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colorado 91, alcorn state 51

Burks, Higgins big help off the Colorado bench

The Associated Press

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BOULDER — First-year Colorado coach Tad Boyle was so intent on conveying the importance of defense and rebounding to his team that for the first time in their careers, the Buffaloes' top two offensive stars began a game on the bench.

Alec Burks and Cory Higgins got the message, coming off the bench to deliver on the defensive and offensive ends. Burks scored 22 points and Higgins added 16 in Colorado's 91-51 victory over Alcorn State on Tuesday night.

"We didn't play perfect, but you hold a team to 28 percent field-goal shooting and out-rebound them by 14 (50-36) as a team, those are the things we're looking for," Boyle said.

After defensive breakdowns and ragged play on the boards cost Colorado in losses last week at Georgia and San Francisco, Boyle told his team the five players who played best on defense would start against Alcorn State.

It marked the first time in 33 games Burks was a healthy scratch from the starting lineup. Higgins had the school's second-longest streak for consecutive starts before it was snapped at 97 — five shy of Jay Humphries' CU record.

"I was aware of it and it wasn't something I took lightly," Boyle said of ending Higgins' streak. "But I was probably as proud of him as anybody for the way he handled it."

The Braves (0-4) took a 10-8 lead on Marquiz Baker's 3-pointer 5:33 into the game, but the Buffs (2-2) went on a 20-0 run over the next five minutes and never looked back.

ALCORN STATE (0-4)

Davenport 3-7 2-4 8, Francis 0-3 1-2 1, Starks 2-3 1-2 5, McDonald 0-5 1-2 1, Baker 5-18 0-0 13, Searcy 0-5 3-4 3, Savannah 2-5 0-0 4, Ingram 0-4 0-0 0, Sanders 3-4 1-2 7, Brownlee 1-2 0-0 2, Eackles 0-1 2-4 2, Martin 1-3 1-1 3, Ragland 1-4 0-0 2. **Totals 18-64 12-21 51.**

COLORADO (2-2)

Dufault 2-9 6-8 10, Tomlinson 3-4 0-0 8, Sharpe 1-1 2-2 4, Relphorde 4-7 5-5 15, Knutson 3-11 0-0 7, Burks 8-13 4-5 22, Higgins 7-11 2-2 16, Coney 0-0 0-1 0, Roberson 2-5 0-0 4, Mills 1-4 0-0 2, Eckloff 1-2 1-2 3. **Totals 32-67 20-25 91. Colorado 49-27. 3-point goals — Alcorn State 3-16 (Baker 3-11, McDonald 0-1, Ingram 0-2, Ragland 0-2). Colorado 7-17 (Burks 2-3, Tomlinson 2-3, Relphorde 2-3, Knutson 1-5, Roberson 0-1, Dufault 0-1,**

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Eckloff 0-1). Fouled out — None. Rebounds —
Alcorn State 36 (Starks 6). Colorado 50
(Roberson 9). Assists — Alcorn State 8 (Searcy
3). Colorado 19 (Roberson, Tomlinson 4).
Total fouls — Alcorn State 18, Colorado 18. A
— 2,778.

Halftime —

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CU shows best defensive effort of season

By Brian Howell
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BOULDER — Tad Boyle wanted to send a message to his team.

That message appeared to get through on Tuesday night.

The University of Colorado men's basketball team had its best defensive effort of the season in routing Alcorn State 91-51 at Coors Events Center.

"To me, it's about where this program's identity needs to come from, and I think we took a step forward in that tonight," Boyle said. "We'll give ourselves a chance every single night if we do those two things: We'll defend and rebound."

Alec Burks scored 22 points, Cory Higgins added 16 and Marcus Relphorde had 15, but Tuesday night was all about defense for CU (2-2).

"(Boyle) said the best defensive players are going to play," Burks said. "He stuck to his word. He was preaching defense, and you've got to respect that."

Upset about his team's defense (the Buffs were giving up 82 points per game), especially after Saturday's 83-81 overtime loss at San Francisco, Boyle put a unique starting five on the floor Tuesday night: guards Levi Knutson, Relphorde, Shannon Sharpe and Nate Tomlinson and forward Austin Dufault.

The Buffs' two best players, Burks and Higgins, began the game on the bench.

"The starting lineup to me is irrelevant," Boyle said. "What matters to me is the final result."

Changing the starting lineup was significant for Higgins, however. He had started all 97 games of his career — the second-longest starting streak in CU history. Seeing that streak end bothered him.

"It's a streak I'm proud of, but at the same time, it's always team first," said Higgins, who added six rebounds and two steals to his scoring punch. "I'm not going to sit and say it didn't bother me, because it was something I was proud of, but it's over with now."

Boyle said he was aware of the streak before making his decision.

"We talked about it," Boyle said. "Cory is a team guy. Cory is a guy who is concerned about the program and the team first. I was aware of (the streak). It wasn't something I took lightly, but I was probably as proud of him as anybody for the way he handled that."

Burks said he found out Monday that he wasn't going to start. The sophomore had started every game of his career until Tuesday as well.

"I just played my role," said Burks, who also had six rebounds, a block and a steal in 19 minutes. "I guess I had a chip on my shoulder, because I feel like I wasn't one of the worst (against San Francisco). I just did what the coach said, and we got the win. That's all that matters. I was trying to prove him wrong, show him I could play defense. That was my main thing coming off the bench. I think I did (do that). He told me after the game I did a good job, so I feel like I did what I had to do."

In all, the Buffs held Alcorn State (0-4) to 28.1 percent shooting while forcing 11 steals and blocking five shots. They also outrebounded the Braves 50-36. It was the first time this season the Buffs had outrebounded their opponent.

"I think the way our team responded to the situation on Saturday night was good," Boyle said. "Quite frankly, before the game, I didn't know how they were going to respond, but I was really proud of them. The score is the result of how you take care of your business on the defensive end."

Higgins said it may have been the Buffs' most consistent defensive effort of the year so far, but he also said the Buffs can't get too excited about turning a corner.

"I don't know," he said. "It was a step in the right direction, but we're not going to be able to see until these next couple of games."

As for Burks and Higgins, Boyle said he hadn't even thought about whether they would return to the starting lineup. But he made it clear that Tuesday's lineup change was not an indication that his two stars don't play defense.

"Cory Higgins is one of our best defensive players," Boyle said. "Alec Burks has the capability of being one of our best defensive players. What I want our whole team to understand is that it's not just about those guys; it's about our whole team and our whole program and what our identity is."

"Our basketball program and what we're trying to get established, I don't want to wait three or four years in to experience what we want to experience this year."

NOTES: Jay Humphries has the longest starting-streak in CU history at 103 from 1980-84. ... Burks has scored at least 20 points in all four games this season. ... Andre Roberson had nine rebounds off the bench. He has yet to start a game but is averaging 8.0 rebounds a game. ... Dufault had 10 points and eight rebounds. ... The Buffs play at Harvard on Sunday.

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