

Booker struggles early, leads CU to late win at Washington State

By Ryan Thorburn *Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera*

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PULLMAN, Wash. -- A lot of coaches would have given Askia Booker the hook.

Colorado's leading scorer was 3-for-14 from the field during Wednesday's 64-54 loss at Washington and missed eight of his first nine shots on Saturday night against Washington State.

Tad Boyle didn't sit Booker down at the end of the bench. Instead, CU's head coach continued to call the unflappable shooting guard's number when the "must-win" game was on the line.

After Brock Motum gave the Cougars a 37-35 lead and got the crowd at Beasley Coliseum on its feet, Booker made a difficult jumper to tie the game and another clutch basket moments later to give CU a 42-37 lead.

The Buffs never looked back and flew back to Boulder with a much-needed 58-49 road victory over Washington State.

"My teammates still give me the ball and coach still runs plays for me at the end of the game and tells me to make a play," Booker said when asked how he remained poised in the midst of a frustrating offensive slump. "It's a big confidence booster when your coach runs a play for you and puts the ball in your hands with a few seconds on the shot clock and tells you to make a play,"

"It's just good that (Boyle) and the team believe in me."

Suddenly, at 12-6 overall and 2-4 in the Pac-12, this young CU team believes the pendulum is about to swing in the other direction.

The Buffs host Stanford (11-7, 2-3) and Cal (10-7, 2-3) this week with a chance to move vertically in the conference standings.

"We've got some guys that are much better than the way they're playing," Boyle said. "Ski had three baskets all night, but two of them came at critical times in the second half, big-time shots with the shot clock running down."

Spencer Dinwiddie scored 13 of his 16 points in the second half as the visitors closed the game with a 23-12 run over the final 9 minutes and 11 seconds.

Xavier Johnson had 14 points off the bench. Josh Scott added 11 points in the post.

Of CU's 58 points, 50 were scored by freshmen and sophomores.

"We want the next win," Johnson said of the significance of getting the first road breakthrough in Pac-12 play. "We've got Stanford and Cal coming in. We want to move on and just keep winning."

Andre Roberson finished with only four points and seven rebounds. However, the 6-7 junior forward was the primary defender on Motum, who finished with 13 points on 5-for-16 shooting after averaging 19.4 points

entering the contest.

"A lot of that goes to Colorado. At the beginning we had opportunities to get it to (Motum), we got it to him, and he was crowded immediately," Washington State head coach Ken Bone said. "Colorado is a good defensive team. I thought their quickness bothered us."

CU, clearly the more aggressive team, out-rebounded the Cougars 36-32 and made 19 free throws with the home team only getting to the line nine times.

"When you win on the road you have to take it and you have to move on," Boyle said. "I'm proud of my team for doing whatever it took."

Booker, who matched Roberson and Motum with seven rebounds, looked exhausted after the game. He finished the long trip to the Great Northwest averaging 8.0 points on 6-for-25 (24.0 percent).

And yet the fearless sophomore remains a closer in Boyle's mind.

"Ski has been shooting well in practice," Boyle said. "And we know what he's capable of doing for us in big games."

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