



Alec Burks scores two of his game-high 27 points.
Photo Courtesy: Tony Harman



03/16/2011 B.G. Brooks, Contributing Editor

Bufs Send Tigers Packing; Cal Visits Friday

BOULDER - After being passed over four days earlier by the NCAA, the Colorado Buffaloes might have arrived at the Coors Events Center on Wednesday night wanting to express themselves. An enterprising fan found the right words (the search didn't take long) and put them in bold gold lettering on a black T-shirt he was peddling outside the arena: "SCREW THE SELECTION COMMITTEE."

That might not be possible, but the Buffs took the first step in proving that group made a shameful error. It wasn't letter-perfect basketball, but CU blistered Texas Southern 88-74 in its first-round NIT game, advancing to the second round on Friday at the Events Center to play future Pac-12 opponent California (7:30 p.m., ESPN).

BUFFALO EXTRAS



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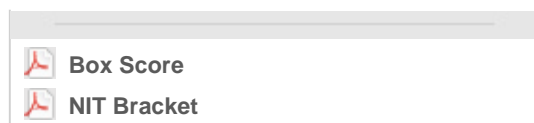
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Win that one, plus a following game at home next week, and CU is headed to Madison Square Garden for the NIT semifinals. It might not be the Big Dance, but the Big Apple for hoops in late March is a nice destination.



"We'll take that, I guess. It wasn't the prettiest game. I thought mentally, we were a little out of it . . . we had a little funk to us, if you will. We didn't have that mojo we need to have, that we had in Kansas City (at the Big 12 tournament). A lot of that is expected; I can't fault our guys too much for it, but we just have to get back to who we are and how we were playing," said Coach Tad Boyle, whose first CU team tied a school record with its 22nd win (13 losses).

The Buffs will have to reclaim their identity quickly, having only one day to prepare for the Golden Bears, a 77-74 winner over Mississippi. Boyle called Cal "a heck of a challenge for us" and said he expected "a Big 12 game" from the Golden Bears (18-14). He hoped CU students might delay beginning spring break - it starts Friday - "by six or seven hours . . . just stay for one more game and give us that lift, because we need it. Our students and fans have been great all year."

Wednesday night's game drew 6,299, a loud and appreciative crowd that saw double-figure performances from senior Cory Higgins, sophomore Alec Burks and freshman Andre Roberson. Burks, once again serenaded by chants of "One More Year" from the student section, led all scorers with 27 points, while Higgins added 25 and Roberson 15 and a game-best eight rebounds.

"Cory kind of willed us tonight," Boyle said. "I thought (he) was dialed in from the get-go . . . he was really dialed in all night."

As the disappointment of Sunday's snub wore off, Higgins said he and his teammates "definitely wanted to come out and play hard, keep some of the momentum we had at the end of the season. I don't know if it was a statement game, but I knew we were going to be locked in and try to make sure we win and get back to playing a good basketball game."

The Buffs were never in real trouble in the first half, but getting it going - *really* going - required a little time. With Texas Southern, the Southwestern Athletic Conference runner-up, hitting only one of its first seven field goal attempts, CU had no trouble taking an 8-2 lead. And the Buffs maintained their advantage throughout the first 20 minutes.

The Tigers' only genuine threat to comeback occurred when guard Harrison Smith hit a three-pointer with 5:39 before the break to cut the Buffs' lead to 26-23. That might have pushed the right button for CU and the eject button for TSU (19-13).

From that point until halftime, the Buffs were at their best on a night when their up-tempo offense was spotty. Burks was at the forefront of a 14-2 run that opened a 40-25 CU lead. After a Nate Tomlinson steal, Burks found Higgins on the left wing for a layup, then spied Andre Roberson alone underneath for a dunk. On the next trip down, Burks sliced under the basket from the left side, came up on the right and put the ball high on the backboard.

It nestled in the net and gave the Buffs their biggest advantage of the half, 40-25 - and CU maintained that 15-point lead (44-29) at the break.

Boyle said his team "spurted on offense," crediting TSU for "junking it up defensively" and causing

the Buffs' inconsistencies. "We never got into a flow."

CU's decisive run just before halftime, said Burks, didn't result from anyone's words during a timeout: "I don't remember anything being said . . . we wanted to go to half with a double-digit lead, maybe that's what sparked it."

Higgins finished the half with 16 points, Burks 12 and Roberson 9. The Tigers were held to 33.3 percent from the field (11-of-33) in the first half and 39.7 percent for the game (27-of-68). The Buffs shot 57.7 percent (15-of-26) in the first 20 minutes and 61.2 percent (30-of-49) for the full 40.

TSU seemed content to play an outside game early and went to the free throw line only three times in the opening half. CU, meanwhile, had taking it to the rim as its goal on almost every trip across half-court, drawing a dozen fouls and hitting 13-of-19 free throws (24-of-31 for the game).

CU opened the second half with a set play that featured Burks cutting in from the left wing and Tomlinson lobbing a pass that Burks caught and stuffed in one motion. The Buffs were up by the largest margin of the night to that point, 46-29.

The Tigers reeled off six consecutive points to close to within 11 (46-35) with 18:06 to play. But once again, Burks and the Buffs hit the gas. They steadily rebuilt their lead to 18 (55-37) on a Levi Knutson trey, then to 20 (65-45) on another Knutson three-pointer with 11:16 remaining.

From there, CU added to a potential NIT highlight reel, getting a lengthy trey by Burks, dunks by Roberson and Shannon Sharpe, a soft lay-in by Burks on a fast break, Higgins pulling up and hitting, driving and finishing, Burks with an acrobatic up-and-under layup . . . the list went on.

Texas Southern had stumbled into a bad place. When CU surged ahead 78-54 on a Higgins layup with 5:44 to play, the only issues in doubt were the final margin and how many fans would make it back in two nights.

CU's show goes on - without the NCAA but hopefully not its students and fans.

"They were great," Higgins said. "They've been great all year. For them to be behind us, especially this past week, was huge - and just knowing they're going to stick with us through thick and thin. We can't thank them enough.

"I don't think they're going to change their plans for spring break, but hopefully on Friday a couple of them are still left over."

Contact: BG.Brooks@Colorado.EDU

SHOW MENU



CU Buffs avoid letdown to win NIT opener over Texas Southern

Colorado next hosts California at 7:30 p.m. on Friday

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

Posted: 03/16/2011 08:57:45 PM MDT



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

The Buffs' goal for the season has now shifted from simply making the NCAA Tournament to winning the National Invitation Tournament.

Colorado got off to a good start in the postseason on Wednesday night by tying the program record for wins in a season (22) with an 88-74 victory over Texas Southern in the first round of the NIT in front of 6,299 hostile witnesses at the Coors Events Center.

Cory Higgins set the tone for the tournament by scoring 16 of his 25 points in the first half. In the process, the senior guard passed CU legend Cliff Meely for third on the school's all-time scoring list.

"We definitely were having fun out there. Anytime you can play another game with these guys it's always going to be fun, especially me being a senior," Higgins said after shooting 8-for-11 from the field in the first postseason game of his career. "We

just wanted to let it all hang out there and really just not worry about anything else."

Alec Burks scored a game-high 27 points on 8-for-9 shooting, and Andre Roberson added a career-high 15 points and a game-high eight rebounds for the Buffs.

"This is just good experience," said Roberson, a true freshman who seems to be getting better as the season ages. "If you lose, you're done for the rest of the season."

The top-seeded Buffs (22-13) will host No. 4 Cal (18-14) on Friday night at the Coors Events Center (7:30 p.m., ESPN).

CU head coach Tad Boyle and athletic director Mike Bohn hope that having a future Pac-12 foe in the house will help draw another good crowd in the second round.

The students, who came out in force to support the team with the incentive of free tickets courtesy of the athletic department, are expected to abandon campus on Friday ahead of next week's spring break.

"We were touched by our fans all week long with their support," Bohn said. "The ticket office has been busy all week and the students, as usual, were terrific. I thought they were classy and used great restraint in engaging in any type of message associated with the events from earlier in the week."

The Buffs knew it was time to let their play do the talking on how they feel about not being invited to the Big Dance.

Burks opened the second half with a dunk off a set play -- one of many highlight-reel slams -- to keep the crowd on its feet. Levi Knutson's second 3-pointer after halftime gave CU a 65-45 lead with 11:13 to play.

The Buffs led by as many as 24 points before Boyle subbed Higgins and Burks out to a standing ovation.

"Cory deserves it and he has deserved it before this year," Boyle said of the senior finally experiencing some form of

March madness. "I'm glad that he is being rewarded. All of our guys are being rewarded by it because they have worked awful hard."

After a sluggish start offensively, the Buffs led 44-29 at the intermission after closing the first half with an 18-6 run.

Texas Southern fell behind 10-2 out of the gates, but after making three 3-pointers and a three-point play during a four-possession spurt the visitors were within 26-23 with 5:38 to go.

"I thought mentally we were a little bit out of it," Boyle said. "Physically, I thought we played hard. Mentally, I thought we were in a little bit of a funk."

Burks capped a 10-0 run with a spectacular reverse layup to make the score 40-25 just before halftime.

CU finished the game shooting 61.2 percent from the field while holding the Southwest Athletic Conference regular-season champions to 39.7 percent.

The more aggressive Buffs won the battle of the boards 37-29 and made more free throws (24) than the Tigers attempted (16).

"I think they should have been in the (NCAA) Tournament," Texas Southern head coach Harrison Smith said. "It's always a big thing to go on the road because the crowd is also a big factor. Emotions get running and players feed off the emotion of the crowd."

A victory over Cal would give the Buffs more wins than any other team in program history.

"Obviously, we wanted to be in the NCAA Tournament and be remembered for that," Knutson said. "But I think being the winningest team at CU would be pretty special.

You get the feeling this group won't be completely satisfied without adding a Madison Square Garden memory to the 2010-11 season.

Colorado 88,

Texas Southern 74

TEXAS SOUTHERN (74)

FG FT Reb

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

King 15 2-2 0-0 3-6 1 4 4

Galloway 40 1-9 3-4 0-4 11 1 6

Jones 39 7-18 3-5 4-6 0 4 17

Price 8 1-2 0-0 1-1 0 2 2

J-Danner 38 7-14 1-1 2-5 0 2 19

Norris 6 0-3 0-0 0-0 0 2 0

Smith 33 8-13 5-6 2-4 0 4 24

Christie 0 0-0 0-0 0-0 0 0 0

Denson 5 0-2 0-0 0-1 0 2 0

Ray 16 1-5 0-0 0-0 2 1 2

Totals 200 27-68 12-16 13-29 14 22 74

Percentages: FG .397, FT .750.

3-Point Goals: 8-28, .286 (Johnson-Danner 4-8, Smith 3-6, Galloway 1-6, Ray 0-2, Norris 0-3, Jones 0-3).

Team Rebounds: 2.

Blocked Shots: 2 (King, Price).

Turnovers: 9 (Jones 3, Galloway 2, King, Johnson-Danner, Norris, Smith).

Steals: 9 (Galloway 3, Jones 3, Smith 2, Ray).

Technical Fouls: None.

COLORADO (88)

FG FT Reb

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

Dufault 16 0-5 0-0 2-5 1 2 0

Tmlinsn 27 0-0 0-0 0-0 6 0 0

Relphrd 25 1-4 5-6 1-4 0 0 7

Burks 30 8-9 10-13 1-7 4 1 27

Higgins 28 8-11 8-10 1-5 2 3 25

Sharpe 14 3-4 0-0 0-1 3 3 6

Coney 6 1-1 0-0 0-0 0 0 2

Robersn 26 7-8 1-2 2-8 2 4 15

Knutson 24 2-7 0-0 0-3 1 0 6

Mills 2 0-0 0-0 0-0 0 0 0

Eckloff 2 0-0 0-0 0-0 0 1 0

Totals 200 30-49 24-31 7-37 19 14 88

Percentages: FG .612, FT .774.

3-Point Goals: 4-15, .267 (Knutson 2-6, Burks 1-1, Higgins 1-4, Roberson 0-1, Relphorde 0-3).

Team Rebounds: 4.

Blocked Shots: 2 (Roberson 2).

Turnovers: 13 (Higgins 3, Sharpe 2, Relphorde 2, Roberson 2, Tomlinson 2, Knutson, Dufault).

Steals: 6 (Tomlinson 2, Burks 2, Roberson, Relphorde).

Technical Fouls: None.

Texas Southern 29 45--74

Colorado 44 44--88

A -- 6,299.

Officials -- Bob Staffen, Winston Stith, Ronnie Hernandez.

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Bufs next face future Pac-12 foe

By Ryan Thorburn Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 03/17/2011 12:17:39 AM MDT

Perhaps the Buffs can start a Pac-12 rivalry on Friday.

Colorado will host Cal at 7:30 p.m. at the Coors Events Center after advancing to the second round of the National Invitation Tournament with an 88-74 romp over Texas Southern on Wednesday.

The Bears (18-14) moved on after a 77-74 victory over Mississippi on Wednesday in Berkley.

CU is a No. 1 seed after getting left out of the NCAA Tournament in stunning fashion on Sunday.

"We'll have to play better on Friday in order for us to be successful against Cal," head coach Tad Boyle said. "It will be a heck of a challenge against a future Pac-12 team."

The game will be televised nationally on ESPNU. CU is 1-0 against Pac-10 teams this season, an 83-57 home win over Oregon State on Dec. 4.

Emotional tribute

Hosting an NIT game allowed CU to honor the ski team during an emotional halftime ceremony.

The Buffs won their 18th national title last week in Stowe, Vt., to complete a season-long tribute to teammate Spencer Nelson, who died in a hiking accident on Aug. 15.

After all of the team members were introduced, the crowd gave Nelson's parents a warm ovation. Wednesday would have been their son's 21st birthday.

SWAC struggles

Texas Southern was included in the NIT field after winning with Southwest Athletic Conference regular-season title with a 16-2 record.

The Tigers (19-13) were upset in the SWAC Tournament semifinals by Alabama State, which went on to capture the automatic berth in the NCAA Tournament.

Alabama State (17-18) lost 70-61 in a First Four matchup between 16 seeds on Wednesday night in Dayton, Ohio.

Higgins passes Meely

Cory Higgins scored 25 points and passed CU legend Cliff Meely to move into third on the school's all-time scoring list.

Higgins, a four-year senior, has 1,953 career points. Meely scored his 1,940 points at CU in just three seasons (1968-71).

Alec the Great

Alec Burks scored 27 points with seven rebounds and four assists. With season totals of 709 points, 225 rebounds and 101 assists, the sophomore is the first player in CU history with at least 500 points, 200 rebounds and 100 assists in a single season.

Faculty tickets

The athletic department will offer tickets to Friday's game to all 7,000 CU staff and faculty members at a discounted price of \$5. The regular price for an NIT ticket is \$11.

Notable

CU, the 1939-40 NIT champion, improved to 9-7 all-time in the tournament. ... Alan Cass, the longtime public address announcer for CU football and basketball games who retired after the regular-season finale, worked Wednesday's game. ... The Buffs shot 26.7 percent behind the arc but made an astonishing 26-of-34 (76.5 percent) shots on two-point field goal tries.

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Kyle Ringo: CU Buffs can turn NCAA snub into opportunity

By Kyle Ringo, Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 03/17/2011 12:13:34 AM MDT

We will never know what being snubbed by the NCAA Tournament selection committee ultimately cost the Colorado men's basketball program.

That is why so many folks in black, silver and gold have been wearing scowls this week, seething and ready to deck the first person they see in a Clemson, Alabama-Birmingham, Virginia Commonwealth or USC T-shirt. Luckily not many of those exist around here.

It certainly didn't cost the program exposure. The decision to leave the Buffs out of the 68-team field has kept them in the headlines around the nation all week.

It won't cost CU in recruiting either. In fact, all the attention is more likely to help Tad Boyle and his assistants land on the radar of top-shelf recruits.

And it doesn't cost the program financially. More on that in a minute.

The Buffs were robbed of an opportunity, and as my grandfather used to tell me all the time, sometimes that is all you need. Opportunity, after all, is what March Madness is all about.

Morehead State has the opportunity to knock off Louisville today as the tournament begins in earnest. UNC-Asheville gets a crack at Pittsburgh and Northern Colorado can take its best shot at San Diego State.

The reason millions of people will be glued to their televisions for 12 hours today and throughout the weekend, many skipping work to do so, is the fascination created by that opportunity. They have seen the little guy beat the big dog before, often in thrilling fashion, and they hope to see it again.

Heck, just last year March Madness ended with the big dog (Duke) celebrating a national title seconds after the little guy (Butler) barely missed a half-court heave at the buzzer that would have completed the best Cinderella story yet had it gone in.

That is what Colorado was robbed of, its opportunity.

Who is to say Colorado wouldn't have won a game and maybe even two if it was invited to participate? And what might that have done longterm for the program?

We do know the Buffs rebounded from their slap in the face nicely Wednesday in the first round of the National Invitation Tournament by dispatching Texas Southern 88-74, providing more evidence they belong in the other bracket.

You might remember a similar situation at the end of the 2005-06 season when a senior dominated CU team that finished in the top five in the Big 12 Conference with 20 wins overall and nine in the conference, was passed over and relegated to the NIT.

That team laid down and lost to Old Dominion by 18 on its home floor in the first round.

You wondered how the Buffs would respond Wednesday. It took them awhile to find the flow, but when they did, you saw a team that has something to prove and wants to keep playing. The Buffs get their next opportunity Friday at home against future Pac-12 rival California at 7:30 p.m.

It will be a chance for Buffs fans to get a sneak peak at the future in their new conference.

In the days since the snub, some have theorized the leader of their current conference, Big 12 commissioner Dan Beebe,

somehow played a part in the Buffs being left out of the tournament. Beebe is one of the 10 members of the men's NCAA Tournament selection committee.

It's a nice conspiracy theory but it lacks merit because it makes no sense. Beebe working to keep the Buffs out of March Madness would be taking money out of his league's pocket. If there is one thing you can count on in big time college athletics, it's that everyone has a firm grip on their wallets.

It would be in the interest of the Big 12 to get as many tournament invitations as possible. Each team that gets into the tournament earns money or "units" that are pooled. The money along with bowl revenue from the football season is distributed evenly to the schools at the end of the year. Beebe wants that pool to be as deep as possible.

CU is leaving the conference for the Pac-12 on July 1 and has already negotiated the financial terms of its exit from the league.

Beebe is also required to recuse himself when the committee discusses any member of his conference for an at-large bid. So it's not as if he was in the room arguing against the Buffs.

While Beebe wasn't involved in snubbing CU, one could make the argument that the snub is a demonstration of how much, or little, as the case may be, Beebe is respected nationally. The fact that his fellow committee members felt comfortable leaving the Buffs out of the tournament doesn't speak well of his influence.

And that is just another reason for Colorado fans to feel good about what lies ahead, even as they watch with frustration today as others take advantage of their opportunities.

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college basketball

Colorado earns easy victory in first round of NIT

By Natalie Meisler
The Denver Post

Posted: 03/16/2011 09:37:13 PM MDT

Updated: 03/17/2011 06:15:12 AM MDT

BOULDER — The Pac-12 starts Friday for the Colorado basketball team.

The Buffs will welcome future conference foe California at 7:30 p.m. in the second round of the NIT.

The first round Wednesday looked almost easy for CU, which ran Texas Southern out of the Coors Events Center, winning 88-74. Alec Burks scored 27 points and Cory Higgins 25, and the Buffs looked interested in sharing the ball with 19 assists.

"We didn't know what team to expect, whether they would be down because they didn't make the (NCAA) Tournament or hungry," Texas Southern forward Travele Jones said. "I guess we got the hungry team."

CU first-year coach Tad Boyle wasn't sure what to expect, either, after the NCAA snub heard 'round the country. He talked to the team after receiving the NIT bid and asked for the team's input.

Higgins and fellow senior Levi Knutson stood up and asked teammates for a chance to extend their careers.

"I thought that was a great sign," Boyle said.

Burks and Higgins combined to put the Tigers away early, as CU led 44-29 at halftime. Higgins led an 18-6 tear to conclude the first half. He and Burks took turns passing up open looks to pass the ball to each other.

"Cory kind of willed us to win tonight. That's what we needed," Boyle said.

Higgins wouldn't call it a statement game in response to the NCAA omission. Fans surely hadn't gotten over the snub, as evidenced by some signs and T-shirts.

"I don't think it took us that long to get over it," Higgins said. "What happened is what it is and we had to deal with it. We didn't have any other choices. There are tougher things in life, so we just need to focus our energy on the NIT."

Burks, a sophomore who keeps hearing "one more year" chants from students who don't want him to leave early for the NBA, also had some input. Higgins said Burks implored his teammates to go into halftime with a double-

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digit lead when they were up by just three.

The Buffs (22-13) tied the Chauncey Billups-led 1997 NCAA team for the most wins in school history.

"This is a chance for us to set the standard as a team for the future," Boyle said.

The school's NCAA champion ski team was honored at halftime.

King 15 2-2 0-0 3-6 1 4 4
Galloway 40 1-9 3-4 0-4 11 1 6
Jones 39 7-18 3-5 4-6 0 4 17
Price 8 1-2 0-0 1-1 0 2 2
Jhnsn-Dnner 38 7-14 1-1 2-5 0 2 19
Norris 6 0-3 0-0 0-0 0 2 0
Smith 33 8-13 5-6 2-4 0 4 24
Christie 0 0-0 0-0 0-0 0 0 0
Denson 5 0-2 0-0 0-1 0 2 0
Ray 16 1-5 0-0 0-0 2 1 2
Totals 200 27-68 12-16 13-29 14 22 74
FG FT Reb
TSU (19-13) Min M-A M-A O-T A PF PTS

Percentages: FG .397, FT .750. **3-point goals:** 8-28, .286 (Johnson-Danner 4-8, Smith 3-6, Galloway 1-6, Ray 0-2, Norris 0-3, Jones 0-3). **Team rebounds:** 2. **Blocked shots:** 2 (King, Price). **Turnovers:** 9 (Jones 3, Galloway 2, King, Johnson-Danner, Norris, Smith). **Steals:** 9 (Galloway 3, Jones 3, Smith 2, Ray). **Technical fouls:** None.

FG FT Reb

CU (22-13) Min M-A M-A O-T A PF PTS

Dufault 16 0-5 0-0 2-5 1 2 0
 Tomlinson 27 0-0 0-0 0-0 6 0 0
 Relphorde 25 1-4 5-6 1-4 0 0 7
 Burks 30 8-9 10-13 1-7 4 1 27
 Higgins 28 8-11 8-10 1-5 2 3 25
 Sharpe 14 3-4 0-0 0-1 3 3 6
 Coney 6 1-1 0-0 0-0 0 0 2
 Roberson 26 7-8 1-2 2-8 2 4 15
 Knutson 24 2-7 0-0 0-3 1 0 6
 Mills 2 0-0 0-0 0-0 0 0 0
 Eckloff 2 0-0 0-0 0-0 0 1 0

Totals 200 30-49 24-31 7-37 19 14 88

Percentages: FG .612, FT .774. **3-point goals:** 4-15, .267 (Knutson 2-6, Burks 1-1, Higgins 1-4, Roberson 0-1, Relphorde 0-3). **Team rebounds:** 4. **Blocked shots:** 2 (Roberson 2). **Turnovers:** 13 (Higgins 3, Sharpe 2, Relphorde 2, Roberson 2, Tomlinson 2, Knutson, Dufault). **Steals:** 6 (Tomlinson 2, Burks 2, Roberson, Relphorde). **Technical Fouls:** None.

Texas Southern 29 45 — 74

Colorado 44 44 — 88

6,299. Officials —Bob Staffen, Winston Stith, Ronnie Hernandez.

A —

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Longmont, Colorado
Friday, March 18, 2011

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Buffaloes take out snubbing on Tigers

By Brian Howell
© 2011 Longmont Times-Call

BOULDER — Being snubbed by the NCAA Tournament selection committee may stick with the University of Colorado men's basketball players and coaches for a long time.

Yet, on Wednesday night, the Buffaloes revealed something about themselves.

Snubbed? Sure.

Pouters? No way.

The Texas Southern Tigers might as well have been the selection committee the way the Buffs treated them during an 88-74 rout.

It wasn't the best game CU has played, but the Buffs beat the Tigers physically and they beat them with style. Alec Burks made acrobatic lay-ups, Andre Roberson slammed home a series of two-handed dunks, Levi Knutson drained a couple of arching 3-pointers and Cory Higgins, as usual, did a little of everything.

"We definitely were having fun out there," Higgins said.

The Buffs needed that.

Displaying none of the heartbreak they suffered three days earlier, these were the Buffs that made pundits from Dick Vitale to Seth Davis wondering how in the world they weren't invited to the Big Dance.

On Sunday, the Buffaloes sat in coach Tad Boyle's living room and watched, along with the rest of the country, as the 68-team NCAA Tournament bracket was revealed. They believed, as did many experts around the country, that they would be among those 68.

When they weren't, some players hung their heads, others stared at the TV screen in complete shock. Tears dripped down the cheeks of some of the players.

Playing in the NCAA Tournament is a dream that, for five seniors, will never be realized. The reality of that made Sunday one of the more difficult days in their careers.

It was the seniors, however, that picked up the team and helped the Buffs put their disappointment aside and win a basketball game. Higgins and Knutson both spoke to the team on Monday in an effort to revive the mood.

"I thought that was a great sign," Boyle said. "It showed great leadership from both of those young men. I know our seniors are not ready to have their careers be over with. Our whole team wants to keep playing."

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That CU played well should come as no surprise, really. All year this has been a team that has risen to the occasion. Whenever the Buffs have had something to prove, they've played well.

"This was one of those (games), absolutely, and I think it does start with our seniors," Boyle said. "They've stepped up when we've needed to step up."

Against the better teams on their schedule, the Buffs played their best basketball. At the Big 12 Tournament, they did something they had never done by winning two games and advancing to the semifinals.

The NIT isn't the main event during March Madness, and history has shown that NCAA snubs often don't respond well to being relegated to the consolation bracket. CU knows that feeling. Five years ago, the Buffs were passed over by the NCAA Tournament, earned a home game in the NIT and got blown out by Old Dominion.

Led by seniors Higgins, Knutson and Marcus Relphorde and sophomore star Burks, the Buffs didn't want to go out like that. This may not be where the Buffs want to be, but it's still the biggest stage on which they have played in five years. And, of course, they rose to the occasion.

"Postseason games, especially in the NIT, are won by teams that want to keep playing and have that will to survive," Boyle said.

CU may not be in the NCAA Tournament, but if Wednesday night is any indication, the Buffs plan on not only surviving, but making noise in March.

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