



Cory Higgins tied Richard Roby for CU's career scoring lead.
Photo Courtesy: CUBuffs.com



03/29/2011 B.G. Brooks, Contributing Editor

Tide's Late Rally Overtakes Buffs In NIT Semifinals

NEW YORK - In a game that for the final 10 minutes inevitably trickled toward a decisive final possession, Alabama's last shot was good, Colorado's wasn't. Difference was, 'Bama's winning basket was a layup, CU's shot to win was a 22-footer.

Even the best of players will miss open looks - which Buffs sophomore Alec Burks did Tuesday night with 2.3 seconds to play. But that won't bother CU Coach Tad Boyle through the off-season nearly as much as the layup allowed Alabama freshman Trevor Releford a little over 10 seconds earlier.

Releford's slash through CU's defense pushed the Crimson Tide past the Buffs 62-61 in the semifinals of the 2011 NIT at Madison Square Garden, bringing a record-setting debut season under Boyle to a disappointing conclusion.

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"Our guys really battled . . . but we just didn't come up with that stop, complete stop when we had to. That was the difference in the game," said Boyle, whose first CU team won a school-record 24 games (14 losses). "We got good looks the last two possessions by two of our better players (Burks, Cory Higgins). You take that as a coach offensively. Defensively, I just hate giving up a layup to lose the game."

Not that it was on his mind at the time or at any previous point, but Higgins' missed 10-footer in the lane on CU's next-to-last possession would have put the Buffs up by three points and nudged Higgins into first place as the school's career scoring leader. Higgins finished the game with 13 points and his brilliant CU career with 2,001, tying Richard Roby (2004-08).

Said Boyle: "Cory Higgins is a guy that as a coach, when it's all said and done, you say it's a pleasure to coach him and I'm proud to coach him . . . I wish we had him for another year."

The same wish holds true for Burks, the talented 6-foot-6 sophomore who is deliberating on declaring himself eligible for the NBA Draft or returning for his junior year.

"Alec and I have sat down two or three times during the season and now that it's over, we'll give it some time to sink in," Boyle said. "I know he will get with his mother and they will make a decision that's best for their family. As his coach, I'm going to support him in whatever he does, I know that. I've told him that and I've told his family that; whatever that may be, and right now we don't know the answer to that, obviously."

Burks finished with a team-high 20 points Tuesday night, but like most of his teammates didn't have a spectacular shooting night. The Buffs' Big Three scorers - Burks, Higgins and Levi Knutson - were a combined 15-of-41 from the field. As a team, CU was 20-of-50 (40.0 percent), while 'Bama hit 28-of-56 (50.0 percent).

"It was one of those nights where we struggled shooting the ball," Boyle said. "Levi got hot in the second half (scoring 11 of his 14) and got us back in the game. But we shot 40 percent for the game and again that's a testament to Alabama and the way they guard."

The Crimson Tide, which plays Wichita State on Thursday (5 p.m., MDT) for the NIT Championship, also burned the Buffs inside. With 6-foot-8 forward JaMychal Green scoring a game-best 22 points before fouling out in the final 3 minutes, 'Bama blistered the Buffs in the paint 42-16.

"Inside was where they had the strength," Boyle said. "They had the advantage on us, and we just didn't overcome it tonight like we have in games past."

CU junior forward Austin Dufault called Green "one of the best I've played this year. He really showed out his ability to step out tonight and make jumpers, especially the second half. That was something big for him, to get him kind of going, and he's a tough player. He can do it all. He showed that tonight. So he's definitely up there, one of the best I've played against."

When Green fouled out with 2:27 remaining, "I really liked our chances," said Boyle. Green's fifth foul sent Burks to the line for a one-and-one. He hit both, cutting the Tide lead to 60-59.

A Tide turnover and dunk by Andre Roberson gave CU a 61-60 advantage, and after Higgins missed his jumper, 'Bama took a timeout with 36 seconds showing. After a miss, a controlled rebound and

another time out, Releford drove for what would be the Tide's winning layup and what he would call "the biggest shot" of his career.

"The game-winning shot, I just felt like they kept wanting me to go to the screen and were blitzing me and I rejected it," Releford said. "I was able to get a shot up and it went in."

CU took a timeout to set its strategy with 9.1 seconds showing. Burks got the inbounds pass, dribbled slightly right of the top of key, jumped - and missed off the back of the rim. After CU couldn't grab the rebound and time expired, Burks crumpled to the Garden floor.

Was it the shot the Buffs wanted?

Said Knutson: "I'll take Alec with a 15-footer any day. It just didn't go down. That wasn't the difference in the game. There were a lot of plays in the game that were the difference, but I'll take that shot any day with Alec putting it up from 15 feet."

Television replays showed Burks' shot to be longer, but it didn't matter. It bounced away, leaving Alabama Coach Anthony Grant relieved and grateful for his team's 25th win of the season (11 losses). "Obviously the game could have gone either way," he said. "Burks took the last shot and he has made so many of those. We were fortunate the bounce went our way and we have the opportunity to play for a championship."

Alabama's zone defense and aggressive pressure forced CU into 12 of its 16 turnovers in the first half. But the Buffs adjusted, attacked more efficiently after halftime and rallied from a 10-point deficit early in the second half to take a five-point lead in the last 5 minutes.

Grant called CU "a very explosive team . . . They got on a roll in the second half, which obviously changed what we wanted to do, and obviously the thing we have talked about all year is that defensively, we are a team that can defend a lot of different ways. We can play zone. We can play man. We can press. We can do a lot of different things. And I think obviously maybe in the first half, kind of - they were off-balance a little bit, kind of off kilter because of the zone. I don't think it was something they expected. Like any good team, they regrouped at halftime and they came out and they attacked it pretty aggressively."

Green, a first-team All-SEC selection, led the Tide with 12 first-half points, while Burks had 13 and Higgins 10 for the Buffs. Higgins' halftime total put him four points away from breaking Roby's career scoring record. But he managed just three second-half points, finishing 4-of-14 from the field.

A pair of short jumpers by Green opened the second-half scoring and pushed 'Bama's lead to 10 (40-30) before CU rallied. Burks converted a three-point play and Knutson hit a trey from the left corner to pull the Buffs to within 40-36 with 17:17 remaining.

Knutson was feeling it. He scored CU's next eight points - the first two on a floater from the right baseline, the next six on two treys again from the left corner - and suddenly the Buffs were within 46-44 with 13:47 remaining.

Just under a minute later, Marcus Relphorde hit one of two free throws and CU closed to 46-45,

capping a 15-6 run. After a Releford foul shot, Relphorde completed CU's comeback with a reverse layup, tying the score at 47-47 with 11:11 left. Half a minute later, Higgins hit one of two free throws - and the Buffs had their first lead - 48-47 - since 17-15.

The Buffs went ahead by three points (50-47), then four (55-51) before Relphorde was called for an intentional foul for grabbing the driving Releford with 6:47 to play. The freshman from Kansas City hit one of two free throws (55-52), but 'Bama wasted the rest of the possession with a traveling call.

CU went up 57-52 - its biggest lead of the game - on a dunk off a turnover by freshman Andre Roberson and a Higgins jumper. But the Buffs couldn't hold that advantage or make a final defensive stand.

Boyle congratulated 'Bama, but also paid tribute to his team: "I thought that was a hard-fought game by two good basketball teams playing late in March. They were just a little bit better tonight than we were . . . but I'm really proud of our team and the way we fought, the way we competed and the way we hung in there. We just came up a little bit short tonight. We had some really good looks, and they just made one more play at the end than we did, and that was the difference in the game. That's what makes it so hard.

"But I'll take these guys any day of the week because we have come a long way this year as a team, and I couldn't be more proud of the young men in our locker room."

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Trevor Releford's layup lifts Alabama into NIT title game

Published: Tuesday, March 29, 2011, 10:44 PM Updated: Tuesday, March 29, 2011, 10:45 PM



By **Don Kausler Jr./Tuscaloosa Bureau, The Birmingham News, Press-**

Register, and The Huntsville Times



Chris Hines goes to the basket against Colorado's Marcus Relphorde in the first half of Alabama's NIT semifinals win on Tuesday, March 29, 2011, at Madison Square Garden in New York. (AP Photo/Mary Altaffer)

NEW YORK -- As if it didn't already know, Alabama found out how important JaMychal Green is to the team.

It also found out it can win with him on the bench.

The junior forward scored 22 points, but he sat for five minutes in the second half with four fouls, then fouled out with 2:27 to go and Alabama leading by three points.

Colorado only scored two points in the final 2:27, however, and the Crimson Tide's Trevor Releford drove for a go-ahead layup with 12.6 seconds left. The Buffaloes' Alec Burks then missed an outside shot at the buzzer and Alabama took a 62-61 NIT semifinals victory.

Alabama (25-11) will meet Wichita State (28-8) in the championship game at 6 p.m. CDT Thursday in Madison Square Garden. The Shockers advanced tonight with a 75-44 victory over Washington State.

Releford finished with 13 points.

Only 32 seconds after picking up his third foul, Green went to the bench with his fourth foul with 12:19 left in the game.

He sat for the next 5:10, during which Colorado outscored the Tide 10-5 to take a 55-51 lead.

Green fouled out with Alabama leading 60-57.

Alabama led 36-30 after one half, which featured a 10-0 Tide run, a 10-1 Colorado run and a 17-2 run by Alabama.

Not a single Alabama player had more than one foul in the first half.

Green had 12 points and Releford had nine in the first half for Alabama.

Burks had 13 points and Cory Higgins had 10 for Colorado.

Alabama fell behind 5-2 but surged to a 12-5 lead. Releford scored baskets just a few seconds apart, first on a long drive for a layup, then off a steal of the in-bounds pass.

But Colorado then surged to a 17-13 lead.

From there, the Tide put its 17-2 run together, starting with Chris Hines muscling inside for a basket. Green scored the next two baskets. Tony Mitchell later followed a 3-pointer with a putback, and when Green sank an outside shot from the left baseline with 3:13 left, the Tide led 30-19.

The half ended with six points in the last six seconds. Burks sank two free throws with six seconds left to pull Colorado within 34-28.

Releford then went coast-to-coast in 4.2 seconds, sinking a lay-in and drawing a foul with 1.8 seconds left. He missed the free-throw attempt and Hines fouled the Buffaloes' Andre Roberson, who sank two free throws with 1.8 seconds still left.

Alabama overthrew a court-length pass on the in-bounds play, so Colorado got the ball under its basket, but it failed to score.

The Tide has made 16 of 31 shots from the field (51.6 percent). Colorado has made 9 of 24 (37.5 percent).

Alabama has forced 12 turnovers and has committed only five.

The Tide has outscored the Buffaloes 22-6 in the paint.

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Posted on Tue, Mar. 29, 2011

Bishop Miede's Releford puts Alabama into NIT finals

The Associated Press

NEW YORK | Alabama is making sure Anthony Grant stays focused on his own team rather than watching his former team's incredible NCAA Tournament run.

Trevor Releford scored the go-ahead basket in the closing seconds and Grant's top-seeded Crimson Tide withstood a late rally and beat Colorado 62-61 in the NIT semifinals Tuesday night.

Releford, who played at Bishop Miede, finished with 13 points and six assists for the Crimson Tide, 25-11, who advanced to play Wichita State on Thursday night for the championship. The Shockers beat Washington State 75-44 in the other semifinal game at Madison Square Garden.

"I'm glad that we have a chance to play for a championship," Releford said.

Alabama trailed 61-60 with 12 seconds left when Releford slipped along the baseline and scored the go-ahead basket. After a timeout, Colorado got the ball into the hands of sophomore star Alec Burks, whose off-balanced shot at the buzzer clanked off the rim.

Burks dropped face-first to the floor when the shot bounced away and then slipped out of the locker room and onto the team bus only minutes after the game ended.

"It was a great look. I'll take Alec with a 15-footer for the win any day," said Levi Knutson, who added 14 points for the Buffaloes. "There were a lot of possessions in the game that made the difference."

Burks, a native of Grandview, finished with 20 points, and Cory Higgins had 13 for the Buffaloes, 24-14, who made a run to the Big 12 tournament semifinals before losing to eventual champ Kansas. It was a late-season charge they thought would get them into the NCAA Tournament.

The Crimson Tide, likewise, would have happily accepted a No. 11 seed to the NCAA tourney over their No. 1 seed in the NIT. Instead, one of the last at-large berths went to Grant's former team, VCU. The Rams have turned their good fortune into the feel-good story of March, winning a game in the "First Four" and then upsetting their way to the Final Four in Houston.

"Obviously we're disappointed when we didn't reach one of our goals, to go to the NCAA Tournament," Grant said, "but our guys turned the page quickly."

Grant has been asked as much about the Rams as his Crimson Tide during the NIT and politely reminded reporters this week that he coaches in Tuscaloosa now.

Still, Grant is proud of the job his former players have done this postseason. Jamie Skeen transferred into his program before Grant left and scored 26 points in the Rams' upset of No. 1 seed Kansas.

The Crimson Tide built the lead to 40-30 shortly after the break before Colorado slowly climbed back into it.

"That was a hard-fought game by two teams playing late in March, and they were just a little better than us," Colorado coach Tad Boyle said. "I'm really proud of our team. We just came up a little bit short."

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CU Buffs' NIT hopes rim out with 62-61 loss to Alabama

Alabama ekes out victory to advance

By Ryan Thorburn, Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 03/29/2011 09:40:09 PM MDT

NEW YORK -- Ten, nine, eight, seven ...

Time to start the drive.

Six, five, four, three ...

Time to shed the defender.

Two, one ...

Time to let it fly and celebrate.

Alec Burks executed a hoops dream sequence so many young boys have gone through in the driveway as the final seconds ticked down at Madison Square Garden.

Reality bites for the Buffs.

Burks' potential game-winning jumper at the buzzer rimmed out and Colorado's championship run came to a painful end with a 62-61 loss to Alabama in the National Invitation Tournament semifinals on Tuesday night.

The Crimson Tide rolls on to face Wichita State, a 75-44 winner over Washington State in the other semifinal, in the title game on Thursday night.

"I'll take Alec with a 15-footer any day," said crestfallen senior sharpshooter Levi Knutson, who had splashed three shots from behind the arc in the second half to spark a dramatic comeback by the Buffs. "Just didn't go in. That wasn't the difference in the game. There were a lot of plays in the game that were the difference.

"But I'll take that shot any day with Alec putting it up from 15 feet."

Tad Boyle will lose sleep on the previous possession when CU appeared to have won the game with a defensive stop only to give up an offensive rebound.

In a cruel twist of fate it was Trevor Relephorde -- a freshman who grew up playing on the AAU circuit with Burks in their native Kansas City -- who drove the lane and converted the deciding field goal with 12.6 seconds left.

"I thought it was kind of fitting for our season to come down to this kind of game, having a one-point lead," Boyle said. "It's disappointing that we could not get that stop when we needed it. This program, I've said it from day one and I'll say it now, we are going to be known for our defense."

The Crimson Tide (25-11) has already established itself as one of the best defensive teams in the nation.

Alabama gave up an average of 58.3 points in its three NIT wins to get to New York while CU averaged 86.0 points in victories over Texas Southern, Cal and Kent State back in Boulder.

The Buffs (24-14) were held to 40 percent (20-for-50) shooting and turned the ball over 16 times after averaging 8.7 miscues in the previous three rounds of the tournament.

"Defense for us, it gives us a chance to win every game," Alabama head coach Anthony Grant said. "I thought it did tonight."

JaMychal Green, a first-team All-SEC selection, scored two quick field goals to give Alabama a 40-30 lead with 18:47 to play.

But a three-point play by Burks and a 3-pointer by Knutson jump-started the CU offense and cut the deficit to four points.

Knutson hit two more from behind the arc and, after a reverse layup in transition by Marcus Relphorde, the score was tied 47-47.

After a 3-pointer by Nate Tomlinson -- who missed the Kent State game due to a separated shoulder suffered against Cal - and a dunk by Andre Roberson the Buffs were up 55-51.

However, a turnover by Shannon Sharpe led to an intentional foul on Relphorde to squash the momentum. The Crimson Tide used a 9-3 run and had a 60-57 edge.

Burks drew Green's fifth foul and hit two free throws, and Andre Roberson gave CU a 61-60 lead on a dunk off an Alabama turnover with 1:53 to go.

Cory Higgins had a chance to extend the lead in the final minute but a floater in the lane wouldn't go down. The senior settled for 13 points and finishes a brilliant career tied with Richard Roby for CU's career scoring record (each scored 2,001 points).

"Cory is a guy that, as a coach when it's all said and done, you say it's a pleasure to coach him," Boyle said. "I'm proud to coach him and I wish we had him for another year."

Higgins, Knutson, Relphorde, Trent Beckley and Javon Coney are suddenly out of eligibility.

And Burks' heartbreaking final shot may have been his last for CU. The gifted 6-foot-6 sophomore, who finished with 20 points, is projected as a first-round pick in the NBA Draft should he decide to leave school early.

"This program is in good hands," Knutson said after scoring 14 points in his final run with the Buffaloes. "We have a lot of guys in that locker room coming back, a few guys that couldn't play this year, that are going to carry this program to places it has never been before."

Alabama 62, Colorado 61

ALABAMA (62)

FG FT Reb

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

Green 26 11-16 0-0 2-5 0 5 22

Mitchell 28 3-9 1-2 1-5 3 2 8

Hines 36 4-6 0-2 4-8 1 2 8

Releford 36 5-11 3-7 0-3 6 1 13

Davis 39 2-7 0-0 2-2 4 0 5

Hnkersn 17 2-4 0-0 0-1 0 1 4

Engstrom 3 0-0 0-0 0-1 0 0 0

Eblen 4 0-0 0-0 0-0 0 1 0

Hillman 11 1-3 0-0 0-0 1 2 2

Totals 200 28-56 4-11 12-33 15 14 62

Percentages: FG .500, FT .364.

3-Point Goals: 2-8, .250 (Davis 1-1, Mitchell 1-3, Releford 0-2, Hankerson Jr. 0-2).

Team Rebounds: 8.

Blocked Shots: 1 (Hines).

Turnovers: 11 (Releford 4, Hines 2, Green 2, Davis, Hillman, Mitchell).

Steals: 11 (Releford 4, Hines 3, Mitchell 2, Green, Davis).

Technical Fouls: None.

COLORADO (61) FG FT Reb

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

Relphorde 26 1-3 1-2 0-1 0 3 3

Dufault 24 1-2 0-0 2-6 2 2 2

Burks 36 6-14 7-7 3-6 4 1 20

Higgins 32 4-14 3-4 0-1 4 1 13

Knutson 37 5-13 0-0 2-5 0 1 14

Tmlinsn 12 1-1 0-0 0-3 0 3 3

Sharpe 2 0-0 0-0 0-0 0 0 0

Beckley 4 0-0 0-0 0-0 1 1 0

Rbersn 27 2-3 2-2 1-4 0 3 6

Totals 200 20-50 13-15 10-32 14 12 61

Percentages: FG .400, FT .867.

3-Point Goals: 8-25, .320 (Knutson 4-10, Higgins 2-6, Tomlinson 1-1, Burks 1-5, Dufault 0-1, Relphorde 0-2).

Team Rebounds: 6.

Blocked Shots: 3 (Higgins, Roberson, Burks).

Turnovers: 16 (Relphorde 5, Dufault 2, Roberson 2, Burks 2, Higgins 2, Tomlinson 2, Sharpe).

Steals: 7 (Tomlinson 2, Roberson 2, Burks, Higgins, Relphorde).

Technical Fouls: None.

Alabama 36 26--62

Colorado 30 31--61

A -- 6,082.

Officials -- Bryan Kersey, Mike Eades, Gary Prager.

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Higgins catches, can't pass Roby

By Ryan Thorburn Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 03/29/2011 11:49:53 PM MDT

NEW YORK -- Nothing against Richard Roby, but Colorado fans wish Cory Higgins was in sole possession of the program's career scoring record.

The Buffs could have used one more basket by the beloved senior.

Higgins finished with 13 points during CU's 62-61 loss to Alabama in the National Invitation Tournament semifinals on Tuesday night at Madison Square Garden.

Higgins (2007-11) and Roby (2004-08) are now tied with 2,001 points. Donnie Boyce (1,995 points, 1991-95) is next on the list.

"Cory has had a heck of a career," CU head coach Tad Boyle said. "He's been so instrumental in this program in so many different ways. A lot of people see him on the court and what he does offensively and defensively, but what Cory has meant to us off the court is just as important."

Higgins, who was Jeff Bzdelik's first recruit at CU, owns CU records for games played (132), starts (131), free throws made (570), double-figure scoring games (107) and minutes played (4,478).

Burks timetable

Alec Burks would shatter the scoring record if he stayed at CU for four years. But the sophomore could decide to enter the NBA Draft next month.

"We'll give it some time to sink in," Boyle said on meeting with Burks to discuss his future plans. "I know he will get with his mother and they will make a decision that's best for their family. As his coach, I'm going to support him in whatever he does."

Tomlinson plays

Nate Tomlinson played eight days after suffering a separated left shoulder in the second-round win over Cal.

The junior point guard only took one shot, but it was a key 3-pointer that gave CU a 53-50 lead entering crunch time. Tomlinson finished with three assists and two turnovers in 12 minutes.

Backup point guard Shannon Sharpe had a costly turnover that led to a momentum-shifting intentional foul on Marcus Relphorde, who had five of CU's 16 turnovers.

Kansas City reunion

Burks, a Grandview, Mo., export, led CU with 20 points, but missed a game-winning shot at the buzzer.

And one of his friends from Kansas City, Marcus Releford, made the decisive bucket with 12.6 seconds remaining.

Puerto Rico rematch

CU and Alabama had never played in men's basketball before Tuesday's game. The two programs could meet again next season.

The Buffs and Crimson Tide are both in the 2011 Puerto Rico Tip-Off field along with Iona, Maryland, Purdue, Temple and Wichita State.

Wichita State humiliated Washington State 75-44 in the other NIT semifinal.

The Puerto Rico Tip-Off will be played Nov. 17-20 in San Juan.

Boyle at MSG

Boyle played at Madison Square Garden during his sophomore season at Kansas (1981-82). The Jayhawks lost a heartbreaker to St. John's (76-75) and beat Indiana (71-61) during a holiday tournament.

Ladder 24 visit

The Buffs took a tour of the Hook & Ladder 24, Engine 1, Third Division of the FDNY on Tuesday. The company lost six firefighters on Sept. 11, 2001, and then-CU football coach Gary Barnett invited members of the firehouse to Boulder for the legendary 62-36 victory over Nebraska that season.

Since that trip to Boulder a large CU flag has been flying on one of the company's hook-and-ladder trucks.

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kwgn.com/news/kdvr-buffs-basketball-make-colorado-proud-20110329,0,2367473.story

KWGN

Bufs Basketball makes Colorado proud

Chris Tanaka

FOX31 Sports

10:29 PM MDT, March 29, 2011

The Buffs N.I.T. run came to a close Tuesday in the semifinals. Yes, it was a disappointment, however, over the course of the past couple of weeks, we've seen a remarkable transformation in the men's basketball team. They went from being snubbed, to super. Their assault on the N.I.T. was a classic example of how perspective can define reality.

When Tad Boyle's club was left out of the Big Dance, they could have easily packed up their bags, hosted a game or two then quit and called it a season. But they didn't. They trudged on, and in the process, showed something far more powerful in sports than athletic ability. They showed perseverance, mental toughness and a resolve to make the best of a bad situation. By doing so, they not only showed the basketball world they belonged, but they did something else.

Boyle's bunch raised the awareness and visibility of the program more by not being selected for the NCAA's than if they had. If the Buffs had qualified for March Madness, they would have been a lower seed, inevitably drawing a 1 or 2 seed along the way.

Sure it's possible they would have made it to the national semifinals, but it wouldn't have been probable.

By making the N.I.T. the Buffs not only continued to get the outpouring of support from the nation, but also---with each successive win, demonstrated they were worthy of it all. Additionally, the team got prolonged national television exposure which can only help in recruiting.

The reality of the situation is that most college basketball players or coaches will want to be in the Big Dance as opposed to the N.I.T., but from C.U.'s perspective, that's not necessarily the case.

When the tournament began, we all thought they were robbed. Right now, they're looking more and more like the thieves themselves.

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nit: alabama 62, colorado 61

Tide ends CU's ride in NIT

By Natalie Meisler
The Denver Post

Posted: 03/29/2011 10:01:54 PM MDT

Updated: 03/29/2011 11:53:56 PM MDT

NEW YORK — A season that rejuvenated Colorado men's basketball and revived its dormant fan base needed a few more seconds to get off another shot or 14 fewer seconds to play one more game.

The Buffs refused to roll over for Alabama's Crimson Tide in the NIT semifinals Tuesday night despite falling behind by 10 points early in the second half.

Six lead changes later in a CU home-game atmosphere provided by the majority of the 6,082 fans at Madison Square Garden, Alabama held on and won 62-61.

A buzzer shot on Alec Burks' pull-up jumper refused to fall.

CU coach Tad Boyle, who placed a premium on defensive stops in his first season, looked at Alabama freshman guard Trevor Releford's layup with 13

seconds left as the culprit.

CU led 61-60 on Andre Roberson's dunk with 1:54 left when it looked like neither team would score again. Releford scored on a second chance. That left plenty of time to set up a game-winning play. Burks didn't have many options as he dribbled into Alabama's solid defense with

the seconds ticking away.

"It was a great look," said CU senior guard Levi Knutson. "I'll take Alec with a 15-footer any day. It just didn't go down."

Burks was not made available to the media after the game. Boyle said it's way too soon to know if Burks, an all-Big 12 sophomore guard, will return as a junior or enter the NBA draft.

It was a tough loss for him in front of relatives who came from the Kansas City, Mo., area. He was a childhood friend and teammate of Releford's and had looking forward to the matchup.

Boyle wanted to see the ball in Burks' hands at the end, but Crimson Tide coach Anthony Grant had watched too much tape to assume a win until the buzzer sounded.

"Obviously the game could have gone either way," Grant said. "Burks took the last shot and he has made so many of those."

The Buffs won four Big 12 games by margins of two or three points.

"I thought it was kind of fitting for our season to come down to this kind of game, have a one-

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point lead," Boyle said. "It's disappointing that we could not get that stop when we needed it."

CU's winningest season ended with a 24-14 record.

Alabama (25-11) threatened to blow the game open to start the second half with all-SEC forward JaMychal Green scoring the first two baskets for a 40-30 advantage.

Green fouled out with 2:27 left. He scored a game-high 22 points.

Knutson, who struggled through a cold first half, helped get CU back into the game with 11 consecutive points for the Buffs. That cut Alabama's lead to 46-44.

Point guard Nate Tomlinson, who missed the Buffs' last game in Boulder because of a shoulder

Green's final foul sent Burks to the free-throw line to snap a 7-0 run by Alabama. Roberson scored on another dunk off a turnover for a 61-60 edge.

Senior guard Cory Higgins scored 13 points and finished the game a point short of becoming CU's career scoring leader. He tied Richard Roby, who played from 2004-08, with 2,001 points.



Tad Boyle's first season as CU's coach was a success. (Kathryn Scott Osler, Post file)

injury, contributed three key plays off the bench. He delivered a perfect pass to Burks for an easy basket and made a 3-pointer. Then he picked up a loose ball and fired it to Roberson for a dunk that produced a 55-51 lead for Colorado.

Alabama answered again, stretching a lead to 60-57 with Green getting a close-in shot with 3:31 left for a 58-57 lead as the Buffs went cold again.

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Alabama's Chris Hines, right, goes to the basket with Colorado's Marcus Relphorde defending during the first half of an NIT semifinal Tuesday at Madison Square Garden in New York. (Mary Altaffer, The Associated Press)

Alabama will play Wichita State (28-8) in Thursday's NIT championship game. The Shockers crushed Washington State 75-44 in the first semifinal Tuesday.

A look at the Buffs

With its loss Tuesday night to Alabama, CU's run to a postseason title ended. A look at the Buffs' 24-14 season under first-year coach Tad Boyle:

- After three big wins to open Big 12 play, losing six of the next seven slowed their push.
- CU finished 6-10 when trailing at the half.
- Making the semifinals of the Big 12 Tournament seemed to be enough to get the

Buffs in the NCAA Tournament, but the team was devastated at their Selection Sunday watch party.

- Senior Cory Higgins is gone, and the big question is: Will sophomore Alec Burks (20.5 ppg) leave early for the NBA draft? He has been listed high on early mock drafts.

Green 26 11-16 0-0 2-5 0 5 22
 Mitchell 28 3-9 1-2 1-5 3 2 8
 Hines 36 4-6 0-2 4-8 1 2 8
 Releford 36 5-11 3-7 0-3 6 1 13
 Davis 39 2-7 0-0 2-2 4 0 5
 Hankerson 17 2-4 0-0 0-1 0 1 4
 Engstrom 3 0-0 0-0 0-1 0 0 0
 Eblen 4 0-0 0-0 0-0 0 1 0
 Hillman 11 1-3 0-0 0-0 1 2 2
Totals 200 28-56 4-11 12-33 15 14 62
FG FT Reb
'BAMA (25-11) Min M-A M-A O-T A PF PTS

Percentages: FG .500, FT .364. **3-point goals:** 2-8, .250 (Davis 1-1, Mitchell 1-3, Releford 0-2, Hankerson Jr. 0-2). **Team rebounds:** 8. **Blocked shots:** 1 (Hines). **Turnovers:** 11 (Releford 4, Hines 2, Green 2, Davis, Hillman, Mitchell). **Steals:** 11 (Releford 4, Hines 3, Mitchell 2, Green, Davis). **Technical fouls:** None.

FG FT Reb

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CU (24-14) Min M-A M-A O-T A PF PTS

Relphorde 26 1-3 1-2 0-1 0 3 3

Dufault 24 1-2 0-0 2-6 2 2 2

Burks 36 6-14 7-7 3-6 4 1 20

Higgins 32 4-14 3-4 0-1 4 1 13

Knutson 37 5-13 0-0 2-5 0 1 14

Tomlinson 12 1-1 0-0 0-3 3 0 3

Sharpe 2 0-0 0-0 0-0 0 0 0

Beckley 4 0-0 0-0 0-0 1 1 0

Roberson 27 2-3 2-2 1-4 0 3 6

Totals 200 20-50 13-15 10-32 14 12 61

Percentages: FG .400, FT .867. **3-point goals:** 8-25, .320 (Knutson 4-10, Higgins 2-6, Tomlinson 1-1, Burks 1-5, Dufault 0-1, Relphorde 0-2).

Team rebounds: 6. **Blocked shots:** 3 (Higgins, Roberson, Burks). **Turnovers:** 16 (Relphorde 5, Dufault 2, Roberson 2, Burks 2, Higgins 2, Tomlinson 2, Sharpe). **Steals:** 7 (Tomlinson 2, Roberson 2, Burks, Higgins, Relphorde).

Technical fouls: None.

Alabama 36 26 — 62

Colorado 30 31 — 61

6,082. Officials —Bryan Kersey, Mike Eades, Gary Prager.

A —

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Billups glad to see Buffs in New York

By Natalie Meisler
The Denver Post

Posted: 03/30/2011 01:00:00 AM MDT

Updated: 03/30/2011 01:14:21 AM MDT

NEW YORK — Chauncey Billups could have had any seat he wanted, on or near the Colorado bench Tuesday night.

The former Nuggets guard and Colorado star didn't want to be a distraction, however, when his alma mater played Alabama at Madison Square Garden in the NIT semifinals. So he found a spot far away from the cameras.

With his parents, wife and kids in town for spring break, Billups and his family helped add to the Buffaloes' support against the Crimson Tide.

As for CU, Billups has plenty of faith in the direction coach Tad Boyle has taken the team.

"It's been awesome. I think Tad, in his first year, has been as good as you possibly can be as a coach, taking over other players," Billups said Monday

night after the Knicks, his new NBA team, defeated Orlando in overtime. "(Tad) is lucky to have guys like Alec (Burks) and Cory (Higgins.) Those are guys who just want to win and play hard. I'm proud of the whole team."

Almost as soon as CU was left out of the NCAA Tournament, Billups realized he might have a chance to see CU in the NIT semifinals. He checked the Knicks' schedule to see if the dates

would work out perfectly if the Buffs advanced.

"I was so mad (when CU didn't make the NCAA field). I still feel they deserved it," Billups said. "I was disgusted. But my first thought was, 'When is the (NIT's) final four?' "

Billups has come to know Burks well. Billups left for the NBA after his sophomore year when it was apparent he would be a high lottery pick (he was drafted third overall). The biggest question hovering over the CU program is whether Burks, a thin 6-foot-6 sophomore guard, will return to school or try the NBA.

"I've spoken to Alec a couple of times," Billups said. "We'll talk some more here soon. I really want him to just focus on his season right now. Don't worry about the NBA or leaving; the time will come."

Billups doesn't see Burks' weight, or lack of it, as an issue.

"There are guys built like Alec in the NBA," he said. "He's a frail guy, but he's a special talent for his size. He's a really good playmaker."

Billups is happy to talk about the Buffs after a daily barrage of questions about teammate Carmelo Anthony and the Knicks' tailspin since

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the duo arrived in New York after the big trade with the Nuggets.

Billups said he misses Denver and plans to be home as soon as the season ends. Anthony may have wanted the bigger stage, but Billups will be content not to deal with the media horde that crowds his locker room space after each game.

"This is like the third round of the playoffs every day," Billups said after the Orlando game. "Even on the road, it's crazy."



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MARCH 30, 2011, 4:50 PM

Amazingly, CU now has two all-time leading men's scorers

By **TOM KENSLER** |  No Comments

What were the odds of Cory Higgins finishing his CU men's basketball career tied with Richard Roby (2004-08) atop the school charts at 2,001 points?

They had to be astronomical. I know I have never seen another school with co-leaders in career scoring.

Nothing against Roby, but I'm sure most were pulling for Higgins to claim the top spot to himself because this was new and fresh, and it's always fun to see records broken. And to think that another basket by Higgins would have beaten Alabama and sent CU into the NIT championship game.

Roby and Higgins overlapped one season, playing together in 2007-08, when Roby, a 6-6 guard, was a senior and the 6-5 Higgins was getting his feet wet as a freshman.

Higgins told me countless times that he respected Roby for helping him "learn the ropes" of the college game.

"I saw how he handled himself that year, with the team and with the media as the leader," Higgins told me recently.

Higgins became the team spokesman beginning in his sophomore season.

And certainly not to be overlooked or forgotten is Brittany Spears completing her eligibility this season as the CU women's all-time leading scorer with 2,185 points.

It was a privilege to cover them for the past four seasons.

More from All Things Colorado Sports

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Wednesday, March 30, 2011

Colorado has momentum going into Pac-12

By Diamond Leung

Colorado might have ended its season without a trip to the NCAA tournament and fallen short of the NIT championship game after losing to Alabama on Tuesday, but the Buffaloes did achieve something during their consolation postseason run.

In coach Tad Boyle's first season, Colorado's 24 wins broke a school record and marked only the fifth time in history the Buffaloes have won at least 20 games. That counts as progress as the program leaves the Big 12 for the Pac-12.

Now the attention turns to [Alec Burks](#), the bouncy 6-foot-6 sophomore guard who has an NBA draft decision to make. He averaged 20.5 points and 6.5 rebounds this season, but at times struggled on defense.

Burks missed at the buzzer in what could have been his final college game as Colorado lost [62-61](#) and then apparently slipped out of the locker room without talking to reporters.

According to the [Denver Post](#), Burks has received some advice from former Colorado great Chauncey Billups, who left school for the NBA after his sophomore season.

"I've spoken to Alec a couple of times," Billups said. "We'll talk some more here soon. I really want him to just focus on his season right now. Don't worry about the NBA or leaving; the time will come."

Billups doesn't see Burks' weight, or lack of it, as an issue.

"There are guys built like Alec in the NBA," he said. "He's a frail guy, but he's a special talent for his size. He's a really good playmaker."

With Burks, Colorado would compete for the upper half of the Pac-12. Without him, the rebuilding project begins again, but on a high note.

The move to the Pac-12 allows Colorado to recruit California better, and Boyle has already signed three recruits out of the Los Angeles area, including point guard Spencer Dinwiddie. ESPU ranks Dinwiddie as the No. 29 point guard in the recruiting class.

Colorado also got a taste of how far it could go as a program this season when it was fully expecting to make the field of 68, but stunningly denied. Boyle told his players to make a run in the NIT in order to show they belonged, and they did with wins against Kent State and Cal, a future Pac-12 opponent.

The Buffaloes fell short of the title in New York, but they set a standard for future teams to build on.



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NIT Final Four: Alabama beats Colorado to earn berth in NIT championship against Wichita State

BY [Sean Brennan](#)

DAILY NEWS SPORTS WRITER

Originally Published: Wednesday, March 30th 2011, 12:08 AM

Updated: Wednesday, March 30th 2011, 1:50 AM

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Antonelli/News

Alabama Crimson Tide forward Chris Hines (l.) helps the Tide roll into the NIT final with a win over Colorado and guard Alec Burks.

[Alabama](#) and [Colorado](#) had their reasons to be chafed on Selection Sunday.

[Former VCU coach Grant proud of Rams](#)

[Weiss: No method to NCAA's Madness](#)

[Dayton endures to win NIT title](#)

[Illini edge Stony Brook in NIT](#)

[Weiss: Expansion is the real Madness](#)

[Pecora lends support for NCAA expansion](#)

The Crimson Tide had closed out its regular season with 11 victories in its final 15 games, including wins over [NCAA Tournament](#) teams [Kentucky](#) and [Tennessee](#), while Colorado had built itself a pretty decent resume with three victories over [Kansas State](#), including one in the [Big 12](#) Tournament, and one over [Texas](#) in late February.

Yet Alabama still could not catch the eye of the [NCAA Selection Committee](#), and the two jilted teams settled instead for the [NIT](#).

Tuesday night provided a chance for one of them to move on to the title game and that team is Alabama - but just barely.

Alabama rallied from a five-point deficit with 6:07 to play and then had to sweat out a potential game-winning shot by Colorado's [Alec Burks](#) as time expired before claiming a 62-61 victory in the NIT semifinals Tuesday night at the Garden.

The Tide (25-11) advances to play [Wichita State](#) (28-8) in the NIT Championship Thursday night.

"This is a big win," Alabama coach [Anthony Grant](#) said. "This is the final four of the NIT. Burks took that last shot and he's made so many of those."

The Tide took the lead for the final time when [Trevor Releford](#) tossed in a baseline layup for what proved to be the game-winning basket with 12.6 seconds to play.

"It's great for me and great for the team," Releford said of his game-winner. "I'm just glad we were able to advance and play for a championship."

[JaMychal Green](#) led the Tide with 22 points. Releford added 13.

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