



Alec Burks set CU's single-season scoring record in tonight's win.
Photo Courtesy: CUBuffs.com



03/18/2011 B.G. Brooks, Contributing Editor

Bufs Eliminate Bears, Move Step Closer To The Big Apple

BOULDER - For a coach like Tad Boyle, a Greeley kid who remembers the New York Knicks in their heyday, the prospect of taking a team to play in Madison Square Garden is beyond alluring. But despite his Colorado team being a win away from making the Garden its destination, Boyle preferred to revel in Friday night's accomplishment rather than ponder what might be secured on Tuesday.

CU's 89-72 win against California in the NIT second round assured the 2010-11 Buffaloes a prominent spot in the school's basketball records. With 23 victories this season, Boyle's first team is the most successful in 108 years of CU hoops - a feat he called "a pretty special accomplishment for these young men . . . it's a standard for teams to hold themselves to in the future . . . 23 wins

BUFFALO EXTRAS



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and we're not done yet.

"Tonight's carrot was the record; Tuesday night's carrot will be Madison Square Garden."

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 Box Score

CU returns to the suddenly uproarious Coors Events Center on Tuesday (7 p.m., ESPN) to play the winner of Sunday's Fairfield-Kent State contest. If the Buffs win that one, they travel to New York for the NIT semifinals on March 29. CU last reached the NIT semis in the 1990-91 season.

"We've obviously got to focus on the next game," CU senior guard Levi Knutson said. "But we've come a long way, and I think we've responded to adversity really well. I knew this group would, so hopefully we can come and take care of business on Tuesday and enjoy a trip to New York."

The Buffs (23-13) cleared the next-to-last hurdle by eliminating the Golden Bears (18-15) with a solid, characteristically up-tempo second half. CU won the board battle 42-33, outscored Cal in the paint 34-18, got 12 points off of 13 Cal turnovers and held a 17-10 advantage in second-chance points. The Buffs committed just five turnovers all game, their first coming in their 50th possession, which Boyle called "a pretty special stat."

Boyle, who played in the Garden as a Kansas freshman and called it "one of the highlights of my career," also acknowledged a pair of pretty special players. Senior Cory Higgins, who had three points at halftime, scored 19 after intermission. While Higgins carried the second-half, sophomore Alec Burks shouldered the first, scoring 13 of his 25 in the first 20 minutes as the Buffs poked and prodded the Bears' zone defense.

"Cory and Alec are playing at a high level . . . they've put this team on their shoulders," said Boyle of his prized pair that has accounted for 99 points in CU's pair of NIT wins. Burks is averaging 26, Higgins 23.1.

On a night when his team left its mark in the CU record book, Burks did, too. With 3:29 remaining, Burks converted a three-point play - a put-back and a free throw - to surpass Cliff Meely as CU's seasonal scoring leader. Meely scored 729 in the 1970-71 season. Burks now has 734.

"I didn't know anything about it until someone said something," Burks said. "That's great to have a record in the CU history books."

Leaving to a standing ovation, Burks and the rest of the CU starters went to the bench with 3:17 to play and the Buffs up 85-70.

With spring break beginning Friday, Boyle had been concerned about second-round attendance. But a bigger crowd (7,614) turned out Friday night than Wednesday night (6,299). Student attendance and the crowds in general "have been great this season," said junior forward Austin Dufault. "The student section could have given up on us after we didn't make the NCAA Tournament, but they respect what we do on the court and they wanted to support us . . . That was huge for us tonight and it's been huge throughout the tournament."

Boyle agreed: "I was blown away by the support. Obviously, these guys are easy to rally around right now after what they've been through this week. The way we've responded to it is a testament

to their character, but it's also a testament to our fans and how loyal they've been all year long."

The Buffs led 37-34 at the half, but it wasn't because of their perimeter defense. The Bears closed out the final 7:12 with six three-pointers, rallying from a pair of nine-point deficits. Aside from those 18 points on treys, Cal's only other points during that span came on two free throws by junior guard Jorge Gutierrez, who was coming off a 25-point performance in the Bears' first-round win against Ole Miss.

Gutierrez, who attended Denver's Lincoln High School before spending a year at Findlay College Prep (Henderson, Nevada), led all first-half scorers with 16 points. But they would be his only points of the game. He went to the bench with 14:24 remaining after spraining his right ankle, then taking a knee to the head and suffering a possible concussion. Cal team officials didn't want to take a chance on him returning.

"It was iffy enough that we weren't going to risk that," Cal Coach Mike Montgomery said.

Added Boyle: "It was a big blow. He is the heart and soul of that team. When he went down . . . it was advantage Colorado."

But the game didn't open that way. After Cal went up 5-0, CU countered with seven points by Burks in a 90-second span and finally overtook the Bears 9-7 on Dufault's first points of the tournament. He finished with seven points, all in the first half, but played a solid game - four rebounds, two assists and a steal while picking up four fouls mostly guarding 6-foot-8 Harper Kamp.

Over the next 6 minutes, the Buffs outscored the Bears 11-2 to take an 18-9 lead, with the final basket coming when Burks split the Cal zone and lobbed a pass to Andre Roberson, who elevated from the right baseline and finished the play with a dunk.

A couple of minutes later, Cal went on its three-point spree and CU's lead evaporated. Boyle said the Bears hit a couple of treys in transition, another couple after out-of-bounds plays. "Some of that is on us, but they made some deep threes and some open threes - but we weren't contesting them."

The Buffs had an answer when the second half started.

After Marcus Relphorde opened the scoring with a reverse layup, Higgins, who scored three first-half points in 13 minutes (he picked up two fouls), connected on three consecutive treys as the Buffs restored their nine-point lead.

"Higgins hurt us at the start of the second half," Montgomery said.

But during Higgins' surge, CU lost point guard Nate Tomlinson to a left shoulder separation. He left the court with his arm dangling and went to the locker room with 18:01 to play. Tomlinson, who had three first-half points and two rebounds, did not return, and Boyle said his status is unknown for Tuesday.

"He ran into a pretty solid pick," Boyle said.

When the Bears closed to 48-44, a Knutson trey launched the Buffs on an 11-2 run that opened CU's biggest lead of the night to that point - 59-46. The final five points of that run came on one

possession. Scoring on a breakaway layup, Higgins was intentionally fouled. His free throw completed his three-point play. The Buffs kept the ball and Burks added another pair of free throws.

Montgomery called that sequence "a huge turnaround. One, we turn it over so that leads to a breakaway. In the official's opinion it was an intentional foul (on Emerson Murray), so that's the end of that story."

The Buffs weren't done. After Cal got a free throw by Richard Solomon, Higgins hit another jumper and Relphorde added a three-pointer to send CU ahead 64-47 with 13:35 to play. And during that 16-3 CU run, Cal lost Gutierrez.

Even so, the Bears rallied briefly. A 9-0 run cut CU's lead to eight (64-56) with 9:51 remaining, and the Bears closed to eight again (71-63) on a conventional three-point play by Bak Bak just over a minute later.

The Buffs restored their double-digit advantage on four consecutive free throws by Burks and Shannon Sharpe and never allowed the Bears back to within double figures. CU's future Pac-12 opponent was on the ropes.

Higgins added an exclamation point dunk with 4:28 to play, sending CU ahead 82-67. But the 6-1 Sharpe one-upped Higgins with a soaring slam off a Trent Beckley miss in the final half minute, bringing the roaring crowd and astonished CU bench to their feet. CU's slam of the season also earned Sharpe the No. 1 highlight - that's right, No. 1 - on ESPN's nightly Top 10.

Said Burks, Sharpe's best bud among the Buffs: "I thought it was crazy. I knew he could do that stuff since he got here. Everybody got to see it like I have. I knew he was capable of that."

It was that kind of night for the Buffs. Another one like it and . . . CU on Broadway.

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SHOW MENU



CU Buffs rout Cal, advance to NIT quarterfinals

Burks scores 25; Higgins adds 22

By Ryan Thorburn Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 03/18/2011 09:43:50 PM MDT



The Buffs are in a New York state of mind.

Colorado set a program record for wins in a season (23) and advanced to the third round of the National Invitation Tournament for the first time in 20 years with an 89-72 victory over Cal on Friday night at the Coors Events Center.

Alec Burks scored 25 points and set a new single-season scoring record at CU (734 points). The legendary Cliff Meely (729) had owned the mark for 40 years.

Cory Higgins scored 19 of his 22 points in the second half to make sure the Buffs improved to 17-2 in the friendly confines with a postseason victory over their future Pac-12 rivals

Color Mike Montgomery impressed.

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atmosphere. "I think they're going to head to New York."

"To Colorado's credit, their crowd was good," the Cal head coach noted of the 7,614 fans who created a deafening

Indeed, the top-seeded Buffs -- who will host either No. 6 Fairfield or No. 7 Kent State on Tuesday with a trip to the NIT Final Four in New York at stake -- are one win away from finishing a historic season at Madison Square Garden.

"We're not there yet," CU head coach Tad Boyle said. "But that's the carrot dangling out there. Tonight's carrot was 23 wins and putting ourselves in the history books of Colorado basketball."

Amazingly, the Buffs did not commit a turnover until their 50th possession of the game. They finished with five miscues and scored 12 points off 13 Cal turnovers.

Higgins splashed back-to-back 3-pointers early in the second half to give CU a 45-36 lead. With 14:46 remaining, the senior from Danville, Calif., completed a three-point play after a steal. Cal's Emerson Murray was called for an intentional foul on the play.

The Buffs kept possession, and Burks added a pair of free throws to make the score 59-46.

"We made runs, and Cal made counter-runs," Levi Knutson said of what was a high-level game at times between a couple of talented rosters. "There were a lot of big plays. That (foul) was a way for us to separate ourselves in the second half."

After a 3-pointer by Marcus Relphorde the advantage was 64-47 with 13:33 remaining. The Bears (18-15) answered with a 9-0 run to cut their deficit to eight points with just over 10 minutes left.

Andre Roberson ended a scoring drought of 3:26 for CU, and a three-point play by Burks restored order for the home team with a 69-58 lead.

Higgins and Burks combined for 52 points on 16-for-20 shooting during Wednesday's 88-74 victory over Texas Southern. The tandem tormented the Bears with 47 points on a 14-for-27 combined night from the field.

"Cory has been playing at a really high level," Boyle said. "He and Alec have kind of put this team on their shoulders."

The Buffs (23-13) led by as many as nine points early but settled for a 37-34 edge at the intermission after allowing Cal to knock down six 3-pointers in the final 7:54 of the first half.

Burks scored CU's first seven points and splashed a 3-pointer to make the score 21-12.

Cal freshman Allen Crabbe took advantage of some porous perimeter defense by the Buffs and made back-to-back 3-pointers to cut the deficit to 32-29.

"We just had to get back in transition. They shot a lot of threes in transition," Austin Dufault said. "We knew we had to get to shooters and that was the main thing."

After shooting 50 percent in the first half, the Bears went 11-for-29 (37.9 percent) following the intermission.

Both starting point guards, CU's Nate Tomlinson (separated shoulder) and Cal's Jorge Gutierrez (ankle) left the game in the second half with injuries and did not return.

Shannon Sharpe, Higgins and Burks made up for Tomlinson's absence, but Cal couldn't cope without Gutierrez, who scored all 16 of his points in the first half.

"He's the heart and soul of that team," Boyle said of Gutierrez, a former star at Denver's Lincoln High School.

Despite separating the AC joint in his left (non-shooting) shoulder, Tomlinson vows to play again this season.

"Shannon has been playing aggressive, that's what we need from him," Knutson said. "I hope Nate's out there because we need him out there, but I think Shannon's ready to step up and willing to step up if Nate can't go."

Sharpe put an exclamation point on the victory with a breathtaking slam dunk in the final seconds that had the impressive spring break crowd in a frenzy.

"I was blown away by the support," Boyle said. "These guys are obviously easy to rally around with what we've been through this week. The way we've responded to it is a testament to their character, but also a testament to our fans and how loyal they have been all year long."

Colorado 89, Cal 72

CALIFORNIA

FG FT Reb

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

Kamp 33 3-8 8-8 2-6 2 3 14

Solomon 25 2-4 2-4 1-5 0 2 6

Gutierrez 23 5-8 4-5 0-4 2 1 16

Smith 32 4-7 1-1 0-2 4 4 11

Crabbe 34 3-12 0-1 0-1 3 2 9

Carter 6 0-1 0-0 0-0 0 1 0

Bak 19 3-6 3-5 5-11 0 2 9

Powers 8 1-4 0-0 0-0 0 1 2

Murray 15 2-2 0-0 0-2 1 5 5

Thurman 5 0-1 0-0 0-1 0 0 0

Totals 200 23-53 18-24 8-33 12 21 72

Percentages: FG .434, FT .750.

3-Point Goals: 8-18, .444 (Crabbe 3-7, Gutierrez 2-3, Smith 2-4, Murray 1-1, Carter 0-1, Powers 0-2).

Team Rebounds: 1.

Blocked Shots: 3 (Solomon 2, Thurman).

Turnovers: 13 (Crabbe 4, Gutierrez 4, Bak 2, Smith, Kamp, Murray).

Steals: 4 (Kamp, Murray, Crabbe, Bak).

Technical Fouls: Murray.

COLORADO

FG FT Reb

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

Dufault 22 3-6 1-2 2-4 2 4 7

Tmlnsn 18 1-3 0-0 1-3 1 0 3

Rlphrde 29 3-10 0-0 0-7 2 2 7

Burks 31 6-12 11-12 5-6 3 2 25

Higgins 29 8-15 3-5 0-2 2 2 22

Sharpe 12 2-5 2-2 1-1 1 2 6

Beckley 3 0-2 0-0 0-0 0 0 0

Coney 7 1-1 0-0 0-1 0 0 2

Roberson 21 2-3 1-6 3-8 2 4 5

Knutson 20 4-7 0-0 1-3 0 3 10

Mills 5 1-3 0-0 2-4 0 0 2

Eckloff 3 0-1 0-0 0-0 0 0 0

Totals 200 31-68 18-27 16-42 13 19 89

Percentages: FG .456, FT .667.

3-Point Goals: 9-20, .450 (Higgins 3-5, Burks 2-3, Knutson 2-4, Tomlinson 1-2, Relphorde 1-3, Eckloff 0-1, Roberson 0-1, Dufault 0-1).

Team Rebounds: 3.

Blocked Shots: 1 (Roberson).

Turnovers: 5 (Relphorde 2, Roberson, Coney, Knutson).

Steals: 8 (Burks 2, Higgins 2, Mills 2, Coney, Dufault).

Technical Fouls: None.

California 34 38--72

Colorado 37 52--89

A -- 7,614.

Officials -- Bobby Vetkoetter, Jim Casas, Eric Curry.

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Ringo: Boyle`s Buffs among best in CU history

By Kyle Ringo Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 03/19/2011 12:05:22 AM MDT

There are only three teams in the conversation when trying to decide the best single season of men`s basketball at the University of Colorado.

This year`s team might have earned the top spot in the minds of many Friday by defeating California to advance to the quarterfinals of the National Invitation Tournament, earning a school-record 23rd victory in the process.

"We set a standard now that future teams can hold themselves to as they start the season. So 23 wins and we`re not done yet," coach Tad Boyle said. "In 108 years of basketball at the University of Colorado, it`s a pretty special accomplishment for these young men."

This is not in any way meant to diminish that accomplishment, but when you consider that 40 of the 68 teams in the NCAA Tournament this year had at least that many wins before the tournament began, it shows there is still a lot of room for the Colorado program to grow.

However, these Buffs have a pretty solid résumé with wins over Cal, Texas, Kansas State (thrice) and Missouri. Nevermind the dolts on the NCAA Tournament selection committee.

For years the standard bearer at CU was the 1954-55 team led by future Olympic team members Burdette Haldorson and Bob Jeangerard. Coach H.B. Lee`s Buffs went to the Final Four of the NCAA Tournament that season and finished ranked third in the nation after losing in the semifinals to Bill Russell, K.C. Jones and the rest of the San Francisco Dons, who were ranked No. 1.

It`s hard to argue against a team that finished third in the nation, but if there is an argument to be made against those Buffs being the best in CU history, it might be this. The truth is they were playing in an era in which the color of a man`s skin still too often prevented the very best from participating. Russell and Jones at San Francisco were the exception then.

The talent pool is much deeper today and wins now are more significant.

That leaves the 1996-97 Buffs led by Chauncey Billups as the team I still consider the best ever at CU, but the further this season`s team advances, the easier it becomes to move it to the top of the heap.

Billups` Buffs won 22 games that season and advanced to the second round of the NCAA Tournament where they lost to North Carolina and coach Dean Smith two days after beating Indiana and coach Bob Knight. They won 11 games in the Big 12 Conference and boasted one of the most talented rosters in CU history with Fred Edmonds, Ronnie DeGray, Martice Moore and Will Smith surrounding Billups.

That team had a lot in common with this season`s team. Its most talented player was a sophomore who knew when the end of the season arrived he would probably be leaving for the NBA.

Both Billups and this season`s sensational sophomore Alec Burks could lean on strong senior teammates. For Billups it was Edmonds, Moore and Greg Jensen. Burks has Cory Higgins, Levi Knutson and Marcus Relphorde.

In a fairy tale world where the teams could play a game against each other, I`d take the 1996-97 Buffs in a heartbeat simply because of Billups` tenacity and desire to win.

It is here that I must make apologies to the 1990-1991 team that finished third in the NIT and went 19-14 behind seniors Shaun Vandiver and Stevie Wise.

Also, the 1968-69 team won the Big Eight Conference championship and finished third in the NCAA Midwest Region. Sophomore Cliff Meely set a Big Eight record for sophomore scoring with 310 points in conference games, surpassing the old record set by Wilt Chamberlain of Kansas.

There have been a lot of losing basketball teams at Colorado over the years, which helps to explain the hunger for a winner seen on the faces of so many in a surprisingly raucous Coors Events Center Friday. The crowd was modestly measured at 7,614 if you ask me. There had to be more people in the building judging by the decibel level after a dunk in the waning moments by freshman Shannon Sharpe.

Speaking of the crowd size. What better way to send these Buffs off and complete one of the three most memorable seasons in Boulder than filling every seat Tuesday night when the Buffs play host to either Fairfield or Kent State?

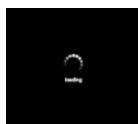
If CU fans believe in this team enough to make that happen during a week when the students are on spring break, and if the team follows through by earning a trip to New York and the NIT semifinals, I just might change my vote.

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CU Buffs' records going by wayside

By Ryan Thorburn Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 03/19/2011 12:03:17 AM MDT



It has been a bittersweet week for Cliff Meely.

The former Colorado and Big Eight legend watched Cory Higgins pass him on the school's all-time scoring list on Wednesday and had his 40-year-old single-season scoring record broken on Friday by Alec Burks.

Of course Meely, a front-row fixture at the Coors Events Center, is thrilled the performances by today's stars led the Buffs to wins over Texas Southern (88-74) and Cal (89-72) in the National Invitation Tournament.

"I didn't know anything about it until someone said something about it," said Burks, who scored 25 points on 6-for-12 shooting against the Bears. "That's great to have a record in the CU history books."

Meely scored 729 points as a senior during the 1970-71 season. He was a first-team All-American that season and averaged a CU-record 24.3 points per game without a 3-point

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line.

Burks, a sophomore, has 734 points this season. The 6-6 guard is a unanimous first-team All-Big 12 selection.

Higgins finished with 22 points against Cal to bring his career total to 1,975. The senior moved by Meely into third on the scoring list during a 25-point performance in the first round of the NIT.

Already in the CU record book for most games played (130), starts (129) and free throws made (559), Higgins is only 26 behind Richard Roby for points scored.

Roby, a senior when Higgins was a freshman, finished his career with 2,001 points. Donnie Boyce (1,995 points, 1991-95) is second on the list.

The Buffs (23-13) also set a program record for wins in a season and improved to 17-2 at the Coors Events Center.

Australian rules

basketball

Nate Tomlinson suffered a separated AC joint in his left shoulder trying to run through a pick in the second half. That's an injury that keeps NFL players out of the lineup.

But the junior point guard from Australia said he plans to play again during the Buffs' NIT journey.

"I just need to let the swelling go down," Tomlinson said after walking out of the locker room with his arm in a sling.

If needed, Tomlinson said he will take a shot in the shoulder before games to deal with the pain.

CU has some time to catch its breath before hosting either Fairfield or Kent State on Tuesday in the third round.

Student discount

Students with season passes were admitted free to the game and other students only had to pay \$4 thanks to the athletic department. The regular price for an NIT ticket is \$11.

CU drew an impressive crowd of 7,614 on Friday, despite the start of spring break at the university.

"Going into spring break, I didn't expect much from the crowd," Austin Dufault said. "But the thing that's been great this season is our crowd, especially our student section. ... They could have given up on us after we didn't make the NCAA Tournament, but they respect what we do on the court and they wanted to support us."

Bears and Buffs

Cal still leads the all-time series 9-8 but fell to 1-6 in Boulder. CU won the previous meeting 63-60 in Berkeley on Dec. 7, 2004.

The programs will be Pac-12 rivals next season. CU will play at Cal on Jan. 12, 2012, and the Bears will visit the Coors Events Center again on Feb. 25, 2012.

Notable

CU did not have a turnover in the first half. ... The Buffs have made 1,006 field goals this season, breaking the record previously held by the 1990-91 team (996). ... CU improved to 10-7 all-time in the NIT. ... Freshman Ben Mills tied a career-high with four rebounds. ... Dufault has 100 field goals this season. It's the first time CU has had five players on the same team reach that number in one season (also Burks, Higgins, Levi Knutson, Marcus Relphorde). ... Andre Roberson grabbed eight rebounds and has now led CU in that department 23 times as a true freshman.

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SPORTS

Bufs Bash Bears In 2nd Round Of NIT

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(credit: CBS)

BOULDER, Colo. (AP) — Alec Burks scored 25 points, Cory Higgins had 22 and Colorado beat California 89-72 in the second round of the National Invitation Tournament on Friday night.

Colorado (23-13) set a school record for wins and advanced past the second round of the NIT for the first time since reaching the semifinals in 1991. The Buffaloes will play the winner of Sunday's game between Fairfield and Kent State on Tuesday in Boulder.

Jorge Gutierrez had 16 points and Harper Kamp 14 for the Bears (18-15), who played without starting center Markhuri Sanders-Frison. Sanders-Frison, Cal's leading rebounder, dislocated his right shoulder in practice on Tuesday. He was on the bench with his arm in a sling.

With 13 points from Burks, the Buffaloes led by nine midway through the first half, but the Bears' accurate long-range shooting got them back in the game. Cal hit six 3-pointers in the final 7:55 to cut the lead to 37-34 at the break.

Gutierrez, who averages 14.6 points a game, scored all of his points in the first half. He went down hard with 14:24 left in the game and lay on the floor for several minutes before walking to the bench. He didn't return.

Colorado led 54-46 early in the second half when the game opened up for the Buffaloes. Higgins was intentionally fouled on a layup and hit the free throw. Burks hit two more free throws, and after a free throw by Cal, Higgins hit a jumper and Marcus Relphorde nailed a 3 to make it 64-47 with 13:35 left.

Cal went on a 9-0 run to get within eight, and the lead hovered there until Colorado pulled away in the last 5 minutes. Burks' three-point play with 3:24 left made it 85-69 and the Buffaloes cleared the bench.

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cu basketball

Burks, Buffs pile up records in win

By Natalie Meisler
The Denver Post

Posted: 03/19/2011 01:00:00 AM MDT

Updated: 03/19/2011 01:17:01 AM MDT

BOULDER — Put aside Colorado fans' chants for "one more year" from sophomore guard Alec Burks. The Buffs could have three more games left in the season and already own the school record for wins in a season.

The 23-13 Buffs became the winningest team in CU history Friday, ousting undermanned, soon-to-be Pac-12 foe California 89-72 in the second round of the NIT.

"We're not done yet," said CU first-year coach Tad Boyle. "In 108 years of Colorado basketball, this year was pretty special."

If Friday's carrot was a chance to set the school record, Boyle said Tuesday's pairing with the Fairfield-Kent State winner is all about advancing to New York's Madison Square Garden for the March 29 semifinals.

For

the second straight NIT game, CU came out of intermission as the aggressor.

Cory Higgins led the charge with 19 second-half points.

Higgins easily would have matched Wednesday's 25-point total but Boyle cleared the bench with 3:17 left.

The reserves finished to a standing ovation from 7,614 at the Coors Events Center.

Burks finished with 25 points (733 for the season) to overtake Cliff Meely's 40-year-old record of 729 points.

Cal kept answering CU's early attempts to extend a double-digit lead until Higgins took over the game with just less than 15 minutes remaining.

The senior guard, determined to extend his career, punched away the ball on the Bears' end and raced three-quarters of the court for a slam. He drew an intentional foul and hit the free throw. Burks dropped in two more for a 59-46 advantage with 14:32 left.

"There were a lot of plays we made and they made, but that obviously was a big play," CU guard Levi Knutson said.

Cal refused to fold, despite losing its leader, former Denver Lincoln star Jorge Gutierrez, after he crashed and suffered a concussion on the ensuing trip up the court. He declined to talk

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THE DENVER POST

after the game.

Cal was already down its starting center, Markhuri Sanders-Frison, who was injured before the NIT opened

The Bears also ran into foul trouble.

"We were a little running on empty," Cal coach Mike Montgomery said.

Cal closed its season with an 18-15 record.

Gutierrez had 34 friends and family members cheering on the Bears. The All-Pac-10 first teamer and all-defensive honoree previously played at the Events Center for the 2007 state title.

Boyle recruited him hard for Northern Colorado, but Gutierrez spent a year improving in academics at Division I feeder Findlay Prep in Las Vegas.

He lists his hometown, however, as Chihuahua, Mexico.

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Jorge Gutierrez, Cal basketball team left woozy by Colorado in NIT loss

By Brian Howell
Correspondent

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BOULDER, Colo. -- The last time Cal's Jorge Gutierrez stepped on Coors Events Center floor, he led Abraham Lincoln High-Denver to a win in the Class 4A state championship game.

This visit wasn't as memorable for the Golden Bears' junior guard.

A head injury took Cal's leading scorer out of the game for the final 14 1/2 minutes, and the Bears saw their season end with an 89-72 loss to Colorado on Friday in the second round of the NIT.

"It's so disappointing," Gutierrez said. "I couldn't finish the game. I couldn't help my teammates win the game, so it's always disappointing."

Colorado's Alec Burks led all scorers with 25 points, while Danville native and former Monte Vista High star Cory Higgins had 22 for the Buffaloes (23-13), who set a school record for victories in a season.

Gutierrez led Cal (18-15) with 16 points, and Harper Kamp added 14.

Through the first 23-plus minutes, Cal was right in the game. Brandon Smith converted a three-point play to pull the Bears within 48-44 with 16:47 to play.

From there, Colorado went on a 16-3 run take its biggest lead of the game, 64-47, and the Bears never recovered.

"We didn't have a response for that," said Gutierrez, who had a personal cheering section of about 50 people. "They kept scoring, and we couldn't stop them."

Higgins made the big play in that run, getting a steal and a fast-break dunk. Cal's Emerson Murray was whistled for an intentional

foul on the play. Higgins converted the three-point play, and Colorado kept the ball and scored two more points.

"Huge turnaround," Cal coach Mike Montgomery said. "Huge given the circumstances."

Seconds after that sequence, Gutierrez went down hard to the floor. He said somebody hit his knee, which caused him to fall and as he fell, he hit his head on another player's knee. Both Gutierrez and Montgomery said the trainers were more concerned with Gutierrez's head, which is why he didn't return.

"That was really unfortunate, both for him being home in Colorado and for us," Montgomery said.

Colorado's lead never dipped below eight points after that, as Higgins scored 19 of his points after halftime.

"It was lovely," Higgins said. "This is the first time I finally got to play against pretty much my dream school. It was good to beat them."

The Bears, who also played without center Markhuri Sanders-Frison (dislocated shoulder), did their best to hang in but were simply too depleted.

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"I had combinations of people out there we've never had in a game before," Montgomery said. "If we do everything right, we're right there with them, but we didn't and so they win."

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