

[Print page](#)[Close window](#)

Longmont, Colorado  
Wednesday, January 07,  
2009

Publish Date: 12/23/2008

## Buffs' strong shooting game could be boost

As conference play approaches, CU will seek to hone its airborne success

*By Patrick Ridgell  
Longmont Times-Call*

BOULDER — Monday's updated NCAA statistics revealed the Colorado men's basketball team owns the Big 12's best and the nation's sixth-best field goal shooting rate, at 50.5 percent.

What, if any, role is the new 3-point line playing in CU's success?

Tough to say.

A year ago, the Buffs frequently used a lineup that lacked enough shooters to make coach Jeff Bzdelik's system work. Opposing defenses sagged, clogging the lane, rendering back-door cuts useless. CU finished last in the Big 12 in scoring, at 62.4 points per game, and eighth in shooting, at 45 percent.

This year's line, at 20 feet, 9 inches, is a foot further back. Many NCAA observers had long believed the previous line was too close for college players. But the main intention for stretching it was to open the floor, forcing defenders further from the basket.

That would help any offense determined to spread the court and cut to the hoop, á la CU's. But Bzdelik isn't sure if it's helping his team, or anyone else, for that matter.

"To be honest, I think teams are ... just daring us to shoot a little bit," he said Monday as CU prepared for tonight's game with Louisiana-Monroe (7 p.m., no TV). "Our last opponent (Prairie View A&M) just sagged off of us. We weren't sure how to handle it at times. That's something we've been working on.

"It'd be interesting to compare the statistics with last year compared to this year. I think we're up. It'd be interesting to see what other teams are doing. Are they up or down?"

It's important to remember shooting percentages tumble when conference play starts and the defenses grow stingier. But the early numbers show shooting is up. In CU's case, way up.

Eight Big 12 teams are shooting better from the field now than they were at the end of 2007-08. CU shot 45 percent a year ago. CU is averaging 69.5 points per.

Eight Big 12 programs are shooting their 3s at a better rate now than a year ago. CU's increase on 3s is modest, from 34 percent in 2007-08 to 36 percent entering tonight.

"I think if you're a good shooter, you have confidence to step back, and (the new line) doesn't matter much," junior guard Dwight Thorne said.

The Buffs say the new line is less important than their new personnel.

### Tonight's game

Louisiana-Monroe (3-7, 1-1 Sun Belt)  
at Colorado men (5-3)

**When/Where:** 7 p.m. tonight, at the Coors Events Center in Boulder

**TV/Radio:** No TV/KKZN 760.

**The series:** CU leads, 1-0. The programs haven't met since 1975.

**Leading scorers:** Louisiana-Monroe – Lawrence Gilbert (14.3 points per game); CU – Cory Higgins (18.3 points per game).

**Notes:** In addition to scoring, Higgins leads CU in rebounding, steals, minutes, field goals made and attempted, and free throws made and attempted. ... Five Buffs are shooting 50 percent or higher. .... The Buffs leave Wednesday for Honolulu, where they'll play three games Sunday through next Tuesday in the Rainbow Classic; ... Louisiana Monroe's three wins have come against New Orleans, Morehead State and Stephen F. Austin.

*-Patrick Ridgell*

CU's three main forwards — Austin Dufault, Casey Crawford and Jermyl Jackson-Wilson — are shooting 64-for-129 (almost 50 percent) from the field, and 11-for-36 (30.5 percent) on 3s. Jackson-Wilson hasn't tried a 3. Crawford's right foot has hampered his play, but he's 6-for-15 on 3s. Dufault and Crawford are newcomers in 2008-09.

Marcus King-Stockton started 17 games last year at forward, and CU misses his defense. But he took only 57 shots all season. Dufault is shooting 29-for-68.

"The lanes are more open than last year mostly because people know we have big men who can shoot the ball, and they're pressing up on us, trying to take away the pass, trying to take away the lane," Thorne said. "So it's giving us the back-cut opportunity.

"I think that's the way it's supposed to go."

Patrick Ridgell can be reached at [pridgell@times-call.com](mailto:pridgell@times-call.com).



# Bufs aim for even better shooting

## CU already 12th in the nation in field-goal percentage

By Ryan Thorburn  
Tuesday, December 23, 2008

The Colorado men's basketball team is:

- A. Young and inexperienced.
- B. Currently 5-3.
- C. Shooting historically well.

Believe it or not, the answer is D (all of the above).

Jeff Bzdelik's young, inexperienced Bufs (5-3) lead the Big 12 and are 12th nationally in field-goal percentage (.505).

The only team in program history to officially shoot over 50 percent from the field for a season was the 1985-86 Bufs. Team shooting percentages have only been kept since the 1947-48 season.

And according to the head coach, these Bufs are capable of executing the offense at a much higher level.

"We're still a little hesitant at times," Bzdelik said. "Guys are a little robotic instead of instinctive. But that's par for the course when you're developing a team, especially a young team playing together for the first time in a pretty sophisticated system. We'll grow to that point where we do become instinctive."

In its five wins CU has shot an average of .529 from the floor with four players scoring in double figures.

The Bufs will try to continue that trend tonight when they host Louisiana-Monroe (3-7) -- a team that is averaging 59.7 points per game while giving up 74.5 -- at the Coors Events Center (7 p.m., no television).

Four of the five regular starters -- Cory Higgins (.512), Dwight Thorne (.576), Nate Tomlinson (.558) and Jermyl Jackson-Wilson (.643) -- are shooting over 50 percent from the field. Freshman forward Austin Dufault (.426) would be if not for a 5-for-21 (.238) mark from behind the arc.

Bzdelik isn't the only one in the locker room who believes these numbers are just scratching the surface of what this team is capable of.

"We've got so many new guys here it's just a matter of getting used to the offense and finding out where our shots are going to come from and how they're going to come," Tomlinson said. "As soon as we get used to that sort of thing we'll start knocking them down more consistently."

Even though the 3-point line has been moved back a foot this season, the Buffs are shooting better from behind the new arc (.363) than they did last season (.343).

Thorne is 12-for-26 (.462) in that department.

However, the film shows that the Buffs have not completely earned the respect of opposing defenses yet.

"I think teams are gapping us more and daring us to shoot a little bit," Bzdelik said. "That's an adjustment we have to make. Our last opponent just kind of sagged off of us and we weren't quite sure how to handle it at times. That's something we've been working on."

CU shot 50.9 percent from the field during last Friday's 72-47 victory over Prairie View A&M even though Bzdelik emptied the bench early. Eleven of the 12 players who entered the game for the Buffs scored, led by Higgins (17 points).

So far this sophomore- and freshmen-dominated roster has picked up the offense better than last year's team, which shot .462 from the field and featured senior standouts Richard Roby and Marcus Hall.

"When you're first learning something it becomes easier as opposed to relearning something you've been doing for a while," Bzdelik said.



© 2006 Daily Camera and Boulder Publishing, LLC.



## CU men's preview: Louisiana-Monroe

**TONIGHT:** Colorado hosts Louisiana-Monroe at 7 p.m. at the Coors Events Center.

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

**STORYLINE:** The 5-3 Buffs are looking for their first three-game win streak of the season after easy victories over Colorado State and Prairie View A&M. ... The balanced but under-sized Warhawks are 3-7 despite having five players averaging in double figures scoring.

**KEY STAT:** Louisiana-Monroe is 0-6 on the road season with an average losing margin of 23.3 points.

**COACHES:** Jeff Bzdelik is 17-23 in his second season at CU. Orlando Early is 41-60 in his fourth season at Louisiana-Monroe.

### PROBABLE STARTERS:

**CU --** G Nate Tomlinson, 6-2, freshman, 9.1 ppg, 3.1 rpg, G Cory Higgins, 6-5, sophomore, 18.3 ppg, 6.3 rpg, G Dwight Thorne, 6-2, junior, 12.5 ppg, 4.0 rpg, F Austin Dufault, 6-8, freshman, 9.9 ppg, 3.4 rpg, F/C Jermyl Jackson-Wilson, 6-6, senior, 5.3 ppg, 4.8 rpg.

**ULM:** G Jarvis Hill, 6-2, junior, 10.5 ppg, 3.5 rpg, F Rudy Turner, 6-8, sophomore, 10.2 ppg, 6.0 rpg, G Tony Hooper, 5-11, senior, 10.3 ppg, 3.7 rpg, G Lawrence Gilbert, 6-7, sophomore, 14.3 ppg, 5.8 rpg, G Kenneth Averette, 5-8, junior, 5.9 ppg, 1.4 rpg.

**SERIES:** The Buffs lead 1-0.

**UP NEXT:** The Buffs will participate in the Rainbow Classic in Honolulu Dec. 28-30. CU opens the three-game tournament on Sunday at 10:30 p.m. against Coppin State.



© 2006 Daily Camera and Boulder Publishing, LLC.