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Colorado adapting well to its Pac-12 home

Colorado had the most boisterous contingent at the Pit during the NCAA tournament.

The black and gold fans in Albuquerque were loud, proud and committed to ensuring the Buffaloes were well represented. I was there. I heard it. It was obvious to anyone in the arena.

The Buffaloes were rewarded with an NCAA tournament win over UNLV -- their first such victory in 15 years -- before losing to Baylor in the round of 32.

This was Colorado, and the sport they were cheering was men's basketball. Now that's progress.

The CU fan base had rarely been known as well traveled (or loud) during its days in the Big 12. Yet something has changed in Boulder -- for the better -- since Colorado's move in the Pac-12.

Now the fan base has something to cheer about: a team that isn't going to shy away from its newfound success under Tad Boyle, who is entering this third season with the Buffs.

"Two things contributed to our home-court edge," said Boyle, whose team lost just one league game at home last season. "The students really got into our program, and we were very consistent. The fact that we played at altitude and played fast for the whole game got everyone to buy into the home-court atmosphere. It was the best home-court advantage in the Pac-12. Arizona may be more consistent in terms of numbers game in and game out, but when our arena is full and it's a big game, it's a wash."

Colorado's 11-7 record in its inaugural Pac-12 season was no fluke. Neither was the team's run to the Pac-12 tournament title in Los Angeles. The league's move to Las Vegas' MGM Grand for the conference tourney should bode well in the coming years for this program. If the fans traveled well to New Mexico for the Big Dance, they'll surely make the more destination-driven spot of Vegas.

"We've got momentum now," Boyle said.

However, Boyle does expect this team to struggle a bit out of the box. The Buffaloes lost a few key players in [Carlton Brown](#) and [Austin Dufault](#). The schedule will be challenging with the Charleston Classic, which includes Baylor and Murray State. Hosting Colorado State and Air Force will test this team, as will a road game at Wyoming, all regional rivalries that are more difficult than they seem.

As for the roster, the Buffs have a rising star in junior forward [Andre Roberson](#), who was critical in the Pac-12 title run with double-doubles in three of the four games and a 13-16 performance against UNLV. Boyle also plans on leaning heavily on sophomore [Askia Booker](#), who shined in the NCAA tournament with a combined 31 points in the two games.

The expected impact of big-time in-state recruit Josh Scott, a 6-foot-10 center from Monument, Colo., and 6-6 wing Xavier Johnson from Temecula, Calif., is already being felt. Boyle has worked out the newcomers and hasn't shied from heaping expectations on them.

"Our two most highly rated guys -- Josh Scott and Xavier Johnson -- are both as good as advertised," Boyle said.



Tad Boyle has carried CU to the NIT semifinals and an NCAA tourney win in two seasons.

They, along with four other newcomers, will get a jump on the season with an August trip to France, Belgium and the Netherlands. Boyle said he's hoping that the freshmen will pick up necessary details sooner because of the trip.

The addition of Johnson gives the Buffaloes three key players (the other is rising sophomore [Spencer Dinwiddie](#)) from Southern California. Would this have happened if Colorado wasn't in the Pac-12?

"No way, no way, no way," Boyle said. "We don't get them if we're not in the Pac-12. We don't get Xavier Johnson. No question about it. It was a good move for us to capitalize on the West Coast."

No one associated with Colorado is foolish enough to think the Buffaloes will be picked to win the conference. The combination of returnees and top-five recruiting classes at Arizona and UCLA put those two programs at the top of the league. Stanford's NIT title and returning core probably put the Cardinal at third in the pecking order.

But Colorado has every reason to believe it can be in the top four, pushing past programs like Cal and Washington. Regardless, the Buffs are now officially in the mix on a regular basis.

"We've got a few key guys coming back that contributed to our run," Boyle said. "I like where we're positioned, not just for this year. We could be good this year, but we're poised to be good for two or three years down the road, too."
