1:26 left, but CU made 10 free throws in the little time that remained to stretch out the lead.

The Buffaloes did not celebrate as though they'd clinched anything more concrete than a berth in the Big 12 semis Friday opposite No. 2 Kansas.

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That is all that's assured.

Although they will need to win that game to win the Big 12 championship, it shouldn't be a requirement for admission to the NAAs.

A year ago, Boyle was in the process of building the program at Northern Colorado, which recently had transitioned to Division I. And he was successful enough that when the CU job opened, he was a natural choice for the Buffs.

Wednesday night, UNC won the Big Sky title and clinched an automatic bid. Thursday afternoon, Colorado took a huge step toward an at-large bid – and, as Knutson said, perhaps toward their own automatic.

"I'm extremely proud of the Buffaloes. I'm extremely proud of the Bears," Boyle said. "It would be a great day on Sunday if we both got in."

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