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Buffs learn lessons from Hawaii trip

By Patrick Ridgell
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BOULDER — The clock is ticking on the Colorado men's basketball program. Big 12 play starts in 11 days.

After a disappointing result this week in the Rainbow Classic in Honolulu, where the Buffs lost twice in three games and faded at the end, any urgency coach Jeff Bzdelik still feels to hone things by Jan. 14 at Missouri remains tempered by reality. What happened in Hawaii, if anything, reminds him of what that reality is.

"I'm not disappointed; we're just realistic," Bzdelik said Friday morning as his team began practice. "This is kind of where I thought we would be, being such a young team."

Record-wise, CU is 7-5 heading into its next game, Monday at 4-7 SMU (6 p.m., FSN). Asked Friday to explain what his players gleaned from the trip, Bzdelik stressed lessons they learned, such as how to play with a high level of intensity for three straight days. And rebounding, once again, was a problem. Vermont and Buffalo grabbed more than CU in their defeats of the Buffs.

Bzdelik also talked about taking care of the basketball and how seven or eight "really bad turnovers" led to 14 points for tournament-champion Buffalo, which beat the Buffs on a last-second shot Monday.

"We played in a tight ballgame. We learned a lot from that experience," the coach said. "There were many ways to grow from this experience."

CU entered Monday's game against Buffalo with a four-game winning streak, its best in 2008-09. That 62-60 loss could have gone either way, Bzdelik said.

He then said a lack of depth glared against Vermont the next day. The grind of a short bench and playing three games in less than three days — CU's tip-offs were at 7:30 p.m. Sunday, 5 p.m. Monday and 1:30 p.m. Tuesday — compounded the team's problems.

Vermont beat CU 84-59. After the game, Bzdelik told his team, which includes only one junior and one senior, that of Vermont's 42 first-half points, 21 came from two seniors.

"We were emotionally hung over from the night before and had to play at 1:30 in the afternoon," Bzdelik said. "We had no time to prepare, and we were feeling sorry for ourselves a little bit. That's a lesson to be learned."

While Bzdelik sounds at times like he expects his team to struggle, especially when conference play starts, his lone senior said the team has not developed into what he thought it would be by now.

"Obviously, I have high expectations and I want to be the best team in America," forward Jermey Jackson-Wilson said. "We're still pushing to be a better team than we are or than we've shown. We try not to be complacent that way."

"We need a lot of work going into Big 12. I'm sure a lot of teams do. We're not at the level I think we should be."

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