

Men's basketball: Leadership, unity key to CU Buffs' recent surge

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Of course Tad Boyle misses Carlon Brown's soaring dunks and timely 3-pointers.

However, those tangible elements from last year's Colorado team can be replaced. Xavier Johnson has been playing above the rim and Askia Booker has a knack for hitting clutch jump shots.

Senior leadership from Brown, Austin Dufault and Nate Tomlinson was one of the strengths of the 2012 Pac-12 Tournament champions and something the talented young Buffs have clearly missed at times this season.

Brown, who now plays in the NBA's Developmental League, liked the maturity he saw from some former teammates while attending CU's 81-71 victory over Cal on Sunday at the Coors Events Center.

"Everybody leads by a different variation. Some guys lead vocally, some guys lead by their play," Brown said. "I think everybody is taking those individual challenges from (Boyle) and doing it in their own way."

Brown said junior Andre Roberson has always been a great leader by example.

"Dre is not the most vocal guy, but you know he's going to give 100 percent effort," Brown said. "I see guys really responding to that and giving 100 percent effort."

Roberson and Sabatino Chen, the only senior in the program, called a players-only meeting after a poor start to Pac-12 play.

The team has responded with four strong defensive efforts and three consecutive wins to get back into the conference race.

Roberson grabbed 20 rebounds and scored 12 points to lead the Buffs in Thursday's 75-54 win over Stanford. Chen averaged 5.0 rebounds off the bench and is as happy about the emergence of Johnson (29 points and 15 rebounds during the home stand) as anyone.

Sophomore guards Spencer Dinwiddie and Booker combined for 61 points against the Bay Area schools. Dinwiddie was 15-for-18 from the free throw line and Booker was 14-for-21 from the field.

"When you find out about leadership is when you have some adversity. This team started out 1-4 (in conference) and we had some adversity at Arizona and losing at home to UCLA," Boyle said. "That kind of core group of guys have gotten the team together, gotten them on the same page ... I see more of a unity now. I see it the way we're playing offensively."

Scott drawing attention

Josh Scott only took five shots against Cal and finished with five points and three rebounds in 25 minutes. Pac-12 teams have made the 6-10 freshman a key target in their defensive scouting reports.

"Josh is going to see double teams and when he puts the ball on the floor people are going to come at him," Boyle said. "He has to do a better job of catching it deeper and not relying on his dribble so much. Coach

(Mike) Rohn works with these guys on post moves every day. The first thing we work on is catching the ball with no dribble and being able to score. We don't do that every often."

Scott is third on the team in scoring (12.6 ppg) behind Dinwiddie (14.5) and Booker (14.4) and second in rebounding (5.6) behind Roberson (11.6 rpg).

Resting herd

CU did not practice on Monday and will also take Tuesday off. The Buffs will start preparing on Wednesday for Saturday's game at Utah.

"We need to get some rest. These past two games have been really physical and the conditioning has been pretty crazy," Booker said. "Once we're well rested we need to come back in the gym and compete."

The Utes dropped to 9-11 overall and 1-7 in the Pac-12 with an 87-56 loss to Stanford on Sunday night in Salt Lake City.

The Buffs would like to pick up another road victory over a conference bottom feeder before the trip to Eugene on Feb. 7 to face No. 10 Oregon (18-2, 7-0).

"That's the next step for our program is to go on the road and beat a quality team, or teams, and gain a little bit of momentum here," Boyle said. "That's what the teams at the top of the league do. If we want to get there we better figure that out."

Notable

Roberson's five-rebound performance against Cal dropped the 6-7 forward to second nationally behind Siena's O.D. Anosike (12.0 rpg). ... The Buffs, who had 20 turnovers on Sunday, were 259th nationally in turnover margin (-1.4) as of Monday. ... CU is also a dismal 307th in assists per game (10.6 apg). ... A more positive statistic: CU shot 71.4 percent (15-for-21) from the field in the second half against Cal and 59.6 percent for the game.

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