



CU senior Marcus Relphorde (5) believes the Buffs will be focused Friday night.
Photo Courtesy: CUBuffs.com



03/17/2011 B.G. Brooks, Contributing Editor

Brooks: Record 23rd Win Motivation Enough For Buffs

BOULDER - Give the NIT Selection Committee this: Top seeds get royal treatment. The way the tournament is structured, the four No. 1 seeds in the 32-team field - provided they win - are spared traveling until the semifinal round. Win three games on your home court, book that trip to New York.

How does Buffaloes on Broadway sound? It's an opportune scenario, and certainly one that Colorado Coach Tad Boyle is dangling before his team as it prepares for Friday's second-round game against California at the Coors Events Center (7:30 p.m., ESPNU).

But there's something else, something with more permanence that Boyle is putting before the Buffs: Advance Friday night and Boyle's first CU team sets a school record for most wins in a season (23). The 1996-97 CU team - featuring sophomore Chauncey Billups - finished 22-10.

"When you keep playing, milestones come," Boyle said after CU's 88-74 first-round win over Texas

BUFFALO EXTRAS



Game Notes #36: NIT Second Round vs. Cal

Southern on Wednesday night. A 23rd win "will be the standard for any (CU) teams coming in the future. That's what it's all about, winning basketball games . . . this team has something really special in that it can put itself in the record books and, obviously, we hope that it's a record that's temporary."

Boyle believed his team, at times, stumbled through an expected post-Selection Sunday funk. "But we got it out of us, now it's time to move on," he said Thursday afternoon. "We've got to give Cal our best shot, because anything less is not going to be good enough."

Senior guard Levi Knutson said he noticed the funk mentioned by his coach more in the second half than at tipoff: "I actually thought initially we came out pretty strong. Our starters got us off to a good start, but I noticed (the funk) a little in the second half when we were just trading baskets . . . we just didn't sustain it like we're going to need to (Friday)."

"I hope that's out of our system," added senior forward Marcus Relphorde. "I think we were focused. Of course, we'd love to be in the NCAAs right now, but we all have a goal to accomplish in the NIT to try and prove people wrong. Coach pointed out this a real important game for us . . . we could become the winningest team at Colorado. So that's definitely something we all want to accomplish. We'll be focused."

Relphorde (seven) and Knutson (six) combined for only 13 points against TSU. Junior forward Austin Dufault and senior guard Nate Tomlinson, both starters, didn't score. Ah, that probably needs to change in Round Two.

Knutson said CU's ball movement and movement in general must improve against Cal: "We had stretches (against TSU) where we were standing around too much."

Relphorde agreed on the movement factor, adding, "We need to be a little more patient. I think we played pretty good defense, but this is a different team, more dangerous offensively."

Of his game, Relphorde said, "I didn't really shoot the ball that well from three (he missed three attempts). I just need to find my role in the zone offense - it's been something I've been struggling with this year. I need to be as active as I can and bring some energy in whatever I way I can."

Cal has outrebounded its opponents by a 2.5 margin a game this season, averaging 35 boards. CU won Wednesday night's board battle 37-29, while Cal was outrebounded 38-32 by Mississippi. Nonetheless, the Bears advanced with a 77-74 win in Berkeley. Less than 12 hours later - at 3:30 p.m. Thursday - they were practicing in the Events Center.

Cal, which finished 10-8 in the Pac-10 (tied for fourth), is coached by veteran Mike Montgomery. His hoops roots are mostly western. Among his five stops as an assistant was a stint at Colorado State. He spent eight seasons as Montana's head coach and 18 as Stanford's head coach before leaving to coach the Golden State Warriors for two years. He's in his third season at Cal (64-36, 611-280 overall), with this being the first season under Montgomery that the Bears (18-14) haven't won at least 20 games and reached the NCAA Tournament.

Boyle doesn't know Montgomery as well as he will in future seasons, when CU begins Pac-12 play. But he's seen enough of Montgomery's teams over the years and enough of this Cal team over the last 24 hours to draw this conclusion: "They want to win and are well-coached. They're playing with

a skeleton crew - seven scholarship players. But they play with unbelievable toughness and heart; they don't beat themselves. Mike Montgomery is a good basketball coach."

Against Ole Miss, Cal didn't have its leading rebounder, center Markhuri Sanders-Frison, who suffered a dislocated shoulder in Tuesday's practice. (He was averaging 7.4 boards and 10.9 points. Freshman Richard Solomon filled in with 10 rebounds in the NIT opener.)

Also against the Rebels, junior forward Harper Kamp still might have been bothered by a touch of the flu. He received IV fluids on Tuesday, but played 30 minutes Wednesday, scoring 11 points. Boyle called the 6-foot-8, 245 Kamp "a load," noting that Cal's inside-out offense usually goes through Kamp.

The outside portion of the offense usually falls to guards Jorge Gutierrez and Allen Crabbe, who combined for 45 points Wednesday. Gutierrez accounted for 25 of that total and added six assists, five rebounds, four steals and a blocked shot. Boyle called him "as good a guard as we'll play against all year . . . he's terrific, the best guard in college basketball nobody's heard of. He can really play."

Defensively, the Bears favor a zone, which the Buffs have had success against this season.

The Big 12 team that most resembles Cal is . . . Nebraska. "Just because they're very solid and disciplined defensively," Boyle said. "They don't beat themselves and play through their post guys."

Points of reference: CU and Nebraska split their 2011 series, with the Buffs losing 79-67 in Lincoln before finishing regular-season play with a 67-57 win in Boulder. The Cornhuskers' comparison strikes a chord with Relphorde: "We've just got to be ready for a grind-out game (Friday) night."

But catching Cal at the Events Center is the Buffs' ace. "We're pretty good in this building," said Knutson, alluding to CU's 15-2 home record this season. Nice edge - and that's how the NIT seeding process intended it to be.

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SHOW MENU



Boyle looks for balance

Only three of five starters scored in NIT opener for Colorado

By Ryan Thorburn Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 03/18/2011 12:00:10 AM MDT

The Buffs are not counting on most of their peers to postpone vacation plans.

Spring break at the University of Colorado is next week and the campus will be abandoned by the time tonight's second-round National Invitation Tournament game between CU and Cal tips at the Coors Events Center (7:30 p.m., ESPNU).

"They'd be gone if we were playing Duke," senior Marcus Relphorde said with a laugh. "We've just got to stay focused on the game, and hopefully the people will come out and support us."

No. 1 Colorado is coming off an 88-74 victory over Texas Southern on Wednesday night in the NIT opener in Boulder, where the Buffs are now 16-2 this season. No. 4 Cal beat Mississippi 77-74 in Berkley.

The Bears (18-14) were led by Jorge Gutierrez, a former star at Denver's Lincoln High School, who scored 25 points and made the clinching free throws in the final seconds.

Levi Knutson played on the same AAU team with Gutierrez, who played his senior season at Findlay Prep in Henderson, Nev., and was head coach Mike Montgomery's first recruit at Cal. "He's a quiet kid, but obviously a really good player," Knutson said. "He can do everything from run the point to play the (small forward). He's versatile. I'm sure he'll be excited to come home."

The Bears will be without center Markhuri Sanders-Frison, who separated a shoulder in practice leading up to the NIT.

CU out-rebounded Texas Southern 37-29 but relied on Alec Burks (27 points) and Cory Higgins (25 points) to do most of the heavy lifting on offense. Relphorde (seven points) was the only other starter who scored.

"Obviously, Alec and Cory had great nights," CU head coach Tad Boyle said. "Andre (Roberson) off the bench had a great night, but I would like to have a little more balance."

Roberson continued an impressive season with 15 points on 7-for-8 shooting with eight rebounds in 26 minutes.

If the true freshman can add a little muscle to his 6-foot-7 frame this offseason he will be a force to be reckoned with in the Pac-12 over the next three years.

"As long as he keeps being coachable and keeps getting better at this rate, he is going to be a special player," Boyle said. "He already is. But the fact that he is a freshman and the numbers he is putting up as a freshman are pretty phenomenal."

And so this NIT run is important for two reasons at CU:

1. To get the future -- Roberson, Shannon Sharpe, Ben Mills -- some postseason experience.
2. To get the seniors -- Higgins, Knutson, Relphorde -- to Madison Square Garden.

The Buffs are two home wins away from making it to the NIT Final Four in New York.

"We expect to win the whole thing," Relphorde said. "We have to take it one game at a time, but I feel amongst our group if we didn't win it, it would be a disappointment."

CU (22-13) can set the program record for wins in a season tonight.

Cal, a future Pac-12 rival, has wins over NCAA Tournament teams Temple, UCLA and USC this season, as well as a road victory at Iowa State. The Buffs' loss in Ames this season may have cost the team an NCAA Tournament bid.

The winner will advance to play the Fairfield-Kent State winner on March 21 or 22. On this side of the bracket, Fairfield upset No. 3 Colorado State and Kent State knocked off No. 2 St. Mary's.

"We just don't want to lose. We can finish our season winning, and not many teams in the country can say that," junior point guard Nate Tomlinson said. "If we do that our five seniors will go out in a good way and we'll win a championship this year. That hasn't been done in a while."

CU did win the 1940 NIT. Call captured the title in 1999.

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Posted on Fri, Mar. 18, 2011

California (18-14) at Colorado (22-13)

By Sports Network
The Sports Network

GAME NOTES: The second round of the NIT tips off this evening when the Colorado Buffaloes host the California Golden Bears at the Coors Event Center.

Tonight's winner will advance to the quarterfinals where they will face either Fairfield or Kent State.

The Golden Bears hold a 9-7 edge over Colorado in the all-time series, but the Buffaloes won the last meeting back in the 2004-5 campaign, and have also claimed a victory in five of the last six matchups in Boulder.

The Golden Bears are no stranger to the NIT, as they are making their seventh appearance in this event. Cal, which won this tournament in 1999, reached the second round with a 77-74 decision over Ole Miss. California, which possesses an 18-14 record, was bounced from the Pac-10 Conference Tournament in the opening round with a 70-56 loss to USC.

The Buffs claimed their ninth NIT victory with an 88-74 decision over Texas Southern in the first round. Colorado, which is now 9-7 in this event all-time, has already advanced further than its last trip to this event, as the Buffs were bounced from the 2005-06 NIT with a first round loss to Old Dominion. Colorado now has 22 wins on the season, and has won six of its last eight matchups.

The Golden Bears never trailed in their first-round matchup against Ole Miss, but that doesn't mean the Rebels did not give Cal a run for its money. Ole Miss stayed within striking distance down to the wire, but the Golden Bears were able to hold off the late surge. California shot 49.1 percent in the win and relied on 18 points scored off 17 Ole Miss turnovers. Harper Kamp and Jorge Gutierrez came into the matchup leading the team with 14.3 ppg apiece, but with Kamp dealing with an illness the majority of the pressure fell on the shoulders of Gutierrez and he certainly delivered. The veteran guard exploded for 25 points, but did so much more for Cal, as he also finished with six assists, five rebounds and four steals. Allen Crabbe, another double-figure performer on the season, helped out with a healthy dose of 20 points. Although Kamp was not at his best, the forward still managed to chip in 11 points in the win.

The Buffs showed Texas Southern why they were one of the more dangerous teams in the Big 12 Conference this season. Some people in the college basketball world felt Colorado was snubbed from the Big Dance, and if the players felt that way, they took out their frustrations on Wednesday's opponent. Colorado, which is averaging 79.8 ppg on the year, erupted for 88 points against Texas Southern behind a 61.2 percent shooting effort and a 24-of-31 clip from the foul line. Alec Burks, who was the best player on the floor for Colorado through most of the season poured in 27 points and grabbed seven boards, while Cory Higgins contributed 25 points. Burks is leading the Buffs with 20.3 ppg, 101 assists and is also collecting 6.4 rpg, but Higgins is no slouch either, as Burks' partner in crime is helping the team with 16.1 points per matchup.

Cal led throughout the matchup against Ole Miss, but the Golden Bears were not overwhelming at home, which could mean they are in trouble once they step into the Coors Event Center. The Buffs should continue to win as they are likely playing with a chip on their collective shoulder.

Fact Stats

Game Date and Time

Predicted Outcome

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Colorado star Cory Higgins has Bay Area ties

By Jeff Faraudo
Oakland Tribune

Posted: 03/17/2011 06:16:33 PM PDT

Forty-nine more points and senior guard Cory Higgins is the career scoring leader at the University of Colorado.

But as Higgins and the Buffaloes prepare to play Cal on Friday night in a second-round NIT game at Boulder, Colo., his mind is on the bigger picture.

The Danville native is part of a winning team for the first time in his college career, and he just wants to keep playing.

"I couldn't ask for much more from my senior year," Higgins said in a phone interview. "Being through the last three years and not having postseason play and finally getting there, it's unbelievable."

The Buffaloes (22-13) expected an NCAA tournament bid Sunday but put that disappointment behind them and routed Texas Southern 88-74 to advance in the NIT. Cal (18-14) would return home to Haas Pavilion for the quarterfinals if it can get past its soon-to-be Pac-12 rival.

Higgins scored 25 points for the Buffs on Wednesday, hiking his career total to 1,953. He's third on the all-time CU list, topped by Richard Roby at 2,001 points. Higgins owns school records for games, games started, minutes played, free throws made and double-figure scoring games with 104.

But through his first three seasons at Colorado, the

former Monte Vista High star never played on a winning team, never reached the postseason. Even so, Higgins wasn't immediately excited when the school replaced coach Jeff Bzdelik with Tad Boyle last spring.

When Boyle first met with

his new team last April 19, he sought out Higgins to ask his help.

"We didn't want guys jumping ship," Boyle said. "I told him, 'It's your senior year, and nobody should be more vested in this thing than you are.' To his credit, he did that. I'm forever grateful."

"I was thinking, it's my job to try to keep everybody together. If we did, we had a chance to have a season like we've having," said Higgins, who is averaging 16.1 points this season.

The two meshed quickly. Boyle changed Higgins' role a bit, using him as a part-time point guard, which Higgins embraced because he believes it's the position he'll play as a pro.

"Cory can play in a lot of different styles," said his father, Rod Higgins, the former Warriors forward and current general manager of the Charlotte Bobcats. "Coach has definitely helped him become a better basketball player. Cory wants to win and he's trying to make his teammates better."

Boyle said he knows how much the winning means to Higgins.

"He's relished it as much if not more than any of our players because of what he's gone through to get here," Boyle said. "He's a terrific young man. I can't say enough good things about him."

Rod Higgins said he hopes Colorado reaches the

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NIT semifinals in New York on March 29 so he can perhaps see his son play once more in person.

"The emotions of it are really tough for me. Every missed shot or turnover my kid has, my insides are just churning," Rod Higgins said. "But it's an understatement to say I'm proud of the guy."

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