



# Bufs take wraps off tonight

## Bzdelik's young squad opens vs. Ark.-Pine Bluff

By Ryan Thorburn

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In these volatile economic times the Colorado athletic department is hoping to get more fans invested in the men's basketball program.

Tickets for tonight's season opener against Arkansas-Pine Bluff can be had for as little as \$1. Those who participate in the promotion also receive a free T-shirt, which grants them free admission to eight more non-conference home games.

And tonight's tip time has been moved back to 8:34 p.m. so football fans planning on attending the pep rally on Pearl Street won't have an excuse not to make their way up to the Coors Events Center.

It will be Jeff Bzdelik's job to make sure everyone gets enough bang for their entertainment buck.

CU's second-year head coach is now working with a roster made up mostly of players that he recruited, and the Charmin-soft non-conference schedule is designed to allow the young team to gain some confidence while winning games before the Big 12 grind begins.

So, how good are the 2008-09 Bufs?

"We'll find out together," Bzdelik said. "Plain and simple."

In addition to the cheap tickets, those who attend tonight's game might want to splurge on a program.

Bzdelik has only has three players — sophomore guard Cory Higgins, senior forward Jermyl Jackson-Wilson and junior guard Dwight Thorne — who have ever played in a game at CU before.

The Bufs are counting on a couple of freshmen, starting point guard Nate Tomlinson and starting forward Austin Dufault, to be impact players right away. Sophomore Casey Crawford, who sat out last season after transferring from Wake Forest, is expected to vastly improve the offense by consistently knocking down 3-pointers.

Toby Veal, perhaps the most talented member of the five-man all-freshmen recruiting class, needs to be a strong rebounder on a team that still lacks size. Levi Knutson, a sophomore who played through a serious hip injury last season, has to be able to come off the bench and make more shots this season.

"I'm anxious to see how they do under the bright lights," Jackson-Wilson, the only senior in the program, said of the new cast of talented but untested characters. "Some people play differently, some

play better, you never know what's going to happen. I'm pretty confident in our team, though, with the chemistry we have and how well we've been practicing."

Instead of beating up on a couple of Division II programs in meaningless exhibition games witnessed by 10,000 empty seats, Bzdelik scheduled closed-door scrimmages against Utah and Northern Colorado — two experienced but stylistically different opponents.

"Utah is a senior-dominated team. They're very big and physical, so for the younger guys it was very good just to see what type of physicality there is in Division I basketball," Dufault said. "Northern Colorado was another older team and it was good to travel to Greeley and play them there."

The Buffs will play a school-record eight home games before Christmas. The early part of the schedule is more about how CU plays than what the opponents do, although Bzdelik admits he really doesn't know exactly what to expect from an Arkansas-Pine Bluff team with a new head coach and eight new players.

"Basketball is an unpredictable game, but I think the way we've been progressing in practice, hopefully there won't be any surprises (tonight)," Knutson said. "I think we know what we're going to get out of each other and we're used to each other on the court."

CU was 12-20 during Bzdelik's first season in Boulder and has been picked to finish last in the Big 12 again by his peers, mostly due to the losses of Richard Roby and Marcus Hall. There will be some growing pains with such an inexperienced lineup, but the coaching staff believes this year's team will be much more balanced on offense and committed on defense.

"We're going to make some mistakes, as any young team is going to do," Thorne said. "But I think we'll work hard to overcome those mistakes by playing hard, being more aware, listening to coach, trying to be coachable, and doing the right things at all times. ...

"Having such a young team makes it a lot more exciting because you don't know how everybody is going to react when the lights come on."



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## CU men's preview: UAPB

**TONIGHT --** Colorado hosts Arkansas-Pine Bluff at the Coors Events Center in the season opener for both teams. Tip-off is scheduled for 8:34 p.m.

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

**STORYLINE--** CU is led by sophomore Cory Higgins and will be breaking in five freshmen tonight. For the third consecutive year the Buffs were picked to finish last in the Big 12. The past two seasons that's exactly where they ended up. Can Jeff Bzdelik put an end to the pathetic trend this season with a young team made up mostly of his recruits?

**KEY STAT--** The Buffs play a school-record eight home games before Christmas, none against schools from BCS conferences.

**COACHES--** Jeff Bzdelik is 12-20 entering his second season at CU. George Ivory is making his head coaching debut for Arkansas-Pine Bluff.

### PROBABLE STARTERS

**CU --** G Nate Tomlinson, 6-2, freshman; G Cory Higgins, 6-5, sophomore; F Austin Dufault, 6-8, freshman; F Jermyl Jackson-Wilson, 6-6, senior; F/C Casey Crawford, 6-9, sophomore.

**UAPB --** G Terrance Calvin, 6-2, junior; G Tavaris Washington, 6-5, junior; F Lebaron Weathers, 6-8, junior; F Tyree Glass, 6-7, junior; F Hugh Barnett, 6-9, junior

**SERIES --** CU leads 1-0, a 98-81 victory on Nov. 17, 2001. The Buffs are 3-0 all-time against opponents from the Southwest Athletic Conference.

**UP NEXT--** The Buffs host Montana State next Tuesday at 7 p.m. at the Coors Events Center.



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## Bufs in sync with Bzdelik

Young roster gets handle on system

*By Brian Howell*

*Longmont Times-Call*

BOULDER — As the players on the University of Colorado men's basketball team proved last season, it's not a quick transition to a new coach and a new system.

"Sometimes you have bad habits you need to break," CU senior Jermyl Jackson-Wilson said.

Head coach Jeff Bzdelik's motion offense has taken time to get used to, and that was evident throughout the 2007-08 season, when Colorado went 12-20.

As Year No. 2 of the Bzdelik era opens tonight at the Coors Events Center against Arkansas-Pine Bluff, the Buffaloes believe they have worked out many of the kinks.

The bad habits Jackson-Wilson referred to included players' instincts to take matters into their own hands, panic and get out of their offense as the shot clock wound down.

"With our offense, you can run it to the last second of the shot clock, and you might get a wide-open layup," said Jackson-Wilson, the lone senior on the roster. "I think we didn't trust it enough last year. Maybe it was sort of a trust issue, but we know what it can do now."

"It works. Everything we do, it works."

Despite having an extremely young roster, the Buffaloes believe they'll be more in sync with Bzdelik's system right from the start of the season.

"We already notice it a lot," said sophomore Casey Crawford, who will play his first game as a Buff tonight after transferring from Wake Forest and sitting out last season. "It's running a lot smoother, which is good."

Fans have yet to see any evidence of that this year, because — for the first time since the 1985-86 season — the Buffs didn't play any exhibition games. They did play two closed-door scrimmages, however, against Utah and Northern Colorado.

Bzdelik said the decision to play the scrimmages instead of the exhibition games was good for his team. But it could have a drawback, too.

"It's a double-edged sword," he said. "It's hard to play an exhibition game that will really challenge you and give players a lot of experience. To play two very tough teams, scrimmage-wise, and play them lots and lots and lots of minutes was more beneficial for us."

### Men's Basketball

**Arkansas-Pine Bluff (0-0) at Colorado (0-0)**

**When/Where:** 8:30 p.m. today, at Coors Events Center in Boulder

**TV/Radio:** No TV/760-AM

**Notes:** This is the second meeting between the programs. CU beat the Golden Lions, 98-81, on Nov. 17, 2001, in Boulder. ... Colorado went 12-20 a year ago, including 9-7 in non-conference play. ... UAPB went 13-18, 5-8 outside of its conference. ... UAPB coach George Ivory is in his first year with the team. ... Sophomore Cory Higgins is CU's leading returning scorer, at 8.3 points per game a year ago. ... Junior Terrance Calvin is the leading returning scorer for UAPB, at 6.7 points per game.

*Brian Howell*

“On the flip side, what might not have been good is the fact that our players haven’t gone out there in front of people. I’m sure there’s going to be a lot of nerves early on.”

Those nerves might have been there anyway. Of the 13 players on the roster, five are freshmen and five are sophomores. Aside from Jackson-Wilson (37 career starts) and sophomore Cory Higgins (32 starts), the rest of the roster has a combined eight starts in Division I basketball.

“As I’ve said many times, we’re extremely young and very inexperienced and we’re going to have a lot of challenging moments as we go forward with creating this vision that we have for this program,” said Bzdelik, who could go with a lineup tonight consisting of all underclassmen.

That vision appears to be more clear to the players, especially on offense, than it was a year ago.

“A lot of the guys know the offense from last year, and we helped the new guys coming in to learn the offense,” Jackson-Wilson said. “Every day, we’ve gotten better doing it.”

That’s a good sign to Bzdelik. Not much is expected of the Buffs this year, but the second-year coach sees light ahead.

“I just want to get better every game, every day,” he said. “I believe in these young players, and I believe in the players coming in. I know our future is very bright. We just have to go through this process.”

**OPPORTUNITY AHEAD:** CU’s first four games, and eight of its first nine, are at home. That could offer the Buffs a chance to start strong.

“If we get on a roll here and get some good wins, the momentum will build confidence,” Crawford said. “With a young team like we have, it’s vital.”

Said Jackson-Wilson: “We play a lot of games at home, and we have to take care of our house. We live here. We have to take care of this. We can’t let anybody come in here and just take our food from us, like someone coming to rob your house.”

**TIP-INS:** Admission for tonight’s game is just \$1, and all fans will receive a free CU T-shirt. The T-shirt also will give fans free admission to all men’s and women’s non-conference games through the first week of January when they wear the shirt to those games. In theory, fans could see up to 18 games for just \$1. ... Tonight’s game is the first of 11 consecutive road games to start the year for Arkansas-Pine Bluff.

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