

Tad Boyle finds CU Buffs' defense offensive

CU coach vows to start five best defensive players

By Ryan Thorburn Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

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SAN FRANCISCO -- Could Alec Burks be benched after scoring a career-high 29 points in dazzling fashion?

Will team leader Cory Higgins, who shook off a nasty cut near his eye like a prize fighter and then landed what appeared to be a knockout basket, miss his first career start due to a coach's decision?

Possibly.

If the game film from Colorado's 83-81 overtime loss to San Francisco shows that the Buffs' star players -- who combined for 57 points at War Memorial Gym on Saturday night -- were not among the top five defenders on the team then they will not be in the starting lineup on Tuesday against Alcorn State.

Tad Boyle, just three games into his new job in Boulder, is fed up with CU's rebounding and defensive flaws.

"This is what we're going to do as a staff. We're going to grade this film and we're going to start our five best defenders on Tuesday night," Boyle said after the Buffs' second consecutive bitter road loss. "You will see the five players our staff decides have shown they are capable of getting it done defensively. And I don't know who that's going to be."

The Buffs (1-2) flew home on Sunday and are scheduled to have a three-hour practice today ahead of Tuesday's game at the Coors Events Center (7 p.m., FSN).

Higgins, who had eight rebounds and two blocks against the Dons, will likely be among CU's top-five defenders and in the starting lineup for the 98th consecutive time in his career.

Shannon Sharpe and Andre Roberson certainly have the ability to defend at a high level. Levi Knutson clearly gives the effort.

Burks had five rebounds and two steals but allowed Angelo Caloiaro to make seven of eight shots -- albeitsome difficult and deep ones -- for 26 points and eight rebounds.

"We slipped up," Burks said after the Buffs were out-rebounded 43-36 by a West Coast Conference foe they blew out in Boulder last year. "We have to keep learning about it and figure it out because we have a lot more road games to go."

Higgins gave CU an 81-79 lead with 10 seconds left, but the Dons tied the score with an easy put-back after an offensive rebound with 2.4 seconds on the clock. And then the officials called a technical foul on the visitors for calling a timeout they didn't have.

"The grit and resiliency of this team is there. There's no doubt. The bottom line is we actually got a stop and didn't get a rebound," Boyle said. "We've talked about boxing out all year long. We've run for it in practice when we don't do it. That cost us the game. ...

"We've got to come up with that rebound. If we do, we win the game."

Six NBA scouts were on hand as Burks scored 29 points and Higgins added 28. Knutson added 11 off the bench.

"Offensively, I feel really good about Cory and Alec. Defensively, I don't feel good about anybody," Boyle said. "We have a long ways to go, and those two just as much as anyone else."

San Francisco shot 50 percent from the field in the second half and 57.1 percent in overtime. The Dons were 12-for-19

(63.2 percent) from behind the arc for the game and finished with 19 second-chance points.

Something has to change or a season with March expectations is just going to be maddening, especially for the new defensive-minded head coach.

"I'm not going to feel like this again after a game," Boyle warned. "I've got to have guys out there who are going to try to do the right thing. This is business and it's about producing. We should have won this game and we didn't. As the head coach I take responsibility for that."

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