



COLORADO BUFFALOES

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Andre Roberson (21) believes the Buffs can start a winning streak Saturday at Washington State.

Photo Courtesy: Tony Harman



Brooks: Buffs Can Start Digging Out In Snowy Northwest

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SPOKANE - When their chartered jet touched down here Thursday afternoon, the weather conditions and overall feel of things reminded several of the veteran Colorado Buffaloes of another time in another conference. Flash back to:

Big 12 country . . . mid-January in Ames, Iowa . . . leaden skies and a landscape blanketed by snow . . . temperatures bobbing from the mid- to low-20s.

Make enough wintry trips to Ames and other hoops stops in the Heartland and your appreciation of the winter months in Colorado should climb considerably. The Buffs' first wintry, make it first ever, trek toward Pullman, Wash., is having that same effect - at least on one traveler.

CU's four-day hoops swing through the Pacific Northwest - the first stop was a night spent misfiring in Seattle - serves as a stark reminder that the Pac-12 Conference isn't all beaches and desert, all sunshine and lapping waves.

But from conference to conference, there are constants in basketball travel - the most obvious being how difficult it is for most visiting teams to go from stop to stop and win. The Buffs have dropped in on three Pac-12 schools this season and still are searching for Road 'W' No. 1.

BUFFALO EXTRAS



MBB Notes at WSU

They hop from Spokane to Pullman on Saturday morning and play at Washington State that night (8 p.m. MST, Pac-12 Network), hoping to break the streak and begin a climb back from a 1-4 conference start.

CU coach Tad Boyle is a self-professed numbers guy, and there are several in his team's home and away play that trouble him. Some of the poorer stats he believes can be remedied through hard work and better execution; others, well . . . hear him out.

Before the Buffs made this trip, Boyle offered up some free throw numbers and the discrepancies between the Buffs' number of attempts on neutral courts vs. true road games. He tossed out free throw attempts at home because those seem to even out among schools.

But his bottom line (and he's more of a bottom line guy than a numbers guy) was that for some reason, when he did the research, there was a decided imbalance between attempts on neutral courts (plus 11) and attempts in true road games (minus seven). If you're counting at home - which Boyle obviously is - that's a difference of 18 attempts. And that can be a big difference.

His research was done before CU's 64-54 loss at Washington on Wednesday night, but his conclusion held up. The Huskies attempted 23 free throws, making 18; the Buffs shot 14, making 11. There were enough other factors involved to make this night a frustrating one for his team, but in Boyle's postgame remarks he made this observation:

"We need to start making some shots to help win some games on the road because we are not getting to the free throw line, we were 11-for-14 from the free throw line which is a good percentage but 14 is not enough attempts. It happens to us on the road all the time, but it doesn't happen at home, yet it happens to us on the road for some reason."

Aside from the imbalance from the foul line, Boyle was spot on in saying the Buffs "need to start making some shots . . ." They missed most of their shots (21-for-58, 36.2 percent) against the Huskies, who actually missed more (20-for-59, 33.9 percent) and still won. Boyle acknowledged UW's defense for creating some of CU's problems, but he also pointed to his team's offensive execution as a culprit in the misfiring.

"I think Washington had something to do with it," Boyle said. "Josh (Scott) had trouble scoring over (7-footer Aziz) N'Diaye, there's no question . . . (but) against Washington you're going to have to move the ball. We had six possessions where we had five or more passes. We tried to do things too early in the shot clock. I want us to be aggressive and sometimes when we got good shots it was early in the shot clock."

"But we took too many bad shots - that was the bottom line. We shot 58 times and 18 shots were bad shots - bad shots defined as somebody in your face or a jump shot over a hand. That's almost a third of your shots, and with that you're not going to shoot a good percentage."

The Buffs, said Boyle, have to be consistently better with their spacing, execution and decisions. But he added, "Again, there were possessions where we made great decisions and had great spacing. But it's kind of like where we were with our defense: you've got great defensive possessions, but you don't guard for 40 minutes."

"We guarded for 40 minutes (Wednesday) night. We didn't rebound, but we guarded. Our first-shot defense was terrific; we held them to 33 percent and we'll take that every night of the week. But those 15 offensive rebounds . . .

"Offensively, it's the same thing. We had some great possessions, but we had a lot of empty possessions, some where we never got a shot off and silly turnovers. So spacing, screening, patience, a lot of our shot selection . . ."

Although the Buffs finished the night with six assists, tying a season low, Boyle wasn't displeased by their attempts at sharing: "We're trying to share the ball, although our assists don't look like it. But we tried to share it. It's just decision making."

That might be passed off as one of the characteristics of a team that mostly plays one senior, a junior and then first- and second-year players. But Boyle isn't going to lean on the youth factor. Why?

"Because we've proven we can do it," he said. "But it gets back to league play and the margin for error shrinks."

And we're still playing like we're playing against Wofford or Northern Arizona or Hartford. That margin for error is a little wider. Against Washington it's a lot slimmer."

Boyle isn't expecting the margin to be *that* much wider Saturday night at Wazzu, although the Cougars have the same number of wins as the Buffs in Pac-12 play. On the same night CU was losing at Washington, Washington State defeated Utah 75-65 for its first conference win (1-3, 10-7).

At 1-4 in league play, the Buffs aren't yet buried in the conference standings. But junior wing Andre Roberson said the loss to the Huskies makes Saturday's game "very critical. I don't think anybody on the team wants to be 1-5. We know what we have to do; Saturday is a must win."

Not many among the traveling party - particularly Boyle - are peeking past Pullman, but we'll do it for him. Having already played two of the three league's undefeated teams (UW, UCLA) and then-unbeaten Arizona in their league opener, the Buffs now begin a stretch of the schedule that could offer an assist in the digging out process.

After the visit to WSU, CU comes home next week to play Stanford (Thursday, 8 p.m.) and California (Sunday, 1:30 p.m.) before traveling to Utah the following Saturday to open a new month. If the Buffs can get past their road difficulties this weekend, the potential is there to pull even in the conference standings with a pair of home wins next week.

But they'll have to be more patient and potent offensively to reach .500. Boyle's defensive message seems to have sunk in - at least for one night in Seattle. "I think we bucked up on defense and showed we have some fight in us," Scott said. "That was good. We just want to shoot the ball better."

Added Roberson: "We stepped it up big time on the defensive end . . . we just didn't get the rebounds when it mattered and we didn't make the tough stops . . . we're right there. We took a step forward (Wednesday), but we came up on the short end. The next game is real critical; if we can get that game and get two home wins, we can definitely get on a streak."

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SHOW MENU



Men's basketball: CU Buffs in 'must-win' mode already

By Ryan Thorburn *Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera*

Posted:

Buffzone.com

SPOKANE, Wash. -- The Buffs couldn't avoid thinking about the NCAA Tournament during their stay here.

Colorado practiced Thursday and Friday at the McCarthy Center on Gonzaga's pristine campus, where all of the Bulldogs' postseason banners hang. The players wore their normal black and gold jerseys and shorts, but they were also cloaked in the disappointment of a 1-4 start in the Pac-12.

Even though it's still January, Tad Boyle's team understands that it's on the road to bubble trouble this March unless CU can pick up a victory Saturday night in Pullman against Washington State at Beasley Coliseum (8 p.m., Pac-12 Network).

The Buffs (11-6 overall) are currently in 10th place in the conference standings ahead of only Oregon State (10-7, 0-4) and Utah (8-9, 0-5).

"We don't want to lose any more games, especially if we want a chance to go to the NCAA Tournament," said CU sophomore shooting guard Askia Booker. "I think we need to win the rest of our games from here on out."

Boyle just wants to go home with the first conference road win of the season.

"I'm not looking at the big picture stuff, I'm just looking at this next game," Boyle said. "But sometimes winning breeds winning, just like losing breeds losing. We're on the wrong side of that right now."

CU played better defensively on Wednesday night at Washington, but coming up with defensive rebounds during crunch time proved to be more slippery than the fish being tossed around at the Pike Place Market.

The Buffs are now 1-5 in true road games following the 64-54 loss in Seattle.

"Our first-shot defense was terrific the other night. We made some strides," Boyle said. "But until we can string three, four, five games together, that's maybe where I'll say we've turned the corner (defensively). The jury is still out."

The Cougars (10-7, 1-3) are coming off a 75-65 victory over Utah. Brock Motum, the Pac-12's second-leading scorer (19.4 ppg), posted all 14 of his points in the second half against the Utes.

Andre Roberson, who had 10 points and 11 rebounds at Washington, will be the primary defender on Washington State's 6-9 senior standout. Last season Roberson helped hold Motum to nine points on 2-for-10 shooting during CU's 71-60 win in Boulder.

"Brock Motum is one of the better scorers in the league. He puts up big-time numbers and he makes it look easy," Boyle said. "They're playing with confidence, they're a good home team, and they're hungry just like we're hungry. We're all looking for that next win. You hate to be kind of scratching at the bottom right now."

The Cougars are 8-2 at the Beasley Center this season, losing close games to rivals Gonzaga (71-69) and Washington (68-63).

Washington State, like CU, was blown out by Kansas (78-41) and defeated Fresno State (59-50) during non-conference play.

"We can't let them score in transition. They're pretty athletic and they have pretty fast guards," Booker said. The backcourt tandem of Mike Ladd (10.6 ppg) and DeVonte Lacy (10.0 ppg) both average double figures in scoring for the Cougars. "Motum is a monster. He can score anywhere on the floor. We need to keep him away from the basket and make him shoot over our hand or with a hand in his face."

The Buffs will get on another airplane Saturday in Spokane for the short flight to Pullman, a place the program has never played before. The CU football team's only victory in 2012 was on Sept. 22 at Washington State (35-34).

Boyle and Co. haven't experienced a conference road triumph since a 55-48 win at Utah last season (Feb. 18, 2012).

"I'm not trying to be 1-5. I don't think anybody on the team wants to be 1-5," Roberson said of CU's poor Pac-12 record so far. "If we want to do what we have planned to do this season, it's a must win."

Follow Ryan on Twitter: @RyanThorburn

CU men's hoops preview

SATURDAY: The Colorado Buffaloes (11-6, 1-4) make their first-ever visit to Pullman to play the Washington State Cougars (10-7, 1-3) at 8 p.m. at Beasley Coliseum.

BROADCAST: Television on the Pac-12 Network with Kevin Calabro (play-by-play) and Lamar Hurd (analyst). Radio on KOA (850 am) with Mark Johnson (play-by-play). Follow on Twitter: @RyanThorburn.

CU STORY LINES: The Buffs are 10th in the Pac-12 standings after Wednesday's 64-54 loss at Washington. ... CU shot just 36.2 percent from the field and had a season-low assists total (six) against the Huskies. ... Spencer Dinwiddie had 15 points on 5-for-11 shooting to lead CU. Askia Booker (nine points on 3-for-14 shooting) is looking to bounce back after taking some bad shots in Seattle. ... CU is 7-5 this season in games decided by 10 points or less. ... The Buffs are 1-5 in true road games this season.

WASHINGTON STATE STORY LINES: The Cougars got their first Pac-12 victory of the season on Wednesday at home against Utah (75-65). ... Brock Motum, the Pac-12's second-leading scorer (19.4 ppg), scored all 14 of his points in the second half against the Utes. He has scored at least 14 points in all 17 of Washington State's games. ... Mike Ladd, a 6-5 guard, led the way with 22 points against the Utes. ... The Cougars are 8-2 at home, 0-3 on the road and 2-2 in neutral-site games.

KEY STAT: The Buffs were 1-for-10 from behind the arc against Washington. Andre Roberson was 1-for-3 from distance, which allowed CU's streak of consecutive games with at least one made 3-pointer to extend to 348 (dates back to Jan. 19, 2002).

COACHES: Boyle is 59-31 in his third season at CU. Ken Bone is 67-53 in his fourth season at Washington State.

PROBABLE STARTERS: Colorado -- F Andre Roberson, 6-7, So., 10.9 ppg, 11.8 rpg; F Josh Scott, 6-10, Fr., 13.1 ppg, 5.8 rpg; G Spencer Dinwiddie, 6-6, So., 14.5 ppg, 2.6 apg; G Askia Booker, 6-1, So., 14.6 ppg, 2.4 apg; G Sabatino Chen, 6-4, Sr., 4.8 ppg, 2.5 rpg. Washington State -- G Mike Ladd, 6-5, Sr., 10.6 ppg, 5.9 rpg; G DeVonte Lacy, 10.0 ppg, 2.4 rpg; G Royce Woolridge, 6-3, Sr., 7.6 ppg, 2.8 apg; F Brock Motum, 6-10, Sr., 19.4 ppg, 6.5 rpg; F D.J. Shelton, 6-10, Jr., 5.4 ppg, 5.6 rpg.

SERIES: CU leads 2-1, including a 71-60 victory last season. The Buffs are 2-0 against Washington State in Boulder and also defeated the Cougars 84-74 on Dec. 19, 1969, at a tournament in Albuquerque, N.M.

UP NEXT: The Buffs host Stanford on Thursday at the Coors Events Center (8 p.m., ESPNU).