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CU, Bzdelik lose opener

New Mexico holds Buffaloes guard Roby to one point

By B.G. Brooks, Rocky Mountain News
November 10, 2007

BOULDER - "Bz-ball" debuted Friday night at the University of Colorado, and its newness underscored what new coach Jeff Bzdelik has been preaching for the past eight months.

Patience is required.

A few shooters would be nice, too.

Bzdelik's Buffaloes, still trying to find themselves offensively, battled gallantly in the final 3 minutes, trimming an 11-point New Mexico lead to three with 1:04 remaining before falling 54- 47 before an announced crowd of 8,372 at the Coors Events Center.

"I want to thank the students and a great crowd . . . it was awesome," Bzdelik said. "They were here for us, and there was awesome energy in the building. They were wanting us to do something and, unfortunately, we didn't give them enough."

The Lobos, also playing their first game for new coach Steve Alford, got a clutch basket from senior J.R. Giddens - it was only his second of the game after being virtually shut down by CU freshman Cory Higgins - to pull ahead 52-47 with 33 seconds remaining.

CU, after rallying from a 49-38 deficit and closing to 50-47 on senior Marcus Hall's layup, was done.

Bzdelik termed his team's offensive effort "totally out of sync," and few who watched it would argue.

Still, the Buffs kept themselves in the game with key defensive stops late in the game and by forcing 18 Lobos turnovers.

But when the Buffs needed points, they usually remained needy.

CU shot only 34.1 percent from the field (15-for-44), with leading 2006-07 scorer Richard Roby (17.3 average) hitting only a late free throw to match a career-worst night first recorded last season against Nebraska.

"There's always going to be nights like this," said Roby, whose three field-goal attempts were a career low. "I couldn't get in the flow (of the offense), but I can't get down on myself. I probably could have been more aggressive in getting to the basket."

Bzdelik also was perturbed by the Buffs' deliberation in getting the ball up the court, noting, "We have to run the ball up court and not allow the defense to dig in. It was like (watching) a root canal by a bad dentist."

With Roby looking lost in Bzdelik's offense, Hall (11 points) and Higgins (10) attempted to muster CU's scoring punch.

Sophomore Xavier Silas and freshman Levi Knutson each contributed nine.

The Buffs made only four of 19 three-point attempts, with Hall, Higgins, Silas and Knutson hitting one each. But aside from bad marksmanship, Bzdelik said his team "didn't recognize (the Lobos') change of defenses. We knew what to do, but we kind of stumbled through it."

Alford had been known for his sticking to his defensive roots - a tight man-to-man taught by mentor Bob Knight when Alford played for Knight at Indiana.

Still, Bzdelik wasn't sure what he might see from New Mexico, particularly after Regis befuddled the Buffs with a 1-3-1 zone three nights earlier in CU's final exhibition win.

Alford obviously got the scouting report, going to the zone early and building a 30-19 halftime lead, which posed a good news/bad news



David Zalubowski © AP

Colorado coach Jeff Bzdelik looks on with guard Richard Roby during CU's 54-47 home loss to New Mexico on Friday.

scenario for the Buffs.

The bad news: They were down by double figures. The good news: That 11-point deficit was two fewer than the 47-34 advantage the Lobos held last season en route to their 105-61 blowout win in Albuquerque.

"We're all having a lot of trouble with the zone defense," said Hall, back after missing last season to attend to academics. "We have to figure (it) out, because other teams will notice our problems against it."

NEW MEXICO (1-0) - Harris 0-2 0-2 0, Faris 4-7 0-1 8, Wills 4-9 2-2 13, Smith 2-4 3-5 7, Giddens 2-5 0-0 4, Gary 0-0 0-1 0, Pegues 1-5 1-2 3, Prentice 0-1 1-2 1, Martinez 3-6 0-0 7, Toppert 4-6 1-2 11. Totals 20-45 8-17 54.

COLORADO (0-1) - Jackson-Wilson 0-0 3-4 3, Hall 4-12 2-2 11, Higgins 3-7 3-4 10, Silas 3-12 2-4 9, Roby 0-3 1-2 1, Thorne 1-2 0-0 2, Knutson 3-5 2-4 9, King-Stockton 1-3 0-0 2. Totals 15-44 13-20 47.

Halftime - New Mexico 30-19. Three-point attempts - New Mexico 6-12 (Wills 3-3, Toppert 2-4, Martinez 1-2, Giddens 0-1, Smith 0-1, Prentice 0-1), Colorado 4-19 (Knutson 1-3, Higgins 1-3, Silas 1-4, Hall 1-5, Thorne 0-1, Roby 0-3). Fouled out - Hall. Rebounds - New Mexico 34 (Toppert 9), Colorado 29 (Hall 6). Assists - New Mexico 13 (Prentice 4), Colorado 10 (Hall 4). Total fouls - New Mexico 21, Colorado 19. A - 8,372.

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Buzz in building, but CU falls

8,372 watch Bzdelik's debut, but Buffs come up short vs. Lobos

By Ryan Thorburn

Saturday, November 10, 2007

It sounds so easy.

See Marcus Hall run. See Richard Roby score. See Buffs win.

Unfortunately for Jeff Bzdelik, his new team wasn't able to execute his offensive scheme on Friday night as Colorado lost 54-47 to New Mexico in front of the largest opening-night crowd (8,372) in the history of the Coors Events Center.

The Buffs (0-1) struggled to solve the switching defenses of the Lobos (1-0) — especially the zone — and shot 34.1 percent from the field (15-for-44), including 21.1 percent from 3-point range (4-for-19).

"It was like a root canal from a bad dentist," Bzdelik said of the Buffs' failure to launch a transition offense.

The good news is that Bzdelik used to say the same thing about the Denver Nuggets when he was their first-year head coach. And once they figured out how to run — and drafted Carmelo Anthony — the long-suffering franchise suddenly found itself in the NBA playoffs.

"It was different the second year — we led the league in fastbreak points," Bzdelik recalled. "... free agency."

The Buffs will not be making any transactions. The coaching staff believes things can and will turn around with this program sooner rather than next summer.

"We had more to do with us losing this game than New Mexico had in terms of beating us," Bzdelik said. "Defensively we got enough stops. We competed. Offensively, things can only get better."

Roby was held to a single point, tying the senior's career-low set at Nebraska last season. Hall was 1-for-5 from behind the arc and finished with four assists and four turnovers. Xavier Silas was 3-for-12 shooting.

The Buffs were out-rebounded 34-29, had 15 turnovers to 10 assists as a team, missed seven free throws and allowed the Lobos to shoot 6-for-12 from 3-point land.

And despite all of the above, CU still had a chance to steal the game when Hall's basket made the score 50-47 with 1:04 remaining after New Mexico had led by as many as 13 points in the second half.

"We had a chance to win and we didn't play anywhere near the kind of basketball we're capable of playing," said Roby, who was 0-for-3 from the field and 1-for-2 from the line after averaging 20 points in the two exhibition games. "We felt that we beat ourselves more than anything with silly turnovers or not executing. Those are things that are fixable. So we're looking forward to getting back on the court and fixing them."

Kansas transfer J.R. Giddens, who freshman Cory Higgins had held to two points up until crunch time, splashed a difficult jumper from the corner to give the Lobos a 52-47 cushion with 33 seconds left.

"We fought hard and had a chance to win. J.R. made a tough shot," said Roby, who missed a 3-pointer moments later.

Buzz in building, but CU falls

"Just one of those days that I couldn't get in a flow. First game of the season, can't get down on myself or on the team. We've got to get a lot better. We all know that."

CU trailed 30-19 at the intermission after allowing New Mexico to make five 3-pointers. Bzdelik ripped his jacket off in disgust after Hall's shot from the corner hit nothing but the side of the backboard on the Buffs' final possession.

Higgins' transition layup made the score 2-0 just 23 seconds into the game. It would be CU's final lead of the night.

"We're still searching for our identity, we're still working on our offense," Hall said. "I think defensively we did a good job as far as holding their main scorer (Giddens) down to four points. We still had a shot. We just have to work on this and grow."

And run. And score. And win.



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Higgins, Knutson bright spots for CU

By Ryan Thorburn

Saturday, November 10, 2007

While seniors Richard Roby and Marcus Hall struggled in Colorado's season-opener on Friday night at the Coors Events Center, true freshmen Cory Higgins and Levi Knutson seemed to thrive in the spotlight.

Just not quite enough as the Buffs lost 54-47 to New Mexico.

Higgins did a terrific job defending J.R. Giddens, who finished with four points, and Knutson scored seven of his nine points in the second half to spark CU's late comeback bid.

"It's not about any individual," Knutson said. "I'm happy to be out there helping the team and doing what I can. I can't wait to get better every day and see this team get better."

The Buffs, who are going to be facing zone defenses until they start knocking down some outside shots, were a dismal 4-for-19 from 3-point range. But Higgins and Knutson — the two guys you would expect to be nervous — were a combined 6-for-12 from behind the arc.

"It's always good to stretch the defense a little bit with shooters. I think our team has that," Knutson said. "We just need to step up with confidence and knock shots down. We're a good shooting team. I'm not worried about that."

CU head coach Jeff Bzdelik said he wasn't surprised that his team struggled from the perimeter. He would rather see them push the tempo and get some easier baskets.

"Offensively we were just totally out of sync," Bzdelik said. "We looked like a deer in the headlights."

Hall was 1-for-5 on 3-pointers and led the team with just 11 points. Roby was 0-for-3 shooting (all 3-pointers) and finished with one point.

"We've just got to figure this out because other teams are going to notice that we haven't been successful against zones," Hall said. "So we've got to figure this out real quick."



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Woelk: Buffs endure 'root canal' in opener

By Neill Woelk

Saturday, November 10, 2007

The largest crowd ever for a Colorado basketball home opener showed up Friday night to watch the Buffs play their first game under Jeff Bzdelik.

They didn't witness a happy ending. What could have been a smashing debut instead turned into a harsh reminder of how much work is ahead of the Buffs.

"I think we had more to do with losing this game than New Mexico had with winning it," Bzdelik said. "We're still thinking out there. We knew what to do, we just didn't recognize it.

"We looked like deer in the headlights."

The Buffs did show they are willing to play defense in the manner Bzdelik demands. Colorado forced 18 New Mexico turnovers and held the Lobos to 44 percent shooting from the field (20-for-45).

"Defensively, we got enough stops and we competed," Bzdelik said.

But new UNM coach Steve Alford — also a disciple of defense — watched his team strangle CU on the offensive end. The Buffs shot a miserable 34 percent (15-for-44), including a horrendous 4-for-19 night from 3-point range. Even when the Buffs had a chance to close the gap to three in the final minutes despite their offensive woes, they missed two key free throws.

When it comes to a "work in progress," the Buffs will have to put in plenty of the former to attain any of the latter.

Still, there were glimpses of the offense that took Bzdelik's Air Force teams to the postseason two years in a row. There were moments when the Buffs did find the open man heading to the basket for a layup. But far too often, sharp cuts, pinpoint passes and crisp execution were absent.

Simply, the idea and effort were there. The execution was not.

"It was like a root canal from a bad dentist," Bzdelik said.

There were a few bright spots. Freshman Cory Higgins showed that his play in CU's exhibition season wasn't a fluke. Higgins finished with 10 points and also chipped in five rebounds, three steals and a pair of assists. Fellow freshman Levi Knutson, after a slow start, sparked CU's late second-half run with nine points.

But the flip side of the freshmen was a one-point night from Richard Roby. The CU senior threatened to go scoreless for the first time in his career before finally hitting a free throw with 1:16 left in the game.

If the Buffs are to be competitive, they'll need more than one point from the player who led the team in scoring the last two seasons.

Clearly, the Buffs have plenty of work to do. They are nowhere close to the point that they can react instinctively in their offense. It's not something that will happen overnight.

But if they continue to play defense the way they played Friday, they will at least have a chance to be competitive.

"We'll go back, look at film and see what we have to do to improve," Bzdelik said. "We'll find a way. That's my job."

Bzdelik also knows the 8,300 fans who showed up Friday night won't be regulars. He knows it will likely be a long time before that many folks troop into the Events Center again.

"I really so badly wanted to please the fans," Bzdelik said. "The energy was awesome. They were here for us."

As debuts go, it was by no means one for fans to remember. But the Buffs can't afford to forget if they're going to get better.



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