

CU Buffs' resiliency will be tested in NIT opener in Boulder

Boyle eager to see how squad reacts to snub

By **Ryan Thorburn** Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 03/15/2011 07:26:36 PM MDT



[Click on any photo to see full gallery](#)

The prevailing feeling from coast to coast is that Colorado deserved to be in the NCAA Tournament.

Well-respected Seattle Times columnist Bud Withers on bubble teams scored:

"Clearly, the team with a beef is Colorado, which was 6-7 against the top 50, usually a figure that would guarantee entry."

ESPN college basketball analyst Dick Vitale, known for his love of all things Big East and ACC, said if this were a beauty contest, at-large selection Alabama-Birmingham would be Roseanne Barr and shunned CU would be Scarlett Johansson.

"You talk about the eye test? This one doesn't make it through the laugh test," added ESPN's Jay Bilas, a former Duke player who received his Juris Doctor from the school.

The Buffs are even receiving support in Nebraska. Omaha World-Herald columnist Dirk Chatelain opined:

"Colorado, with five wins over top-40 teams, got snubbed for an at-large bid in favor of Alabama-Birmingham. ... Three

times it toppled Kansas State. UAB, on the other hand, beat nobody."

"I think it's great because it means I don't have to say a whole lot," CU head coach Tad Boyle said of the national attention. "It's obviously something that other people recognize. I think that's a good thing. It just confirms what we already believe."

The Buffs (21-13) strongly believe they should have been in the NCAA Tournament. So how will they react when they get back on the court tonight for a first-round NIT game against Texas Southern?

Boyle looks forward to finding out when the game tips off at 7 p.m. at the Coors Events Center (ESPN3.com, AM 760).

"This group has been resilient all year and this is the ultimate test of that," said Boyle, who was pleased with the mood and effort of the players during practices on Monday and Tuesday. "We won't know until we step on the floor, you never do as a coach. But I like the mindset of our team and where we're at."

Typically, teams that feel slighted by the selection committee either lose early in the NIT or make a run to the Final Four in New York to prove their point.

CU is a No. 1 seed and favored to do the latter. The Coors Events Center will also host a second- and third-round game if the Buffs advance.

"Hopefully we can get that taste out of our mouths and kind of channel that frustration the right way," said senior guard Levi Knutson, one of the last players to leave Boyle's house on Sunday after a planned celebration turned into a nightmare of an evening. "Nobody wants it to end that way, especially the five seniors don't want it to end that way. We'll be ready to go."

The visiting Tigers (19-12) won't feel sorry for CU. Texas Southern won the Southwest Athletic Conference regular season only to have its invitation to the Big Dance taken away by an upset in the SWAC Tournament.

"They have a lot of seniors who don't want their season to end either," Boyle said. "They've got a lot of pride and they won their league, which to me is the ultimate test of a champion."

Alec Burks, the Buffs' first and last All-Big 12 Tournament selection, seemed to be as upset about not making the NCAA Tournament as Cory Higgins and the seniors. The projected first-round pick said the snub won't factor into his decision to go pro or return to CU next year.

"I feel like we had a great season, whether we got in or not," Burks said. "At the end of the day, I'm still going to make my decision based on how I feel at the end of the season."

The season could end tonight or after cutting down the nets at Madison Square Garden at the end of the month.

TONIGHT: The Colorado Buffs (21-13) host the Texas Southern Tigers (19-12) in the first round of the NIT at 7 p.m. at the Coors Events Center.

BROADCAST: Television on ESPN3.com with Dave Armstrong (play-by-play) and Bill Herenda (analyst). Radio on KKZN (760 AM) with Mark Johnson (play-by-play).

STORY LINES: The top-seeded Buffs were left out of the NCAA Tournament despite finishing fifth in the Big 12 and advancing to the semifinals of the Big 12 Tournament for the first time. ... Alec Burks is a finalist for the Wooden Award. The sophomore became the first CU player named to the All-Big 12 Tournament team after averaging 25.3 points and 8.7 rebounds in Kansas City, Mo., last week. ... The No. 8 Tigers finished 16-2 to win the SWAC regular-season title only to get upset by Alabama State in the semifinals of the conference tournament. ... Texas Southern, like CU, also beat Oregon State this season and lost road games at Oklahoma, Iowa State and Baylor. The Tigers also lost at Kansas State, a team the Buffs went 3-0 against.

COACHES: Tad Boyle is 21-13 in his first season at CU. Tony Harvey is 43-55 in his third season at Texas Southern.

PROBABLE STARTERS: **Colorado** -- G Nate Tomlinson, 6-3, Jr., 3.2 ppg, 1.7 rpg; G Marcus Relphorde, 6-7, Sr., 11.5 ppg, 4.3 rpg; G Alec Burks, 6-6, So., 20.1 ppg, 6.4 rpg; G Cory Higgins, 6-5, Sr., 15.8 ppg, 3.4 rpg; F Austin Dufault, 6-9, Jr., 7.0 ppg, 4.1 rpg. **Texas Southern** -- G Lawrence Johnson-Danner, 6-4, Fr., 12.9 ppg, 2.4 rpg; F Daniel King, 6-8, Jr.,

5.0 ppg, 5.5 rpg; F Travele Jones, 6-8, Sr., 15.9 ppg, 6.9 rpg; F Kevin Galloway, 6-7, Sr., 11.1 ppg, 7.0 rpg; F Timothy Price, 6-11, Jr., 2.1 ppg, 2.4 rpg.

KEY STAT: The Buffs were also left out of the NCAA Tournament after winning 20 games in 2005-06. CU lost 79-61 to Old Dominion in Boulder in the first round of the NIT.

SERIES: CU leads 1-0, an 88-77 win on Nov. 18, 2009.

UP NEXT: The CU-Texas Southern winner will advance to the second round to face the Cal-Mississippi winner on either Friday or Sunday. If the Buffs win today, they will host the second-round game at the Coors Events Center.



Close Window

Send To Printer

Published March 15, 2011, 11:55 PM

Boyle: Numbers don't do Dufault justice

Austin Dufault doesn't score many points and when he makes SportsCenter's highlights, it's usually because he was guarding someone like Kansas standout Markieff Morris during a slam dunk.

By: [Dustin Monke](#), The Dickinson Press

Austin Dufault doesn't score many points and when he makes SportsCenter's highlights, it's usually because he was guarding someone like Kansas standout Markieff Morris during a slam dunk.

But to see what Dufault really means to the Colorado men's basketball team, head coach Tad Boyle says go to the film.

"You can't just look at the numbers," Boyle said. "My thing is, you have to look at the film. Where I as a coach and Austin as a player know where he's played well or where there's room for improvement is from watching the film."

Boyle, in his first season at Colorado, said he believes Dufault has improved greatly this season despite the Killdeer High School graduate playing out of position as the team's starting center and often being overmatched against some of college basketball's best big men.

Dufault, a 6-foot-9 junior who starts in the post for Colorado, is averaging 7 points and 4.1 rebounds per game while shooting 54 percent from the field.

"It's a challenge every game and it's something that kept me up and kept my focus every game this year," Dufault said. "I had games where I didn't play well, but I never thought I came into a game not ready to play."

"In the past sometimes, if things weren't going our way, sometimes it's tough at the end of the season to get up for games when they don't mean much. This year, every game meant a lot to our team and myself. When you face that type of caliber of players every night, you've got to be ready to play."

That includes tonight, even though the Buffs aren't exactly where they want to be.

Colorado, still seething from the NCAA tournament selection committee's snub on Sunday, opens the National Invitation Tournament against Texas Southern at 7 p.m. today at the Coors Event Center in Boulder, Colo.

Dufault said the team has turned its focus to winning its next three games and securing a trip to play at New York's Madison Square Garden at the NIT Final Four.

"Everybody says it's the best place in the world to play basketball, so playing there is something that would be special," Dufault said. "Being able to go there would leave a good taste in our mouth, coming off of this season. We've accomplished so many things."

Though Texas Southern is far from a powerhouse team like those the Buffs face all season in the Big 12 Conference, Dufault doesn't get a break in the post.

He'll likely match up with 6-foot-11 junior forward Timothy Price.

Boyle said for the Buffs to succeed, Dufault must have a strong rebounding presence in the post.

In Colorado's 21 wins, Dufault averaged 4.4 rebounds per game. In its losses, he pulled down about 3.5 boards.

"He's a guy we need to rebound the basketball," Boyle said. "Rebounding is something that we stressed since we got here. Austin has the ability to do that. He's done it at times for us. When Austin is rebounding the ball well for us, we've been an awful good team."

Though his contributions haven't been significant, Dufault is a prominent member of a Colorado team that won more than 20 games for just the fifth time in school history.

If the Buffs (21-13) beat Texas Southern (19-12) tonight, they will tie a school record for most wins in the season.

"If we can get our focus back and fight through this adversity, it would be nice to go there and finish this thing off the right way," Dufault said.

Tags: [college basketball](#), [austin dufault](#), [colorado buffaloes](#), [sports](#)