



Bufs have work to do on defense

By Ryan Thorburn
Friday, November 16, 2007

MADISON, Wis. — Akini Akini.

That's the name of Florida A&M's tallest and most talented player. And on Thursday night the 6-foot-10 senior forward had Colorado's post players seeing double.

In an otherwise impressive game for the Buffs, Akini scored 21 points on 9-for-13 shooting to highlight FAMU's effort in an 83-59 CU victory in the America's Youth Classic at the Kohl Center.

"We're not very big," Jeff Bzdelik said after picking up his first victory as the Buffs' bench boss. "We have to move our feet. That's where we need to really be rock solid defensively, in our positioning."

CU stormed out to a 25-7 lead over the Rattlers of the Mid-Eastern Atlantic Conference. The boys from the Big 12 were feeling comfortable enough at that point to let Caleb Patterson get his first official collegiate minutes.

Akini quickly took advantage of the 6-11 true freshman with back-to-back baskets on textbook post moves. He would finish the half with 14 points, including a dunk to pull the Rattlers to within 39-31 with 34 seconds remaining.

"We let our guard down a little bit," Bzdelik said. "And we took some questionable shots and got a little bit careless on defense. But that's to their credit, and next game we'll try and play all 40 minutes."

Silent assassins

The Buffs, perhaps used to playing in front of small crowds after surviving the 7-20 finish to the Ricardo Patton era, shot 54.7 percent (29-for-53) from the floor even though there were less than 100 fans in the Kohl Center for the first game of the night.

"High school games (draw) way more people than that. So I don't even know what it felt like, maybe an AAU game," Silas said. "It doesn't matter, once you get going you're not focused on the crowd or anything like that."

CU will face its first hostile crowd of the season on Saturday night when it plays tournament host Wisconsin.

Notable

Knutson was poked in the eye late in the game but said it wasn't serious after being looked at by a doctor in the postgame locker room. ... CU had 19 assists on 29 made baskets.



Floodgates open as CU scores win

Bzdelik records first victory as Buff coach

By Ryan Thorburn

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MADISON, Wis. — The Buffs couldn't have hit nearby Lake Monona or Lake Mendota with a basketball had they packed the offense for this trip that they played in front of 8,372 fans at the Coors Events Center one week ago.

Colorado opened the Jeff Bzdelik era with a thud, scoring 47 points and shooting 34.1 percent from the field in the loss to New Mexico.

But the Buffs started the America's Youth Classic here with a splash, scoring 42 points in the first half and shooting 54.7 percent in an 83-59 victory Thursday over Florida A&M in front of about 17,000 empty red seats at the Kohl Center.

Xavier Silas scored a career-high 24 points to lead a balanced CU offense in which eight players scored, including five in double figures.

"The offense was much quicker and crisper tonight. That's something we worked very hard on," Bzdelik said after getting his first victory as CU's head coach. "They're starting to be more instinctive than robotic."

Despite all of the practices leading up to the opener, the players apparently needed to experience failure in order to get Bzdelik's simple message:

Run.

"It was a misunderstanding with Coach," Silas said. "He wanted us to get off to a great start with the offense, and we thought that meant walking down and everybody getting set up. He meant to just push the ball and get into spots as quick as we could."

There was no confusion against the Rattlers (1-1), who helped the Buffs' cause by playing man-to-man defense.

Richard Roby scored 10 points after totaling a single point against New Mexico, Jermyl Jackson-Wilson had 11 points on 5-for-7 shooting, freshmen Cory Higgins and Levi Knutson chipped in with 10 points each, and Marcus Hall made three layups and a wide-open 3-pointer to get his nine points.

"Not walking the ball up the floor," Jackson-Wilson said when asked what the main adjustment between the first and second games of the season was. "Coach was saying we should get in our offense, and everybody on the team was thinking that we had to slow down to get into the offense. ...

"This was more like practice today. We let the game come to us, and in the first game we were just thinking. We had a good crowd (against New Mexico), and maybe some people were nervous, I'm not sure. But I'm glad we got that monkey off our back."

Silas helped his coaches and teammates take a deep breath early by making six of his first seven shots en route to 18 points in the first half. CU built a 25-7 lead and settled for a 42-31 advantage at the intermission before breaking the game back open early in the second half.

"As long as you do everything hard and in a timely way like (Bzdelik) wants you to, then stuff is going to open up," Silas said. "Tonight was my night and I was just knocking down shots."

Roby scored his first field goal of the season 1:18 into the game. His first 3-pointer of the season made the score 17-5. His first old-fashioned three-point play of the season made the score 74-56 with 1:43 remaining. And his first smile of the season appeared as the Buffs walked off the floor in victory moments later.

"Xavier had the hot hand tonight, and we did a good job finding him," said Roby, who didn't seem to be bothered at all by the fact that he has scored 11 points through the first two games of his senior campaign. "He took great shots and knocked them down. That was good for us."



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Bzdelik earns first win as CU coach

Longmont Times-Call staff and wire reports

MADISON, Wisc. — Jeff Bzdelik won his first game Thursday night as head coach of the Colorado men's basketball team, as the Buffs beat Florida A&M, 83-59, at the American Youth Classic.

CU (1-1) will play Savannah State at 3:30 p.m. today (760 AM). Sophomore guard Xavier Silas scored a career-best 24 points to lead five Buffs in double figures. Jermyl Jackson-Wilson had 10 points, and Richard Roby, Levi Knutson and scored 10 each.

"I had to get in the gym Sunday," Silas said. "I couldn't have that feeling coming into this game."

Silas led CU with five assists.

After struggling to run its offense in the season opener against New Mexico, CU shot 55 percent from the floor and totaled 19 assists and 12 turnovers. The Buffs also wanted to improve their pace, and they scored 20 points on fast breaks Thursday.

Silas was 8-of-11 from the floor, and scored 18 points in the first half as the Buffaloes (1-1) opened up a huge lead early and were never seriously threatened.

Silas knocked down three of his five 3-point attempts, and also dished out five assists.

"I was really pleased with the way he performed throughout the game in all areas," Colorado coach Jeff Bzdelik said. "To shoot 8-for-11 from the floor meant that he was moving, taking good shots. There were a lot of great things that he did in a positive way for this basketball team."

Silas' jumper with 10 minutes, 28 seconds left in the first half gave Colorado a 25-7 lead. The Rattlers (1-1), the defending Mid-Eastern Atlantic Conference tournament champions, could get no closer than 8 points the rest of the way.

CU jumped out to a 19-5 lead early in the first half. Florida A&M pulled to within seven points near halftime, but never drew closer. CU led by double figures for all but the first minute of the second half.

Jermyl Jackson-Wilson scored 11 points and Cory Higgins, Richard Roby and Levi Knutson each added 10 for the Buffaloes, who were picked by the Big 12 coaches to finish in last place in the league.

Colorado benefited from 14 Florida A&M turnovers in the first half. The Rattlers took better care of the ball after the break, but the damage was done.

"That was a key to the ballgame early. We turned the ball over too much in the first half," Rattlers coach Eugene Harris said. "You can't win at basketball while turning the ball over 14, 15 times in the first half."



Colorado's Xavier Silas is fouled by Florida A&M's Lamar Twitty during the first half of Thursday's game in Madison, Wis. **Morry**

Gash / AP

When it wasn't coughing the ball up, Florida A&M managed to keep it respectful late in the first half. The Rattlers made nine of 11 shots in a 20-10 spurt that cut Colorado's lead to 35-27.

Rattlers forward Akini Akini scored 10 of his team-leading 21 points during the run.

It was the first-ever meeting between the two schools, who are both breaking in new coaches.

CU will conclude the American Youth Classic by playing Wisconsin on Saturday night. The Buffs host Colorado Christian next Tuesday in Boulder.