



Buffaloes back up coach with win at Clune

Bzdelik gets last laugh after cadets express feelings

By B.G. Brooks

Friday, November 30, 2007

The date was circled on Boyd Fritzsche's calendar almost nine months ago, but the idea for the T-shirts was born last week.

Gracing the front was a black- and-white picture of Jeff Bzdelik, defaced by a large, red X. On the back were the words, "Welcome Back . . . Go Falcons."

"We certainly have something to prove. . . . We've been looking forward to this for a long time," said Fritzsche, a senior from Monument who dubbed himself as "kind of a leader in Section 8."

For those unfamiliar with Section 8, it is Air Force's equivalent of Duke's far-side-of-outrageous basketball student section - in other words, a dribble-adoring asylum.

Yes, indeed, Bzdelik remembers Section 8. Fondly while coaching the Falcons for two seasons but not so much Thursday night on his return to Clune Arena with his first University of Colorado team.

Turns out the T-shirts were no factor. Neither was the "Welcome Back, Traitor" sign. Or the other one linking Bzdelik with Judas and Benedict Arnold.

With seniors Richard Roby and Marcus Hall combining for 39 points and taking turns quashing every Falcons surge in the second half, Bzdelik's new team led from buzzer to buzzer in a gratifying 60-50 victory.

"When I said this was just another game, it was not the truth," Bzdelik said after CU snapped Air Force's 38-game home winning streak against nonconference opponents. "My emotions were all over the map."

Hall (18 points) and Roby (21) could tell the night would be far from ordinary, and an extraordinary start would be needed to help quiet almost full (5,606) Clune Arena, where the Falcons had won 60 of 62 games since the start of the 2003-04 season.

"They disrespected our coach, and we weren't going to have that," said Roby, who made 7-of-9 shots, including 3-of-5 three-pointers. "We wanted to win this game for ourselves and for him."

Added Hall, the only player on either team to play the entire 40 minutes: "They were all over coach's back. . . . He's been fighting for us since Day 1; it was time to repay him."

CU did, hitting its first four shots and leading by as many as eight points on three occasions while fashioning a 24-19 halftime lead. And the Buffaloes would have kept that eight-point advantage had it not been for Andrew Henke's three-pointer with six seconds remaining.

Hall appeared to answer at the buzzer, dribbling to just inside the three-point arc and canning a jumper. The basket initially registered on the scoreboard, sending the Buffs off the court believing they had recaptured some momentum.

But officials reviewed the shot on a courtside television monitor and waved it off.

No problem. At halftime, Bzdelik challenged his team to return with the same fervor shown from the opening tip. The Buffs did that, too, and when the Falcons closed the deficit to 31-29 about six minutes in, Hall and Roby answered with back-to-back threes.

Air Force, the loser of three consecutive games after a 5-0 start, pulled to four points twice more but got no closer. Two more Falcons miniruns were derailed by two monster three-pointers by freshman Levi Knutson.

Improving to 5-2 after its second consecutive road win (the Buffs won once on the road last season), CU led by as many as 12 points three times in the final 3:55.

Before he left the court, Bzdelik stopped and talked briefly with a handful of remaining Section 8 cadets, telling them he "admired and respected" their mission at the academy.

"I wanted to get one of those (T-)shirts," Bzdelik said. "But the guy told me I had to pay for it."

Fritzsche was in it for the effect - not the money. The 500 T-shirts he had printed sold for \$10 each. Proceeds - "And we will make some money (Thursday night)," he said - were earmarked for Toys For Tots.

Jackson-Wilson 1-4 0-0 2, Hall 5-12 6-7 18, Higgins 3-7 1-3 7, Silas 1-5 0-0 2, Roby 7-9 4-5 21, Thorne 0-1 0-0 0, Patterson 1-2 2-2 4, Knutson 2-2 0-0 6. Totals 20-42 13-17 60.

AIR FORCE (5-3) - Holland 0-2 0-0 0, Johnson 2-5 0-1 4, Maren 4-8 0-3 9, Anderson 3-9 0-0 6, Washington 5-12 1-3 11, Henke 4-5 6-10 18, El-Amin 0-0 0-0 0, Brooks 0-0 0-0 0, Kenzik 1-3 0-0 2. Totals 19-44 7-17 50.

Halftime - Colorado 24-19. **Three-point attempts** - Colorado 7-22 (Roby 3-5, Knutson 2-2, Hall 2-8, Thorne 0-1, Patterson 0-1, Higgins 0-2, Silas 0-3), Air Force 5-17 (Henke 4-5, Maren 1-3, Washington 0-1, Kenzik 0-1, Holland 0-2, Anderson 0-5). Fouled Out - Johnson. **Rebounds** - Colorado 25 (Jackson-Wilson, Roby 7), Air Force 29 (Maren 7). **Assists** - Colorado 12 (Higgins 5), Air Force 11 (Kenzik, Washington 3). **Total fouls** - Colorado 18, Air Force 17. **A** - 5,606.

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Bzdelik picks up emotional win

Facing his former team, coach leads CU to victory

By Patrick Ridgell

Longmont Times-Call

AIR FORCE ACADEMY — Seven games into his Colorado tenure, Jeff Bzdelik has been caught in a lie.

Prior to Thursday's date at Air Force, the CU's men's basketball coach downplayed his return to the Academy, where he coached with great success the previous two seasons. But after the Buffs won, 60-50, before 5,606 fans that included a raucous student section at Clune Arena, Bzdelik revealed his inner feelings.



Colorado coach Jeff Bzdelik, right, hugs Air Force coach Jeff Reynolds before their game Thursday at Clune Arena at the Air Force Academy. **Kevin Kreck/AP**

"When I said this was just another game, I wasn't telling you guys the truth," Bzdelik said. "My emotions were all over the map.

"I truly love this place and it was great to see so many friends. The student body, they're awesome, and those players.

"I'm so happy for my players. I'll be the biggest fan for those other players on Air Force's team throughout the course of the year."

Bzdelik's revelation was hardly shocking. And it was clear by the strange smile on his face as he peered before tipoff into Clune Arena's Section 8, where the students stand through games and razz even the most unknown of opponents, that he knew Thursday would be different.

Cadets displayed caustic signs. One read, "Judas, Benedict Arnold, Robert Hanssen, et tu Bzdelik?" Another one was, "Welcome Home Traitor." They chanted, "Show me the money" while the Buffs were introduced, and "Traitor!" throughout the night.

One cadet dangled a dollar bill at end of a line on a fishing pole. And most of them wore T-Shirts with a picture of Bzdelik Xed out on the front, plus "Welcome Back ... Go Falcons" written on the back.

Bzdelik said he tried to get one, but was told he'd have to pay for it.

The coach, who almost doubled his Air Force salary when he agreed in April to coach CU for a base pay of \$3.2 million over five years — that's before incentives — approached Section 8 after the game. He told the remaining cadets, "You guys are awesome," and "I love you," which may or may not have made them feel much better.

"He left very abruptly, and that's what has us upset," said Boyd Fritzche, the head of Section 8, before the game.

"They have integrity at the Academy," said another cadet, David Field. "He should preach it and have it."

While Bzdelik's return dominated one plot line Thursday, other stories that bode well for the Buffs (5-2) unfolded. They avenged last year's 84-46 home loss to some of the same Air Force players, though it's important to remember that not only are the Falcons replacing a coach, but four senior starters from last year, too.

And CU won where Air Force has been unbeatable. The Buffs snapped Air Force's 38-game winning streak against non-conference visitors. Thursday's loss dropped the Falcons to 60-3 at Clune since the start of 2003-04.

For a program that's trying to build "an environment that's conducive to winning," which has become a catchphrase you hear all over the program these days, winning at Air Force, even though it's not the same Air Force of recent seasons, is something to behold.

"Those guys beat us by 40. That's embarrassing," CU guard Marcus Hall said. "They were all over coach's back. He's been fighting for us since May, when he got here, and we finally got the opportunity to repay him.

"There were a lot of things to fight for. They beat us by 40 in our home, coach coming back, they gave him a hard time. We just had to fight and match their intensity, and we did that."

CU never trailed. Air Force pulled to within a point early in the second half, but then Hall hit a 3 and moments later, Richard Roby scored eight straight points for CU to help the Buffs build a 42-35 lead.

Air Force (5-3) never drew closer. Roby had a season-high 21 points, and shot 7-for-9 from the field.

"We wanted to win this game for ourselves and for our coach," Roby said. "They beat us bad last year and we wanted to just come out and just play it as hard as we can. We didn't play great offensively, we didn't make shots in the first half. But we stuck with it and grinded it out and that's how you win games."

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colorado 60, air force 50

Roby, Buffs rule in Bzdelik's return

By Irv Moss
The Denver Post

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CU guard Cory Higgins tries to drive by Air Force's Matt Holland on Thursday night. (Kevin Kreck, The Gazette)

AIR FORCE ACADEMY — Colorado coach Jeff Bzdelik brought his bodyguard with him Thursday night on his return to Clune Arena, and guard Richard Roby was the strong arm of the law.

Roby scored 21 points before sitting for a few

minutes while in foul trouble late in the second half, and he was the catalyst in a wire-to-wire, 60-50 victory before disappointed Air Force partisans who wanted their Falcons to show Bzdelik a thing or two. But it was the Buffs (5-2) who played as if they were home as the Falcons (5-3) lost their third game in a row.

The Falcons played as if on the road, hitting only 7-of-17 free throws and contributing 13 turnovers, major components to CU snapping Air Force's 38-game homecourt winning streak against

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nonconference foes. The Section 8 cheering section heckled Bzdelik, Air Force's coach the past two seasons, before the game, but they parted with Bzdelik complimenting the group for its support of the Falcons. Bzdelik made his return to Clune Arena after leading the Falcons to a combined 50-16 record that featured an NCAA Tournament appearance in 2006 and an NIT bid in 2007.

"When I said before the game that this was just

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another game, I wasn't telling the truth," Bzdelik said. "My emotions were all over the map. I truly love this place, and it was great to see so many friends. I'm so happy for my players, but I'll be the biggest fan for the Air Force players throughout the course of the year."

Bzdelik's knowledge of the Air Force team, and of Roby, were the differences.

"Richard's a very talented player," Bzdelik said of his senior who hit 3-of-5 from 3-point range. "He made some shots when they were closing the gap and we got some separation. It helped."

Bzdelik acknowledged it also helped that he knew Air Force's team, enabling him to get his players on the right defensive track. Air Force guards Tim Anderson and Evan Washington were a combined 8-for-21 from the field without a 3-point field goal. Andrew Henke

CU Basketball

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led the Falcons with 18 points.

"They had a game plan and they executed it very well," Air Force coach Jeff Reynolds said. "We had a game plan and we didn't execute it very well."

Reynolds said the 13 turnovers were uncharacteristic of his team.

If the Buffs needed more of a catalyst than Roby and guard Marcus Hall (18 points), it was the memory of an 84-46 thrashing by the Falcons last season in Boulder.

"They beat us by almost 40 in our home last year. Coach coming back and giving him a hard time, we remembered," Hall said. "We marked it on our calendar. Just to come in here and get a win where it doesn't happen too often was awesome."

Air Force lagged from behind throughout, with Roby hitting a jump shot with just 27



David Field of the Air Force Academy joins the raucous welcome for former coach Jeff Bzdelik. (Post / Hyoung Chann)

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seconds played.

The Falcons came out strong in the second half and cut the deficit to 26-25 on Anwar Johnson's dunk. But the Buffs were up to the challenge, with Hall's 3-pointer building the lead back to four.

Johnson's slam got the Falcons as close as they would get. The Buffs opened the lead to double digits, 48-36, on freshman Levi Knutson's 3-point goal with 4:34 left.

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cu basketball

CU's Bzdelik praises cadets

Coach gracious in victory

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

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AIR FORCE ACADEMY — Moments after an emotional 60-50 road victory Thursday night, Jeff Bzdelik instructed his Colorado men's basketball team to stand with him during the playing of "The Air Force Song." Bzdelik then headed toward Section 8 beyond the north basket, where many in the cadets cheering section had waited, presumably to boo the former Falcons coach as he left the court.

Bzdelik told the cadets he loved them.

They were stunned and speechless. Jaws dropped and eyes widened. Wearing white T-shirts with a red cross running through a picture of Bzdelik, the cadets at Clune Arena must have been ready for a confrontation — especially those holding signs such as "Welcome home, traitor" and "Show me the money."

Instead, Bzdelik looked like he wanted to hug

every one of them — just as he had done to the entire Air Force basketball team after the game.

"I wanted to get one of those shirts," Bzdelik told reporters afterward. "But a guy told me I had to buy it.

"I just told them I admire them and respect them. I appreciate what they're doing for us as citizens, protecting our freedom and serving our country. I mean that."

Bzdelik, who had guided Air Force to a 50-16 record in two seasons, also was thankful that senior guard Richard Roby is on his side. Roby scored a game-best 21 points while missing only three shots all night — a pair of errant 3-pointers and a foul shot that wouldn't drop.

The Buffaloes (5-2) never trailed.

"We just wanted to be in the driver's seat the whole game," Roby said.

In fact, Colorado snapped Air Force's 38-game winning streak against nonconference opponents. But more important, CU players said, was avenging last season's 84-46 loss to the Falcons and making Bzdelik's return successful.

CU senior guard Marcus Hall added 18 points.

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Roby returning to sophomore form

By Ryan Thorburn

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AIR FORCE ACADEMY — Richard Roby scored on the first possession of the game, and the Buffs never looked back.

Colorado's gifted senior appears to be returning to his sophomore form, which led to first-team All-Big 2 honors for Roby and a 20-win season for his team.

Roby finished CU's 60-50 victory over Air Force at Clune Arena with 21 points on 7-for-9 shooting. He was 14-for-20 on the two-game road trip with 36 points.

"Richard has really been playing within the framework of what we're doing offensively," CU head coach Jeff Bzdelik said after beating his old team on the heels of Tuesday's 54-44 win at Denver. "He got 21 points and maybe last year when he got 21 he took twice as many shots to get it. That's the difference."

Roby picked up his fourth foul with 8:21 remaining and the Buffs leading 43-35. But Levi Knutson filled in nicely with a couple of timely 3-pointers to keep the Falcons from mounting a comeback.

"I just tried to let the game come to me, as usual. Sometimes it just doesn't come," said Roby, who also grabbed 16 rebounds on the trip. "But when I get going early and get confidence, the rim looks like an ocean to me."

Marcus Hall wasn't too shabby, either. The senior point guard played all 40 minutes and added 18 points, three steals and two assists.

"Marcus Hall is a big part of that," Roby said when asked what has changed the most since Air Force beat CU 84-46 last season. "He makes big shots and he's playing as good as anybody in the country right now."

Hall did not have a single turnover. That and Roby's quick start are two key reasons why the Buffs never trailed.

"We wanted to be in the driver's seat the whole game and have them in the passenger's seat," Roby said.

Bad blood

The Cadets were obviously ready to make things as uncomfortable as possible for Bzdelik in his return to the Air Force Academy.

But there was also a sign in the crowd that read: Don't think we forgot about you, McClain!

As in CU assistant Steve McClain, whose Wyoming team beat Air Force in the first round of last year's Mountain West Tournament to burst the Falcons' NCAA Tournament bubble.

"I guess it's nice to be remembered," McClain said.

Falcons vs. Ricardo

In another ironic scheduling twist, Air Force's next game will be at Northern Illinois on Dec. 4. Ricardo Patton's new team is off to an 0-6 start.

Notable

Jermyn Jackson-Wilson tied Roby for the team high with seven boards, although Air Force outrebounded CU 29-25. ... Both teams shot 17 free throws. The Buffs made 13 and the Falcons only made seven. ... Attendance was 5,606.



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Bufs soar past Air Force

CU avenges 38-point loss to Falcons in '06

By Ryan Thorburn
Friday, November 30, 2007

AIR FORCE ACADEMY — Winning here for Jeff Bzdelik?

Sure, it made for a great story as Colorado's first-year head coach made a triumphant return to Air Force. But it wasn't the true motivation for seniors Richard Roby and Marcus Hall.

That would be: 84-46.

On Thursday night, a little over a year after losing by 38 points to the Falcons in Boulder, the Buffs walked off the court at Clune Arena with a 60-50 victory. Thanks in large part to Roby and Hall — who combined for 39 points — CU snapped Air Force's 38-game home winning streak against nonconference opponents, which dated back Dec. 29, 2001.

"Those guys beat us by 40," Hall said after finishing with 18 points and playing all 40 minutes. "That's embarrassing. ... I think we're going in the right direction. A lot of things can happen when you've got that confidence going." The Falcons (5-3) never led but cut their deficit to 26-25 on a dunk by Anwar Johnson with 17:04 remaining, which had the rowdy crowd rocking. Hall silenced the place with a 3-pointer moments later. After Roby knocked down a couple more shots from behind the arc, CU had a 42-35 cushion with 8:45 to play.

The Buffs (5-2), who only won once outside of the Coors Events Center last season, picked up their second road victory of the week.

"They beat us bad last year, and we just wanted to come out and play as hard as we can," Roby said. "I think we did that tonight."

At about the time in the game when most CU fans had to be wondering, "Where is Levi Knutson tonight?" the freshman swished two 3-pointers to give his team a 51-39 lead.

Since the beginning of the 2003-04 season, Air Force had won 60 of its 62 home games (a 96.8 winning percentage) prior to Thursday's loss.

"I'm very proud," Bzdelik said after his team swept the two-game swing at Denver and Air Force. "We've come on the road and won two games this week. That's something we've been working on."

The Cadets heckled Bzdelik — who posted a 50-16 record as the Air Force coach the past two seasons — with "Show me the money" chants while wearing T-shirts that had his face crossed out.

To his credit, CU's new head coach let the scoreboard do most of the talking after the game. He even went over to the AFA students and told them that he loved them.

"They disrespected our coach, and we weren't going to have that," Roby said. "It's a tough place to play and it's a great team we played. They win a lot of games and they play super hard. We were just fortunate to come out with a win."

The Buffs were 1-for-9 from 3-point land in the first half and 6-for-13 after the intermission. The Falcons were only 5-for-17 from behind the arc and missed 10 free throws in the game.

"I'm so happy for my players and I'll be the biggest fan for those other players on Air Force," Bzdelik said.

CU will host Stanford on Sunday at the Coors Events Center (2 p.m., ESPNU).



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Woelk: Bzdelik's Buffs get last word at Air Force

By Neill Woelk

Friday, November 30, 2007

AIR FORCE ACADEMY — Just another game?

OK, Jeff Bzdelik admits he might not have been telling the truth when he said Thursday night's game at Air Force wouldn't mean any more than any other game. The man who invested two years of his coaching career with the Falcons knew Thursday night's return would be a difficult one.

"My emotions were all over the map," Bzdelik said after his Colorado Buffaloes ground out a 60-50 win. "I love this place. I have so many friends here. The student body is awesome. ... It was a great atmosphere."

Great atmosphere indeed, but by no means was the Clune Arena greeting a warm welcome for the ex-AFA coach. For the near-sellout crowd, the game was a grudge match, a chance for those who felt jilted by Bzdelik's departure last spring to voice their opinion.

That opinion rang out loud and clear. The AFA student section wore T-shirts emblazoned with "Welcome back, Go Falcons" on the back, and a picture of Bzdelik with a large red "X" on the front. "I wanted one of those T-shirts, but they said I had to buy it," Bzdelik joked.

One sign in the stands read, "Judas. Benedict Arnold. Robert Hanssen. Et tu, Bzdelik?" A Colorado Springs newspaper columnist even got into the act, calling Bzdelik a "snarling creature ... fueled by rage, ready to attack."

But in the end, Bzdelik's Buffs had the last word. They opened up an early lead, withstood an early second-half surge by the Falcons, and collected their second road victory of the year — doubling the number from all of last season.

No doubt, Colorado's players wanted to win for their coach. But even more importantly, the Buffs wanted to atone for a 84-46 loss to AFA last year, when Bzdelik had a seat on the opposite bench.

"The biggest thing was the game last year," said CU guard Marcus Hall, who scored 18 points while playing all 40 minutes of the game. "We remembered it. We marked it on our calendars. When you lose by 40, you remember it."

The Buffs will remember this one, but for all the right reasons. A year ago, this was the kind of game the Buffs gave away all too often. They had a chance in this one to do the same thing — but didn't.

After leading by as much as eight at several junctures in the first half, CU started slowly after intermission. Air Force cut the lead to one, 26-25, and the raucous crowd sensed a major change in momentum.

But the Buffs didn't flinch. Hall hit a 3-pointer to bump the lead to four. A minute later, he drained another trey, followed by a Richard Roby (21 points) three, and the Falcons never came closer than four again.

Even when Roby left with his fourth foul and 8:21 still left on the clock, the Buffs held their composure. The defense rose to the occasion, holding AFA to just three points over the ensuing five minutes. Hall picked up the offensive slack by scoring four points in Roby's absence, and also hitting freshman Levi Knutson on a beautiful drive-and-dish to set Knutson up for a wide-open 3-pointer.

It's the kind of effort in the face of adversity that should serve this team well in the future. Anyone who remembers last season remembers this much: a hostile crowd, a run by the opponent and CU's leading scorer on the bench would have spelled disaster.

This time, however, the Buffs held up. That's a huge confidence boost for such situations down the line.

"I challenged them," Bzdelik said. "I challenged to face those kinds of things and step up. I told our players I've never seen a fan come out of the stands and block a shot or get a rebound. I told them to embrace this atmosphere."

Embrace it they did — and they had the last word in the process.



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