

## CU forward delivers solid effort in two games back after illness

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LAS VEGAS -- The Buffs didn't accomplish their goal of doubling down here and defending their Pac-12 Tournament championship.

But despite Colorado's 79-69 loss to No. 18 Arizona in the quarterfinals on Thursday at the MGM Grand Garden Arena, the NCAA Tournament selection committee did have a chance to see what it needed to from Tad Boyle's team.

Namely an active and aggressive Andre Roberson.

The Pac-12 defensive player of the year returned from a viral illness in the opening round victory over Oregon State and put together a vintage performance with 15 points, 11 rebounds, two steals and two blocks against the Wildcats.

The nation's leading rebounder said there was never a doubt he would be ready for postseason play.

"I felt like I was going to be able to come back," said Roberson, who missed the final two games of the regular season with what sources told the Camera was Mononucleosis. "I wasn't really worried about it."

Without Roberson, CU was able to rally for a 76-53 victory over then-No. 19 Oregon at the Coors Events Center.

However, the Buffs clearly missed the 6-7 forward during the 64-58 loss to Oregon State. Roberson, despite early foul trouble, had 12 points and seven rebounds in 25 minutes during Wednesday's 74-68 victory over the Beavers.

"Andre's in great shape and he's one of the best athletes in our country I would think," Askia Booker said when asked if he was worried about Roberson's return this year. "Him having the willingness to come back and play and put his body in jeopardy means a lot to the team. He didn't have to come back, he could have sat out and did what he had to do for himself. He made a sacrifice."

Before the March 7 victory over the Ducks, CU athletic director Mike Bohn and head coach Tad Boyle were concerned the selection committee could hold Roberson's absence against the team on Selection Sunday had he been unable to get back into the lineup at the Pac-12 Tournament.

Roberson was cleared by doctors on Tuesday morning and seemed to get stronger as the intense game with Arizona went along. He has had at least 10 rebounds, two steals and two blocks in 11 games this season, more than twice as many as any other Division I player.

"I'm feeling really good. I have fresh legs," Roberson said. "I feel like that's my job to bring energy to this team. ... But it's definitely important to get back in shape and show everybody that you're playing your best."

Perhaps not playing four games in four nights at this year's conference tournament will actually benefit Roberson in the NCAA Tournament.

There will be some nervous Buffs on Sunday, but most "Bracketologists" project the program will receive one of the 37 at-large bids.

CU beat four ranked teams, finished fifth in the Pac-12, played a top-20 schedule, won 21 games and remains in the top-40 of the RPI.

"I think we can compete with anybody," Booker said. "Most of these teams in the Pac-12 we've played twice, Oregon State and Arizona we played three times. When we play teams outside our conference in the NCAA Tournament, I think it's just going to be an opportunity to score more because teams don't know us as well and aren't familiar.

"They're going to watch tape, but it's never the same until they see you in person."

If nothing else, the Buffs were able to make sure the nation got a good look at Roberson before the brackets are released.

"We're always better with Andre," Booker said. "And we're happy we have him now."

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