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Higgins' free throw streak: CU couldn't swish for more

*By Patrick Ridgell
Longmont Times-Call*

One day, Cory Higgins will miss another free throw. Probably.

For now, though, the sophomore guard on the Colorado men's basketball team is on quite a ride, having hit 45 in a row entering the Buffs' Big 12 opener Wednesday at Missouri (7 p.m., ESPNU), setting Big 12 and CU records while he's at it. He's even willing to tolerate a few questions about the streak, the kind of topic you rarely want to broach for fear of jinxing it.

"It shouldn't change what I go through at the free throw line," Higgins shrugged Monday.

Higgins hasn't missed a free throw since Dec. 10 against Colorado State, the night his 33 points keyed CU's second-half surge. Higgins was 8-for-9 that night.

The old Big 12 record was 39, set by Oklahoma State's Joey Graham in 2004-05. CU's previous mark was also 39, by Rob Gonzalez in 1983. Darnell Archey holds the NCAA mark of 85, which he set over 57 games from February, 2001, through January of 2003 while playing for Butler.

"You think there was some pressure there with No. 33, No. 34?" CU coach Jeff Bzdelik said. "He knew. That's saying a lot.

"That's a tough thing, what he's doing. I don't know if it's been really publicized. That's quite a feat."

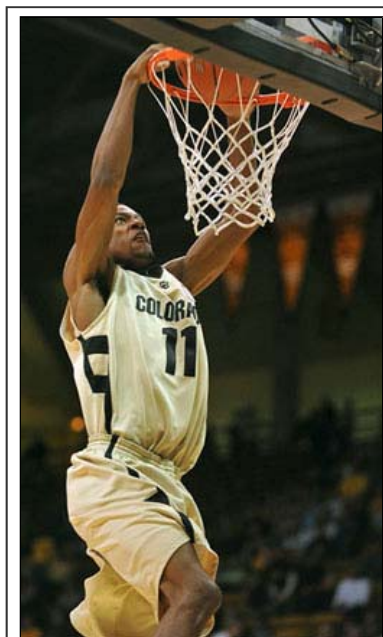
Bzdelik might be right; it's not even common knowledge among teammates. Guard Dwight Thorne admitted Monday he didn't even know about it until CU's last game, Jan. 7 against Western State. Forward Jermyl Jackson-Wilson said he only learned about it recently, but doesn't bring it up.

"A lot of times you're watching the game on TV and the commentator says, 'this person hasn't missed a free throw in this long,' and then they miss the next one," Jackson-Wilson said. "So I don't want to mention it."

While the streak is certainly impressive, other numbers better show Higgins' improvement from his freshman to this, his sophomore season.

One is the 100 free throws he has already shot in 2008-09. He shot all of 75 in 2007-08, showing the guard has developed an ability to get to the line.

He's also hit 84 percent of them this year, the Big 12's third-best rate. He hit 68 percent of his free throws last season.



CU's Cory Higgins dunks the ball in the Buffs' game against Colorado State on Dec. 10th at the Coors Events Center. Higgins began a free-throw scoring streak during that game that is now at 45 consecutive baskets. **Lewis**

Geyer/Times-Call

It was that last number that made Higgins focus on his free throws more in the summer than he said he ever had. It wasn't shooting more; it was shooting them with more focus. The results are tangible.

"Last year, I didn't shoot the ball that well from the free throw line," Higgins said. "I've made a conscious effort to shoot better this year."

Around the Big 12 ...

Missouri will be without one of its best players Wednesday. Coach Mike Anderson indefinitely suspended forward Leo Lyons on Monday due to multiple traffic violations. Lyons, at 14.6 points per game, is the Tigers' second-leading scorer and the Big 12's 14th.

According to the Kansas City Star, police stopped Lyons late Sunday. He could not provide proof of insurance and did not have his lights on. Police also discovered an outstanding misdemeanor warrant for an unpaid fine for a previous traffic violation.

"The theme here is responsibility," Anderson said. "Leo failed to meet his responsibilities as a driver."

Kansas is expected to make a big decision about guard Mario Little today.

Little, named the Big 12's preseason newcomer of the year, has been slowed by a stress fracture in his lower left leg that has kept him out of all but the Jayhawks' past three games. If he plays in the season's second half, starting today, he would forfeit his right to a redshirt year. Kansas hosts Kansas State tonight.

"The thing about it is he's not going to be 100 percent when the decision is made," Kansas coach Bill Self said. "We're rolling the dice. But we'd be rolling the dice no matter what we do."

Self said Little was supposed to practice Monday, and his situation would be reassessed.

The Jayhawks make their annual trip to Boulder on Saturday (1:30 p.m., Ch. 7). They've beaten CU 38 of the past 39 times they've met, but these are not your typical Jayhawks.

The defending national champions are unranked, and are coming off a loss at Michigan State in which Kansas "got whipped for a 12-minute segment in the first half," Self said.

No starters returned from last year's team, which saw five members chosen in the NBA Draft. Self, like Bzdelik, has an inexperienced roster.

The Big 12 has a 78 percent winning rate in non-league games, its best ever. Meanwhile, only three of its teams are ranked — Oklahoma, Texas and Baylor. And only No. 6 Oklahoma is in the top 10.

Patrick Ridgell's Big 12 basketball notes column runs Tuesdays during the conference season.

Rocky Mountain News

Bzdelik checking a CU's long to-do list before Big 12 opener

Buffaloes coach seeks improved work on rebounds

By **B.G. Brooks**, Rocky Mountain News ([Contact](#))

Published January 12, 2009 at 10:48 p.m.

Before nonconference play opened in mid-November, University of Colorado men's basketball coach Jeff Bzdelik voiced concern about his team's rebounding ability.

Nothing has changed. With CU opening Big 12 Conference play Wednesday at Missouri, rebounding remains atop Bzdelik's lengthy checklist of what his young Buffaloes must do to improve.

CU (8-6) ranks 11th or 12th in the Big 12 in the majority of team statistical categories, among them rebounding and rebound margin. Averaging only 28.9 rebounds a game with a margin of minus 4.9, the Buffs are last in both areas.

They're also last in assists-

to-turnovers ratio and must eradicate what Bzdelik termed "bad turnovers" to have a chance to become competitive in conference play. But clearly most distressing is the bad board work.

"I'm extremely disappointed in our ability to block people off," Bzdelik said Monday. "It's about effort and position. We practice it . . . we watch videotape. Certain people are doing it, certain people are not."

Chief among the "doers" is guard Cory Higgins, a 6-foot-4 guard who leads CU in most individual statistical areas - including rebounding (6.5 a game). Plus, Higgins' team-best 17.9 points a game rank him fourth in the Big 12.

He's also third in free-throw percentage (84), fifth in field-goal percentage (53.2) and seventh in steals (1.64 a game).

Bzdelik said Higgins' impressive numbers "reflect his consistency" and called the sophomore's improvement "a great testimony" to the quality minutes he played as a freshman.

Higgins also serves well as Bzdelik's Exhibit A that the Buffs will improve in time if they stick with his system and develop experience and confidence in it.

"I've said from Day 1 this is going to be a very challenging year - and that's not gloom and doom," Bzdelik said. "We've played very well at times, very poorly at times. I feel great about the future, great about where we're headed."

That's long term - not the trip to Columbia, Mo., where CU has won twice in this decade and last.

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