

Colorado men's basketball: Buffs open practices with enthusiasm

By Brian Howell Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

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The college basketball season is underway, much earlier than ever before.

Bright and early on Monday morning, the Colorado men's basketball team held its first official practice of the new season at Coors Events Center.

"You feel like you're trying to drink from a fire hose today," CU head coach Tad Boyle said. "There's so many things, you feel like you could stop at every possession and correct and teach. As a coach, you've got to find that balance between letting them play and play through mistakes, which is what we're going to have to do."

A new NCAA rule passed in May allows men's teams to start practices 42 days before the season opener -- two weeks before they were allowed to open practices in the past. Within those 42 days, teams are allowed to conduct 30 days of practice. It's similar to the rule the women adopted in 2012. The women can start 40 days before the first game and hold 30 practices.

The Buffs (21-12 last season), who open the season on Nov. 8 in Dallas against Baylor, could have opened practice last Friday, but Boyle waited until Monday morning.

"I love the new rule," Boyle said. "We're certainly not where we would normally be for the first practice this year, relative to last year, because of the two-week move up, but I love being out here on Sept. 30 and being able to go for 21/2 hours. I think it's better for the players, because they're going to get more time off. We're basically going to go three days on, one day off."

"They'll get more days off and we'll get a chance to get more done between now and our first game. I think it's better for the players."

In addition to starting two weeks early, the Buffs will begin practice during the 7 a.m. hour most days to accommodate some of the players' class schedules.

Nothing about the new schedule seems to bother the Buffs, who were eager to get a jump on the season.

"It's really exciting, especially with all the young guys," junior guard Askia Booker said. "They're so athletic and they're willing to compete, which is what you want out of those freshmen. And the returners are so much better than last year."

The Buffs have held short offseason workouts in recent weeks, but Monday was the first full session, and it felt different.

"Without a doubt," Booker said. "The intensity picked up a lot; picked all the way up really. Coach is on guys. He's not going to let any slips-ups go; if you don't box out, you're going to run. Those kinds of things pick the tempo up."

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Colorado men's basketball: Buffs train with Navy SEALs

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Part of the reason Colorado coach Tad Boyle waited until Monday to start men's basketball practice is that the Buffs spent Friday and Saturday working out with former Navy SEALs. They went from 5-10 p.m. on Friday night and then 5-10 a.m. on Saturday.

"It's such a short intense time frame that it's good for our players, it's good for our coaches, it's good for our team," Boyle said. "I wouldn't say our players enjoy it, but I think they get a lot out of it."

One player who did enjoy it was sophomore forward Xavier Johnson. He said the workouts were long and grueling, but will pay off.

"I think the biggest benefit is just being mentally tough -- just knowing you're tired, but knowing you can't leave," Johnson said. "You can't go anywhere, so you might as well forget about it and just keep fighting and keep working harder."

"It was a great experience."

Part of the experience was that each player had to actually fight one of the SEALs.

"That was actually a really cool thing," said Johnson, who reportedly took down one of the SEALs. "It was physical."

This is the second year the Buffs have done the SEALs training, and Boyle looks forward to it continuing.

"I'm a big believer in the program," he said. "I expect that relationship to continue because it's something we'll refer back to. I referred to it in practice today four or five times."

Notable

CU is considered to be a top 25 team, based on how well it did last year, but Booker said the Buffs can't worry about the expectations. "What happened last year doesn't matter," he said. "It's this year now and we're here to play for this year." ... The CU women's basketball team could have started practice as early as this coming Thursday, but head coach Linda Lappe will conduct her team's first practice on Oct. 8. The Buffs open on Nov. 12 at Colorado State.

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Howell blog: CU Buffs' Boyle wants consistency from Gordon, Jenkins

By Brian Howell, Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

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In addition to four true freshmen, the Colorado men's basketball team will have two redshirt freshmen to break in this season.

Wesley Gordon and Chris Jenkins both redshirted a year ago, and CU head coach Tad Boyle said he's excited to see them play this year.

"They both have made good strides," he said.

Gordon, a 6-foot-9 forward from Colorado Springs, has great athleticism and could post a lot of blocks on defense. Jenkins, a 6-7 guard/forward, is one of several players who can play multiple positions and could help the Buffs in a lot of ways.

Boyle said they are, of course, a year older, but only time will tell if they're better.

"I think so, but we don't know until we get out there on Nov. 8 (for the season opener against Baylor) or in our scrimmages and exhibitions," Boyle said. "We'll find out a little bit more as we go on. I think that they are (better). I like what I see in practice.

"I think the biggest key for them is going to be consistency, and that's the hardest thing for any freshman. The consistency is something you look for. It may not always be there, but you want to see it hopefully peak its head out a little bit earlier in the season than it would if they were true freshmen."

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