



Levi Knutson hit 5-of-7 three-point attempts.
Photo Courtesy: Tony Harman



03/11/2011 B.G. Brooks, Contributing Editor

Jayhawks Hold On To Eliminate Buffs From Big 12

KANSAS CITY, Mo. - Let the waiting game begin.

If winning two games in the Big 12 Conference tournament added enough bulk to its resume, Colorado's NCAA Tournament destination will be decided on Sunday afternoon when the NCAA Selection Committee announces its 68-team field.

CU's opportunity to earn an automatic NCAA berth as the Big 12 champion and end the suspense was quashed Friday night in the Sprint Center by top-seeded, second-ranked Kansas. After using a 12-0 run early in the second half and appearing to comfortably distance themselves from the No. 5 seed Buffaloes, the Jayhawks were forced to hold on for a 90-83 win that advanced them to Saturday's championship game.

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Trailing by 18 points with 14 minutes to play, CU cut the deficit to 86-80 in the final minute but could come no closer.

"I'm not real happy with the outcome . . . but we took some big-time strides in Kansas City," said first-year CU Coach Tad Boyle. "I'm proud of our resiliency and toughness, but we came here to win this tournament."

CU (21-13) has not played in the NCAA Tournament since 2003, and is hopeful of making only its third NCAA appearance in the past 41 years. If the Buffs don't make it this season - their best since 1996-97 when they won 22 games and were in the NCAAs - it will send them into the NIT with spirits sagging.

"We know we're going to be in postseason," said Boyle, "but we hope it's the NCAA tournament. If it's not, we'll be extremely disappointed . . . but it's something you have no control over."

After falling behind by 18 points in the second half, CU rallied gamely, cutting the KU lead to 79-70 on a Levi Knutson three-pointer with 3:48 to play, to 84-77 on another Knutson trey, and finally to 86-80 on a conventional three-point play by Alec Burks with 38 seconds left.

After that, the Buffs were forced to foul and the Jayhawks sealed their 31st win of the season (two losses) at the free throw line, putting the Buffs' NCAA fate in the unpredictable hands of the selection committee.

"We didn't have enough juice and gas in the tank to get over the hump . . . but you can't fault these guys and their effort," Boyle said, agreeing that playing three games in three days likely took its toll on his team. Senior Cory Higgins, who picked up CU in its quarterfinal win on Thursday against Kansas State, finished with only six points after scoring 28 the previous day. Higgins was 1-for-11 from the field.

Boyle, forced by fouls to play "unconventional lineups," said KU "did a great job on Cory . . . they made Alec and Cory work. They make you earn it; they're not going to break down.

"In Cory's case, he expended a lot of emotional energy (Thursday) and midway through the second half (Friday), he didn't have that pep in his step."

Burks led CU with 23 points, followed by Knutson with 17. KU had four players in double figures, topped by brothers Marcus and Markieff Morris with 20 each. Tyrel Reed and Tyshawn Taylor added 15 each.

KU Coach Bill Self was more perplexed than distraught about his team allowing an 18-point lead to slip to six. "They got it to six in the final minute, and that's nothing to be proud of," he said. "But sometimes that's misleading - you hit a couple of shots . . . and that's what they did. You don't ever like to lose a lead, but I don't feel like we ever lost control as far as the outcome."

He also called CU's 49.2 shooting percentage from the field - 51.5 in the second half - "troublesome . . . we've done a good job over time in defending people."

Among the Buffs' pregame goals were limiting the Jayhawks' number of three-point baskets and being more competitive on the boards than they had been in a pair of regular-season losses. The

Buffs stayed close to meeting that first goal for a large portion of a first half that saw them build a 22-10 lead; they didn't allow a Jayhawk three until Markieff Morris, trailing in transition, buried the first with 7:22 left before halftime.

That basket capped a 17-4 KU run in which all the points were scored by the Morris Brothers - nine by Markieff, eight by Marcus. It brought the Jayhawks all the way back and then some, giving them their first lead of the game, 27-26.

The Jayhawks hit only five of 25 three-point attempts in their 63-62 quarterfinal win on Thursday against Oklahoma State, and CU went into Thursday's semifinal match hoping that cold spell at the arc carried over. The Jayhawks weren't nearly that frigid in their two regular-season wins against the Buffs, shooting a combined 21-for-46 from three-point range.

So holding KU to one trey for almost 17 minutes was an accomplishment. But not many in the Sprint Center believed that would last - and it didn't.

Mario Little and Reed knocked down three-pointers on consecutive first-half possessions, and after a pair of free throws by Reed with 34.3 seconds before the break, KU had its largest lead of the half - 43-37 - into halftime. For the game, the Jayhawks made seven of their 17 trey attempts.

The Buffs didn't come close to meeting their rebounding goal. Out-boarded 78-53 in their two regular-season losses to the Jayhawks, the Buffs lost Friday's battle 41-26.

"A 15 (margin) on the glass is a pretty good number," Self said, adding that his team "played some of our best ball" in finishing the first half after CU had built its 12-point first-half lead and in a 12-0 run early in the second half to construct its big lead.

"Colorado played great, especially in the first half," Self said. "We got down 22-10 before we woke up ... I've got a lot of respect for Tad and their guys."

For what it's worth, Self also believes the Buffs will make the NCAA field and that they will present a formidable task for whoever draws them.

"I think so," he said. "Tad's done a good job ... they've got two terrific offensive players (Burks and Higgins) and a pretty good third (Knutson). I think they're in (and) I don't think anybody will look forward to matching up with these guys - they're dangerous."

But they haven't been too dangerous for the Jayhawks. Since a one-point Buffs win in Boulder in 2003, the Jayhawks have won 18 straight, including 82-78 (Boulder) and 89-63 (Lawrence) this season.

The Buffs, who advanced to Friday's game with wins over Iowa State (77-75) and Kansas State (87-75), were making their first appearance in the Big 12 semifinals while the Jayhawks were in the semis for the second consecutive season and 13th time in the league's 15-year history.

The Buffs raced to a 6-0 lead and expanded that to 11-2 before Reed hit the Jayhawks' first field goal with 16:20 left before halftime. CU kept up its torrid early shooting and expanded its lead to 22-10 before Self called a timeout. His message worked.

The Morris Bros. scored 10 points each in the first half, while no CU player reached double figures. Burks had eight points for the Buffs, with Nate Tomlinson and Knutson scoring six each. Tomlinson didn't score against ISU and had only three against K-State. He was one of three CU players to finish with nine points.

Just short of the half's midway point, CU was shooting 66.0 percent from the field. But by halftime, that had dropped to 46.7. The Buffs had cooled off and the Jayhawks had discovered their usual comfort zone.

With 13:48 to play, Burks was fouled on a drive to the basket and took a hard fall, landing on his back and appearing to have the wind knocked out of him. He eventually bounced back up, shot two free throws and explained afterwards that he fell on his left wrist.

"I hurt my wrist a little," he said. "I had both feet in the air and I fell on my back."

Burks had opened the second half with a tip-in to draw CU within 43-39, and Tomlinson added his third trey of the evening to keep the Buffs within five points (47-42).

At that point the Jayhawks seemed to tire of seeing someone just over their shoulders and quickly pulled away. After Tomlinson's trey, KU - again with the Morrisses doing the most damage - put together a 12-0 run and appeared to effectively close this one out.

The Jayhawks shot ahead by 18 (62-44) when Elijah Johnson buried a three at the 14 minute mark. But the Buffs refused to go quietly, making a game of it and avoiding what some selection committee members might have viewed as a detrimental loss.

Boyle agreed that from early Friday night until late Sunday afternoon is a long time to wait before he and his team learn their postseason plans. "Yeah, it is," he said. "But right now we need some rest and we'll get that (Saturday). Until your name pops up there (during Sunday's selection show), we're not going to put the cart before the horse."

He said his team "has come a long way and overcome a lot," noting that it has "adjusted, grown and bonded" during the course of his first season. "I'm very proud of our program."

Before their final season, none of the CU seniors had played on a winning team or left the Big 12 tournament assured of playing in the postseason. "It's definitely a different feeling," Knutson said. "We made strides as a team, but you're never satisfied with a loss."

"But this team is playing the best basketball since I've been here. I'm proud of the guys on this team and what we've done."

Contact: BG.Brooks@Colorado.EDU

SHOW MENU



CU Buffs' Big 12 run ended by Kansas

Second-ranked Jayhawks officially boot CU from Big 12

By Ryan Thorburn Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 03/11/2011 07:23:15 PM MST

KANSAS CITY, Mo. -- This is usually where Colorado basketball comes in March to be put out of its misery.

The Buffs' four previous seasons all came to an end at the Big 12 Tournament. In three of those years, CU racked up 20 or more losses. Last year a loss to Texas Tech cost the program an NIT bid.

Mad, yes. Madness? Not even close.

The bar has been raised by Tad Boyle. Goodbye Big 12, hello NCAA Tournament?

The Buffs' final run at the Big 12 Tournament ended with a 90-83 loss to No. 2 Kansas on Friday night in the semifinals at the Sprint Center in front of a Rock-Chalking crowd of 18,910.

But CU, which had never made it past the quarterfinals in this tournament, had likely already played its way into the Big Dance with wins over Iowa State and Kansas State the previous two days.

"It feels pretty good knowing that we're going to be in some type of postseason," said senior Cory Higgins, who appeared to be playing on an empty tank, finishing 1-for-11 from the field with a season-low six points. "Obviously, we want to be in the (NCAA) Tournament. It will be a much less depressing feeling going back home."

It looked like the Buffs (21-13) -- only the third team in the program's 108-year history to get to 21 wins -- had some magic left for the top-seeded Jayhawks (31-2) after storming out to a 22-10 lead.

CU had an 11-2 head start after early 3-pointers from Nate Tomlinson and Marcus Relphorde. Tyrel Reed finally made KU's first field goal 3:40 into the game.

They Jayhawks cut the deficit to three points (13-10), but CU answered with a 9-0 run, capped with a dunk and jumper by Alec Burks, who finished with a game-high 23 points.

"I thought Colorado played great, especially in the first half," KU head coach Bill Self said. "They got us down 22-10 before we woke up. And then we actually played some of our best ball of the year."

Two of the players who were awakened are giants -- Marcus Morris (6-9, 235), the Big 12 Player of the Year, and Markieff Morris (6-10, 245). They combined for 40 points (20 each) and 21 rebounds in the game.

Marcus Morris scored the next seven points to start a 19-4 surge by the Jayhawks. A Brady Morningstar basket gave KU a 29-26 lead with 7:07 to play before the break.

Levi Knutson stopped the bleeding and evened the score with his first 3-pointer. The senior sharpshooter splashed another shot from behind the arc to give CU a 32-29 edge.

Mario Little and Reed each made 3-pointers down the stretch as KU closed the half with a 12-3 spurt and led 43-37.

"The thing that killed us against KU all three times is rebounding," Boyle said. "We out-rebounded Texas, but we couldn't do anything about KU on the boards. That's the frustrating part."

The Morris Bros. had 10 points each at the intermission and combined for 12 rebounds to match CU's team. By the end of the game KU had a 41-26 edge on the glass with 16 second-chance points.

The Jayhawks opened the second half with 16-5 run, which concluded with 12 unanswered points and a basket by Markieff Morris for a 59-42 lead.

"They're two of the best bigs in the whole nation," Higgins said of the Morris twins. "To have them on the same front line is tough to deal with."

CU continued to play hard and cut KU's largest lead of 18 points in half when Andre Roberson finished an 8-0 rally with a dunk to make the score 74-65.

Reed restored some order with two clutch 3-pointers in the final 4:20 to give KU leads of 79-67 and 82-70.

The Buffs would not go away and were within six points (86-80) after a 3-pointer by Knutson and a three-point play by Burks with 38.6 seconds left.

Fittingly, Marcus and Markieff Morris closed the game out at the free-throw line where they were a combined 17-for-20.

"I'm very proud of our resiliency and our toughness to come back in the second half against a good team," Boyle said. "But we're not happy with the result. We came here to win this tournament, and I know these guys in the locker room are disappointed."

And now the Buffs will wait until Sunday evening to learn their postseason fate. The coaches, players and members of the athletic department will gather at Boyle's home to watch the live NCAA Tournament selection show on television.

"Until your name pops up there, we're not going to put the cart in front of the horse," Boyle said. "We're going to certainly hope and keep our fingers crossed."

Kansas 90, Colorado 83

COLORADO

FG FT Reb

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

Dufault 25 2-5 2-5 2-5 0 4 6

Tomlinson 22 3-4 0-1 0-1 4 1 9

Relphorde 23 4-9 0-0 1-4 4 3 9

Burks 33 9-18 5-6 4-5 6 3 23

Higgins 33 1-11 4-4 1-2 1 4 6

Sharpe 7 2-2 0-0 0-0 1 0 4

Beckley 2 0-0 0-0 0-0 0 2 0

Coney 1 0-0 0-0 0-0 0 0 0

Roberson 23 4-5 0-0 1-5 1 5 9

Knutson 26 6-9 0-0 1-1 0 0 17

Mills 5 0-0 0-2 1-2 0 0 0

Totals 200 31-63 11-18 11-26 17 22 83

Percentages: FG .492, FT .611.

3-Point Goals: 10-27, .370 (Knutson 5-7, Tomlinson 3-4, Roberson 1-1, Relphorde 1-5, Higgins 0-3, Dufault 0-3, Burks 0-4).

Team Rebounds: 1.

Blocked Shots: 1 (Roberson).

Turnovers: 10 (Relphorde 3, Tomlinson 2, Dufault 2, Burks, Knutson, Higgins).

Steals: 8 (Roberson 3, Relphorde 2, Tomlinson 2, Burks).

Technical Fouls: None.

KANSAS

FG FT Reb

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

Mark Morris 25 6-10 7-8 5-8 0 2 20

Marc Morris 33 5-12 10-12 6-13 4 3 20

Morningstar 36 3-9 0-0 1-4 5 1 6

Reed 34 4-7 4-4 1-3 1 3 15

Johnson 10 1-2 0-0 0-2 0 3 3

Robinson 9 1-1 0-0 0-1 0 3 2

Taylor 29 4-7 7-8 0-2 4 0 15

Little 12 1-1 0-0 0-2 0 1 3

Releford 1 0-0 0-0 0-0 0 0 0

Selby 11 2-6 1-1 2-4 0 2 6

Totals 200 27-55 29-33 15-41 14 18 90

Percentages: FG .491, FT .879.

3-Point Goals: 7-17, .412 (Reed 3-6, Little 1-1, Mark. Morris 1-2, Johnson 1-2, Selby 1-3, Morningstar 0-3).

Team Rebounds: 2.

Blocked Shots: 2 (Mark. Morris 2).

Turnovers: 15 (Marc. Morris 4, Taylor 4, Reed 2, Selby 2, Little, Morningstar, Mark. Morris).

Steals: 4 (Marc. Morris 3, Reed).

Technical Fouls: None.

Colorado 37 46--83

Kansas 43 47--90

A -- 18,910.

Officials -- John Higgins, Mark Whitehead, Terry Oglesby.

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Self thinks CU Buffs will make NCAA tourney

By Ryan Thorburn Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 03/11/2011 11:55:55 PM MST

Colorado advanced to the semifinals of the Big 12 Tournament for the first time in the 15-year history of the event.

After the Buffs' 90-83 loss to No. 2 Kansas in the semifinals on Friday night at the Sprint Center, Jayhawks head coach Bill Self said he wouldn't be surprised if CU also made some noise in the NCAA Tournament next week.

"I definitely believe they are in (the field)," Self said. "I don't think anybody will look forward to matching up with those guys. They're dangerous."

Alec Burks scored a game-high 23 points on 9-for-18 shooting. The 6-foot-6 sophomore guard had 29 points in the 75-73 win over Iowa State in the opening round and 24 points in Thursday's 87-75 victory over Kansas State.

Cory Higgins struggled against KU but was coming off one of the best performances of his career with 28 points on 10-for-15 shooting against the Wildcats.

Levi Knutson finished the tournament 8-for-15 from 3-point distance. He had 17 points against KU on a 6-for-9 night from the field.

"They've got two terrific offensive players and a third that can just shoot the lights out," Self said. "Obviously, they could be very dangerous, because if those guys are hot on the right night, they can play with anybody and beat anybody."

CU went 0-3 against the Jayhawks this season but 3-0 against K-State. A split of the Sunflower State combined with wins over Missouri and Texas is expected to get the Buffs into the expanded field of 68 when the brackets are announced on Sunday.

Burks scare

Burks took a nasty spill after a hard foul with 13:48 remaining in the game. The unanimous All-Big 12 First Team selection and projected first-round NBA pick was unable to break his fall and landed with a thud on the court.

After a timeout by CU, Burks remained in the game and went 1-for-2 at the line.

"I'm good now," said Burks, who had a bag of ice wrapped around his left wrist after the game. "I'll bounce back."

CU head coach Tad Boyle said Burks should be ready for practice on Monday after the team learns its postseason fate.

"Alec's a tough kid," Boyle said. "It's his left hand, which is good, not his right hand. He'll fight through it. It was a nasty fall but it was a basketball play."

Burks grew up in nearby Grandview, Mo., and had a section of family and friends cheering him on from behind the CU bench throughout the tournament.

Out of gas?

Higgins finished with a season-low six points on 1-for-11 shooting. The senior didn't want to blame fatigue for the performance but playing three games in three days appeared to take its toll.

"Cory expended a lot of energy (against Kansas State), a lot of emotional energy as much as physical energy," Boyle said. "I did feel like midway through the second half he just didn't have that pep in his step."

KU's Tyrel Reed scored 15 points while guarding Higgins on the other end.

"If you would have told me going into the game that Tyrel would get fifteen and the other guy, who is one of the best offensive players in our league, would get six ... I would say that definitely shifted the scale to our favor," Self said.

Sour grapes

After CU's win over Kansas State on Thursday in the quarterfinals, Frank Martin acknowledge that the Buffs had proven on the court to be a better team than his 19th-ranked Wildcats this season.

Apparently, losing three times to the Buffs wasn't enough evidence for some of Martin's players to draw the same conclusion.

"It's aggravating because I don't think they're better than us," K-State senior forward Curtis Kelly told the Kansas City Star. "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."

Series update

KU added to its domination of CU with Friday's win and now leads the all-time series 122-39, including an 8-0 record in conference tournaments.

The Jayhawks have won 18 consecutive games against the Buffs and 45 of the last 46 meetings. CU's final Big 12 win over KU was on Jan. 22, 2003 (60-59).

Notable

CU finishes 9-15 all-time at the Big 12 Tournament. ... The Buffs have already played their most games ever in a season (34). ... CU is 3-2 in neutral-court games this season.

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THE DENVER POST

kansas 90, cu 83

Jayhawks' power game denies Buffs

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

Posted: 03/12/2011 01:00:00 AM MST

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Kansas coach Bill Self appeared almost as drained as his players following Friday night's 90-83 victory over fifth-seeded Colorado.

Free-wheeling in the open court, Colorado raced to an early 12-point lead on the second-ranked Jayhawks, the top seed in the Big 12 Tournament. Then, when Kansas appeared to have the game locked up, the Buffaloes stormed back late to make it entertaining in the Big 12 semifinal.

Count Self among those who believe Colorado will be included in the NCAA 68-team field when the bracket is announced Sunday at 4 p.m.

"Tad (Boyle) has done a great job," Self said of CU's first-year coach. "And they've got two terrific offensive players (Alec Burks and Cory Higgins),

and a third (super-sub Levi Knutson) that can just shoot lights out.

"They could be very dangerous (in the NCAA) because if those guys are hot, they can play with anybody and beat anybody."

Burks, a Kansas City native, scored a game-high 23 points, but Higgins had his worst game of the season. Hounded by gritty KU senior Tyrel Reed and possibly out of gas after keying an emotional victory over No. 19 Kansas State on Thursday, the 6-foot-5 senior made just one of 11 shots and finished with six points — a season low.

Knutson provided a late lift, scoring 11 of his 17 points in the second half. But Kansas, a likely No. 1 seed in the NCAA Tournament, has enough firepower to match anybody's scoring runs.

The Morris twins, 6-9, 235-pound Marcus and Markieff (6-10, 252), combined for 40 points and 21 rebounds. Colorado had no answer for their power in the paint. The junior forwards each scored 20 points, providing balance that makes it doubly difficult on a defense.

"Definitely we want to play through our bigs," Reed said.

The Jayhawks (30-2, 14-2 Big 12) advanced to today's championship game against Texas, hoping to claim their eighth Big 12 Tournament title in the league's 15 years.

Scoring the game's first six points, CU's opening volley caused Self to turn red in the face as he signaled for a timeout. And Colorado kept it going — for a while, at least.

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The Buffs quieted the Sprint Center's sellout crowd of 18,910 and forced another KU timeout when a 17-footer by Burks completed a 9-0 run to make it 22-10.

Kansas then began to look to the Morris brothers for answers, and they willingly grabbed the reins. During a span of a bit less than six minutes the duo combined for 17 consecutive KU points, with Marcus, an All-American candidate, starting it going with seven points before Markieff took over.

Suddenly it was Kansas 31, Colorado 29.

Timeout, Buffs.

"(After) we woke up," Self said, "we actually played some of our best ball of the year. Then we kind of faltered. We'll take it."

It's widely believed that Colorado had already secured a bid to the NCAA Tournament bid Thursday with the 87-75 victory over Kansas State, so perhaps CU conserving some energy for next week will be a blessing in disguise.

Colorado kept grinding to the end, however, and an incredible flip lay-in by Burks with 1:32 left cut Kansas' lead to 82-74. Kansas then committed a turnover, giving Colorado a chance to draw closer. But Colorado missed.

"I'm very, very proud with our resiliency and our toughness to come back in the second half, the way we did that against a good team," Boyle said. "We just didn't have enough juice left in our

tanks."

An adrenaline rush should be forthcoming late Sunday afternoon.

Tom Kensler: 303-954-1280 or tkensler@denverpost.com

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THE DENVER POST

cu basketball

Bufs now wait to see about tourney

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

Posted: 03/12/2011 01:00:00 AM MST

Updated: 03/12/2011 01:07:03 AM MST

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Colorado players and coaches acknowledged they are in for a long day and a half before the 4 p.m. "Selection Sunday" announcement to find out whether CU will show up in the 68-team NCAA Tournament bracket.

"We need some rest, obviously," CU coach Tad Boyle said after a 90-83 loss to Kansas in the Big 12 semifinals. "And you never know until your name pops up there. We're not going to put the cart in front of the horse. We're going to certainly hope and keep our fingers crossed. But a lot of things are still out of our control. . . . And if (Colorado is not selected), we'll be extremely disappointed."

Colorado (21-13, 8-8 Big 12 regular season) departed Kansas City with two Big 12 Tournament victories in three starts, and likely gained a lot more respect nationally. Most analysts who study the bracket believe the Buffs will be selected.

"We feel good leaving here knowing we're going to be in some type of postseason," senior guard Cory Higgins said.

Higgins struggles.

Coming off one of his best games of the season, Higgins just didn't have it Friday night. He went 1-for-11 from the field and finished with six points — a season low. It marked only the fourth time this season he failed to reach double figures.

"I thought Kansas did a great job on Cory," Boyle said.

Scary Burks fall.

With CU sophomore Alec Burks being a Kansas City native, the entire sea of spectators, not just Buff fans, held their collective breath when the 6-foot-6 guard took a nasty fall with 13:48 remaining.

Burks got tangled up with a couple of KU players, including guard Elijah Johnson, who was called for a foul. Burks remained on the floor a minute or so before getting up.

"I had both my feet in the air, and I fell on my back," Burks said. "I'm good now."

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Posted on Fri, Mar. 11, 2011

Kansas Jayhawks basketball: KU reaches Big 12 title game with 90-83 win

By J. BRADY McCOLLOUGH
The Wichita Eagle

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Markieff Morris didn't even know that he'd scored 10 straight points during Kansas' crucial push in a 90-83 victory over Colorado, and maybe there's something to that.

"I think I made one move in that whole span," Morris said.

It was not that No. 2 KU suddenly decided, upon falling behind 22-10 in the first seven minutes of Friday night's Big 12 semifinal game at the Sprint Center, that it better play through the Morris twins. It was that the Morris twins started attacking the offensive glass — asserting their size advantage over the Buffaloes — and then good things just started to happen for the Jayhawks.

Marcus scored seven points in a row, Markieff followed him with his 10 in a row, and the Jayhawks went on a 19-4 run that spurred a 30-point swing. With 14:14 left in the second half, Kansas led 62-44.

"We actually played some of our best ball of the year probably from about the 10-minute mark to about the 10-minute mark of the second half," KU coach Bill Self said.

On Thursday in KU's 63-62 quarterfinal victory over Oklahoma State, it took the Jayhawks until the final minutes to figure out a way to advance. On Friday, the top seed immediately responded to the Buffs' challenge, and it will be rewarded with its desired result: a rematch with No. 2 seed Texas in the championship game.

"The coaches asked us five minutes ago, who did we want to play, and we all said Texas," Marcus Morris said. "We're going to be ready. We've been waiting for a while to play those guys. It's a payback game."

The Longhorns handed the Jayhawks their first loss, 74-63 on Jan. 22 in Allen Fieldhouse. It was also KU's first loss on its home court in nearly four years. Thing is, Kansas didn't take that loss as hard as its defeat at Kansas State later in the season. The night before the Texas game, KU sophomore forward Thomas Robinson found out that his mother died. The Jayhawks stayed up with him all night. Some players didn't sleep at all before their 3 p.m. game.

"It was a lot," Marcus said. "We can't make any excuses, but we had a lot of things going on. We came out and we played off all emotion early, and, in the second half, we were just drained out. That's just what happened."

Self described it as a "weird day in Allen Fieldhouse." In some ways, it hardly even felt like a loss.

"I honestly kind of felt like for a while we didn't even count that loss," Tyshawn Taylor said, "like it wasn't even on our record almost. There was so much other stuff going on. That was the least of our worries at that time. After a while, it was like, we lost to Texas, and we know that."

No doubt, if Kansas lost to Texas tonight, it would feel much differently. KU-UT is the rare rivalry that is built on mutual respect.

"But you can't have too much respect," Marcus said, "because that's how you lose games."

The Jayhawks and Longhorns have played some classics in the last five years, but Kansas has won three straight in Big 12 Tournament finals (2006-08).

"We've had some unbelievable matchups with Texas over the years in this tournament," Self said. "That would be nice to add another chapter to that story."

Kansas will be there, thanks to a big night from the Morris twins, who each scored 20 points.

Markieff's stretch said it all for Kansas' night. He made a free throw (the Jayhawks made 29 of 33). He scored a layup off a dish from Brady Morningstar, who had five assists. Morris grabbed an offensive rebound — Kansas rebounded 54 percent (15 of 28) of its own misses — and put it back for two. Then he tossed in a baby hook from the baseline and drilled a three-pointer in transition to give the Jayhawks their first lead at 27-26. And he did it with a simple agenda.

"I was just trying to steal extra possessions," Morris said.

Check J. Brady McCollough's KU blog at blogs.kansas.com/jayhawk. Reach him at jmccollough@wichitaeagle.com.