

Thorburn: CU Buffs, Arizona State eyeing No. 4 seed in Pac-12

By Ryan Thorburn *Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera*

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Buffs fans have their hearts set on some Valentine's Day revenge with Colorado hosting Arizona on Feb. 14 at the Coors Events Center.

Tad Boyle's squad will have a chance to atone for the controversial overtime road loss that highlighted a disappointing 1-4 conference start.

As far as the Pac-12 pecking order for postseason play is concerned, the Buffs' Feb. 16 rematch with Arizona State might be even more important.

With about 10 games left in the regular season for most teams, Oregon, Arizona and UCLA appear to be the class of the Pac-12.

The Ducks (18-2, 7-0) have a two-game head start in the loss column on the other contenders. The Wildcats (17-2, 5-2) have been ranked in the top 10 throughout the season. And the resurgent Bruins (16-5, 6-2) have already won on the road at Arizona and CU.

As Washington (12-8, 4-3) plummets back to earth with a three-game skid that includes losses to Utah and Oregon State, the Sun Devils (16-4, 5-2) and Buffs (14-6, 4-4) will most likely battle for the No. 4 seed at the conference tournament.

Arizona State won the first meeting 65-56 on Jan. 6, three nights after Sabatino Chen's game-winning shot was taken away by officials in Tucson.

One reporter on Tuesday's Pac-12 coaches teleconference with the media should have won some sort of prize as the 100th person to ask Boyle about the hangover effect from the opener against Arizona.

Maybe the Sun Devils are just really tough to beat in Tempe.

"On paper, everyone expected us to beat (ASU) after the Arizona game," Boyle said. "That's not necessarily a bad loss looking back on it."

The Sun Devils -- picked 11th in the preseason Pac-12 poll -- are coming off a home sweep of USC and UCLA.

Carrick Felix, who averaged 19.5 points and 10.5 rebounds against the Los Angeles schools, was named the Pac-12 player of the week for the third time this season.

Jordan Bachynski, the 7-2 center who blocked nine shots against CU, had 22 points, 15 rebounds and six blocks against the Bruins.

The big man from Canada, who went on a mission and spent three years away from basketball before returning to Arizona State, also recorded the first triple-double in program history this season with 13 points, 12 rebounds and 12 blocks against Cal State Northridge.

"When you think about some of the great players that have played at Arizona State, it's amazing and surprising," head coach Herb Sendek said.

Some of the Sun Devil legends with triple-double talented that didn't achieve the milestone in college include Fat Lever, Byron Scott, Lionel Hollins, Joe Caldwell, Ike Diogu and Eddie House.

CU had some impressive performances while taking care of Stanford and Cal in Boulder last week. Andre Roberson grabbed 20 rebounds against the Cardinal while Xavier Johnson had a career-high 18 points and 12 rebounds against the Bears.

"Xavier Johnson is one of the most talented young players in our conference. His size is striking," Arizona coach Sean Miller said. "I think it's that combination of Roberson and him that brings out the best in both of them."

Right now Arizona State is tied for third in the standings with Arizona. However, CU has an official NCAA RPI of 21 this week, which is third in the Pac-12 behind Arizona (4) and Oregon (19).

"I am a little bit biased, but I think our league has three, four teams that are going to the NCAA Tournament," Utah coach Larry Krystkowiak said. "And Colorado I would put right in the mix."

National numbers

For the first time since the final Associated Press poll in 2008, the Pac-12 has two teams ranked in the top 10 with Arizona sitting at No. 8 and Oregon moving up to No. 10.

UCLA (29th) and Arizona State (30) also received votes in this week's AP poll.

My ballot: 1. Michigan, 2. Kansas, 3. Duke, 4. Indiana, 5. Syracuse, 6. Florida, 7. Gonzaga, 8. Arizona, 9. Miami, 10. Butler, 11. Michigan State, 12. Louisville, 13. Oregon, 14. Wichita State, 15. Mississippi, 16. Ohio State, 17. New Mexico, 18. Creighton, 19. Marquette, 20. N.C. State, 21. UNLV, 22. San Diego State, 23. Missouri, 24. UCLA, 25. Pitt.

The bottom of the conference is still very weak with four teams -- USC (130), Oregon State (153), Washington State (161) and Utah (180) well outside the top 100 in RPI.

Sitting (pretty) Ducks

Oregon's 7-0 record in the Pac-12 is its best start to a conference season since 1925-26. The Ducks have won nine consecutive games and are 3-1 against top-25 teams.

The other 11 conference members are a combined 5-22 against ranked opponents.

Oregon has won its last 20 games in Eugene, which is the nation's sixth-longest active home winning streak. CU will be the next visitor with a chance to put the streak to the test on Feb. 7.

"I'm not surprised. Maybe some of the folks who were picking the rankings before the season were surprised," Oregon State coach Craig Robinson said of the rise of the Beavers' rival. "Dana Altman is a very good coach. He gets his guys to play the way they need to play to win."

Notable

Washington State guard Mike Ladd, who had 23 points in the Cougars' win at Oregon State, has averaged 17.1 points over the last eight games. ... Arizona sophomore Nick Johnson leads the conference in steals (42, 2.21 spg) after making a total of 26 steals last season. ... Robinson, who is Michelle Obama's brother, is now 2-0 in games following his presence at the presidential inauguration ceremonies in Washington D.C.

Quotable

"He's just kind of a one-man wrecking crew in terms of rebounding the ball," Cal coach Mike Montgomery on Roberson, who leads the Pac-12 and is second nationally averaging 11.6 rebounds per game.

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Pac-12 power rankings

Ranking/previous (record) comment

1/1 Oregon (18-2, 7-0) -- Ducks off to their best conference start since Calvin Coolidge Administration (1925-26 season). Up next: Wednesday at Stanford.

2/3 UCLA (16-5, 6-2) -- Freshmen are scoring 66 percent of Bruins points, but some of them will be one-and-done. Up next: Wednesday vs. USC.

3/2 Arizona (17-2, 5-2) -- Preseason favorites are two games behind Oregon and the Ducks own the tiebreaker. Up next: Thursday at Washington.

4/6 Arizona State (16-4, 5-2) -- Sun Devils moving into the NCAA Tournament at-large bid discussion. Up next: Thursday at Washington State.

5/5 Colorado (14-6, 4-4) -- Buffs need to extend winning streak to four games in Salt Lake City before Oregon trip. Up next: Saturday at Utah.

6/4 Washington (12-8, 4-3) -- CU's loss in Seattle could haunt Tad Boyle on Selection Sunday. Up next: Thursday vs. Arizona.

7/7 Stanford (12-8, 3-4) -- The Cardinal football team handed the Ducks their first and only Pac-12 loss. Up next: Wednesday vs. Oregon.

8/9 Cal (11-8, 3-4) -- A team with Allen Crabbe and Justin Cobbs should be much better than this. Up next: Thursday vs. Oregon State.

9/8 USC (8-13, 3-5) -- The bottom of the Pac-12 is horrible compared to the bottom of the Mountain West. Up next: Wednesday at UCLA.

10/10 Washington State (11-9, 2-5) -- Contenders pulling for some upsets on the Palouse this week. Up next: Thursday vs. Arizona State.

11/12 Oregon State (11-9, 1-6) -- Craig Robinson must rally the Beavers for another CBI appearance. Up next: Thursday at Cal.

12/11 Utah (9-11, 1-7) -- Utes are 180th in RPI, just ahead of Rider (181) and Sacred Heart (182). Up next: Saturday vs. Colorado.

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Tad Boyle says Colorado Buffaloes' slow start was not a "hangover"

By **TOM KENSLE** |  1 Comment

Speaking Tuesday during the Pac-12 men's basketball coaches teleconference, Colorado's Tad Boyle said he did not attribute the Buffs' slow start (1-4) in conference play to a hangover from the heatbreaking loss at Arizona to begin the league schedule.

Colorado (14-6, 4-4 Pac-12) fell in overtime at Tucson on Jan. 3 after an apparent game-winning 3-pointer at the buzzer was disallowed by officials after consulting a video replay.

"I've been asked that ad nauseum since that game (in Tucson)," Boyle said. "And my answer hasn't changed. I don't think that we had a hangover from Arizona. Maybe some other people disagree with that, and I guess it is up for debate.

"But I'm around the guys every day. We've been practicing hard, getting better."

Three days after the controversial loss at Arizona, the Buffs lost at Arizona State. Then, after a home win over Southern California, CU lost a home game to UCLA and road game at Washington before the current three-game winning streak.

"People thought we should beat Arizona State, but obviously Arizona State (has shown to be) a good team; they just beat UCLA," Boyle said. "That's not necessarily a bad loss. Arizona State is for real. ... It's tough to win in league play. We got off to a rough start at 1-4.

"We've been playing well recently, there's no question about that. We've gotten better offensively, we've been making some shots. But I don't think it has anything to do with the Arizona loss, I really don't."

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