



# Rebuilding Buffs need to be tougher on boards

## SMU outrebounded Colorado 38-27

By Ryan Thorburn  
Wednesday, January 7, 2009

Jeff Bzdelik isn't taking any shortcuts.

From the day he was hired at Colorado the veteran head coach warned the fan base, administrators, members of the media and his own players that building this program from the bottom up was going to be a difficult process.

Bzdelik says he's not worried about the number of losses. Eventually, he maintains, the wins will be there as long as everyone stays the course and puts in the work.

The Buffs are getting good grades, shooting a high percentage and defending reasonably well.

But as Dan Hawkins would say, this is the Big 12. And right now CU's young basketball team rebounds like an intramural team.

During Monday night's 70-67 loss to Southern Methodist, the Buffs acted like they were allergic to paint.

The mediocre (at best) Mustangs -- who lost to Arkansas-Pine Bluff recently -- beat CU 38-27 on the glass, including a 16-7 edge in offensive rebounds.

"It's just another great example of every possession mattering. We've just got to somehow figure out that every loose ball has to be ours, every rebound has to be ours," CU freshman forward Austin Dufault said after scoring 13 points and grabbing a team-high seven boards. "The last couple games that have been close it has come down to one possession. We just have to get that in our heads and not have any lapses."

All five CU starters scored in double figures, led by Dwight Thorne's 18 points. But only Casey Crawford (five points and five fouls in 24 minutes) and Levi Knutson (no points in 10 minutes) were a part of the rotation off the bench.

On a team that clearly lacks athleticism, why are talented freshmen Toby Veal and Ryan Kelley stuck on the end of the bench?

Apparently the coaching staff believes most of the reserve players don't have enough self-confidence to make a difference at this early stage of their careers.

"We're doing the right things, we just don't finish possessions with defensive rebounding," Bzdelik said. "And until players that are on the bench can show me confidence in practice, I don't have a lot of confidence putting them in there in games."

The Buffs (7-6) will host Western State tonight at the Coors Events Center (7 p.m., no television). The non-conference

finale will give CU a chance to snap a brutal three-game losing streak before opening conference play in one week at Missouri.

"We have to take all our frustrations out on Western State," a somber Higgins said outside the visitors' locker room at SMU's Moody Coliseum.

That says a lot about how far the Buffs have to go before they are prepared to compete in the Big 12.

"We can't let doubt creep in," Dufault said. "We have to stay focused, stay calm and just try to get better every day. If we keep grinding, keep working, eventually everything will work out."



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## CU men's preview: Western State

**TONIGHT** -- Colorado wraps up nonconference play against Western State at the Coors Events Center. Opening tip is 7 p.m.

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

**STORYLINES** -- The Buffs (7-6) have lost three consecutive games and are coming off a 70-67 loss at Southern Methodist on Monday. ... Cory Higgins now owns the CU and Big 12 record for consecutive free throws made at 40 and counting. ... The Buffs continue to struggle rebounding and were beaten 38-27 on the glass by SMU.

**KEY STAT** -- All five of CU's starters scored in double figures against SMU, but Casey Crawford (five points) was the only player to score off the bench. Meanwhile, the Mustangs' reserves scored 22 points.

**COACHES** -- Jeff Bzdelik is 19-26 in his second season at CU. Mike Moskowitz is 16-22 in his second year at Western State.

### PROBABLE STARTERS

**CU** -- G Nate Tomlinson, 6-2, freshman, 9.3 ppg, 2.8 rpg, G Cory Higgins, 6-5, sophomore, 17.4 ppg, 6.2 rpg, G Dwight Thorne, 6-2, junior, 12.2 ppg, 3.5 rpg, F Austin Dufault, 6-8, freshman, 10.1 ppg, 3.6 rpg, F/C Jermyl Jackson-Wilson, 6-6, senior, 5.3 ppg, 4.3 rpg.

**WSU** -- G Jeremy Brooks, 6-0, senior, 11.4 ppg, 4.6 rpg, G Justin Avalos, 6-3, senior, 12.3 ppg, 4.1 rpg, F Cameron Burney, 6-7, senior, 17.1 ppg, 7.3 rpg, F Allen McFarland, 6-4, senior, 10.9 ppg, 4.4 rpg, C Clayton Spencer, 6-7, senior, 5.3 ppg, 3.7 rpg.

**SERIES** -- The Buffs lead 9-4 but the programs have not played since 1936.

**UP NEXT** -- The Buffs open the Big 12 slate on Jan. 14 at Missouri (7 p.m., ESPNU).



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