



Silas making strides after rough start

Bufs wrap up nonconference schedule against Tulsa tonight

By Ryan Thorburn Camera Sports Writer
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Since being scapegoated by teammates after the loss to New Orleans, Xavier Silas has responded to some early-season adversity by scoring in double figures three times and impressing head coach Jeff Bzdelik with his play away from the ball.

It's another positive sign for the Colorado men's basketball team, which will need the talented sophomore to play well to enjoy success in the Big 12 this season.

The Buffs (8-5) close out nonconference play against Tulsa tonight at the Coors Events Center (7 p.m., no television).

"We're all getting there. I'd like to play my best in the Big 12," said Silas, who scored 15 points in Friday's 63-52 victory over SMU. "If we keep playing together we'll be able to win some key games in the Big 12."

Silas was a bright spot during last season's dark 7-20 campaign, averaging 12.0 points and 3.7 rebounds as a true freshman.

The 6-foot-5 guard seemed like a perfect candidate to thrive in Bzdelik's system but Silas struggled in some important early games -- scoring two points against Air Force, three points against Stanford and allowing his man to score the winning points in the final second of the Buffs' collapse against New Orleans.

"You've got to remember that he's a young player, too," Bzdelik said. "Because he played so many minutes last year people forget that he's a young player and a sophomore. When you look at the big picture and the future of this program, he's very instrumental and a major part of it."

During CU's current three-game winning streak Silas has averaged 13.7 points as part of a more balanced offensive attack. He has also picked up his intensity and aggressiveness on defense, although improving his rebounding (2.8 per game) remains a goal.

"I'm trying," Silas said. "I'm under (the basket), but I never really get the rebound. But I'm looking forward to being one of the best some day."

Silas (10.5 ppg) is third on the team in scoring behind Richard Roby (15.8) and Marcus Hall (13.5). The trio has combined to average 49.7 points in the last three games.

"Xavier has done a great job," Bzdelik said. "He did a lot of great things (against SMU) that don't show

up in the box score, and I'm very pleased with him."

CU will open conference play Saturday against Texas A&M in College Station. The Buffs, despite eclipsing last year's win total already, seem to understand that they won't beat Tulsa tonight if they peek ahead.

The deep and athletic Golden Hurricane (7-4) arrives in Boulder packing a five-game winning streak.

"We're getting better in certain areas and that's pleasing," Bzdelik said. "But we are also very much aware of the stiff competition that awaits us. Yes, conference play is a week away, but we have a very big test (tonight) and that's our only focus right now."



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CU men's preview

By Ryan Thorburn
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TODAY: Colorado (8-5) hosts Tulsa (7-4) at the Coors Events Center (11,064) at 7 p.m.

BROADCAST: Television: none; Radio: KKZN (760 AM) with Mark Johnson (play-by-play) and Charles Johnson (color).

THE SERIES: The Buffs lead 4-1. The last meeting between the programs was in 1986 and the first was CU's 69-59 win in the 1955 NCAA Tournament en route to the Final Four.

KEY STAT: During this three-game win streak CU has had four players score in double figures in each game.

CU UPDATE: The Buffs are coming off a 63-52 victory over SMU. Richard Roby scored 15 first-half points but was shut out in the second half after getting into foul trouble.

TULSA UPDATE: The Golden Hurricane has rallied to win five consecutive games since a humbling Dec. 5 loss at Oklahoma (81-55) dropped their record to 2-4.

PLAYERS TO WATCH: Colorado senior guard Marcus Hall 13.3 ppg, 3.4 apg; Tulsa sophomore guard Ben Uzoh 16.1 ppg, 6.2 rpg.

UPCOMING: The Buffs will open up Big 12 play on Saturday at Texas A&M (2 p.m.).



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