

Big 12 coaches tab Boyle's Buffs 9th

CU men finished eighth in league last season

By Ryan Thorburn Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

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Colorado basketball is out of the basement.

But the Buffs -- picked to finish last in each of Jeff Bzdelik's three seasons on the bench -- still don't have a lot of respect from Tad Boyle's new peers.

The Big 12 coaches voted CU ninth in their preseason poll released on Tuesday. That's surprisingly low considering the Buffs finished eighth in the conference standings last season and return preseason Wooden Award candidates Cory Higgins and Alec Burks.

Inside the Coors Events Center, at least among the upperclassmen, the expectation is to experience some March madness this season.

And that means finishing in the top half of the conference.

"Anytime you're competing in a conference like the Big 12, which is always deep, if you don't set your sights on being at the top of the conference then you're in the wrong place," senior guard Levi Knutson said during a recent interview with the Camera. "I think that's our goal, and we'll see where that takes us."

The top seven teams in the Big 12 standings were invited to the NCAA Tournament last season. CU's loss to No. 9 Texas Tech at the conference tournament prevented Bzdelik's young team from getting an NIT bid and sent the Red Raiders into the postseason instead.

"It seems like we're getting better every day and learning new things, new plays, and our defense is more intense too," said CU guard Shannon Sharpe, a talented player who redshirted last season due to a knee injury. "I have a very good vibe about this year."

Kansas State, which has nine lettermen returning from last season's Elite Eight team, is the preseason favorite to win the Big 12. Perennial national title contender Kansas is second.

Texas, Baylor, Missouri and Texas A&M round out the top half of the preseason poll. The coaches have tabbed Texas Tech seventh and Oklahoma State eighth.

Nebraska (10th), Oklahoma (11th) and Iowa State (12th) are the only teams picked to finish below the Buffs, who will be leaving the Big 12 for the Pac-12 after this season.

"I haven't really thought about playing in the Pac-10 too much because I'm just concentrating on this year," CU junior guard Nate Tomlinson said. "It's definitely going to be a whole different league, a whole different style of play."

"But if you're a basketball player, you're a basketball player. And it should be a good final season in the Big 12 for us and then a good move for us."

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Basketball coaches pick K-State to win Big 12

By BLAIR KERKHOFF
The Kansas City Star

Kansas State is the coaches' choice in Big 12 men's basketball. The Wildcats received 10 first-place votes in the preseason poll released Tuesday. Kansas, which has won the Big 12 regular season six consecutive seasons, received the other two first-place votes. Coaches can't vote for their own team.

K-State has never won a Big 12 basketball championship. The program's last league title came in 1977 as a member of the Big Eight.

School, key players back, key players lost, comment

- 1. Kansas State (10).** Back: Jacob Pullen, Curtis Kelly. Out: Denis Clemente, Dominique Sutton. League championship would be first since 1977.
- 2. Kansas (2).** Back: Morris twins, Tyshawn Taylor. Out: Sherron Collins, Cole Aldrich. Jayhawks looking to close out 12-team Big 12 with seven straight crowns.
- 3. Texas.** Back: Jordan Hamilton, J'Covan Brown. Out: Damion James, Dexter Pittman. No team needed 2010 in rearview mirror more than Longhorns.
- 4. Baylor.** Back: LaceDarius Dunn, Quincy Acy. Out: Ekpe Udoh, Tweety Carter. Perry Jones is latest top-level recruit by Scott Drew.
- 5. Missouri.** Back: Kim English, Justin Safford. Out: J.T. Tiller, Zaire Taylor. Impact newcomer Ricardo Ratcliff joins top three returning scorers.
- 6. Texas A&M.** Back: Dash Harris, B.J. Holmes. Out: Donald Sloan, Bryan Davis. Plenty of nice parts but no dominant scorer.
- 7. Texas Tech.** Back: John Roberson, Mike Singletary. Out: Nick Okorie, Darko Cohadarevic. Pat Knight says program won't improve until defense does.
- 8. Oklahoma State.** Back: Ray Penn, Keiton Page. Out: James Anderson, Obi Muonelo. Anderson is big loss, but Penn returns after missing most of league season.
- 9. Colorado.** Back: Cory Higgins, Cory Burks. Out: Dwight Thorne, Casey Crawford. Bigger things expected from Higgins, Burks and new coach Tad Boyle in last go-round.
- 10. Nebraska.** Back: Lance Jeter, Brian Diaz. Out: Ryan Anderson, Sek Henry. Any hurrahs in last Big 12 hurrah?
- 11. Oklahoma.** Back: Cade Davis, Steven Pledger. Out: Willie Warren, Tommie Mason-Griffin. No team loses more production than Sooners.
- 12. Iowa State.** Back: Diante Garrett, Jamie Vanderbeken. Out: Craig Brackens, Marquis Gilstrap. The Mayor, Fred Hoiberg, will need his honeymoon period.

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