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Sports Weekend

CU welcomes annual invasion of Kansas fans

WAVING THE WHEAT IN BOULDER

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

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Kansas fans love their Jayhawks and gather anytime and anywhere the men's basketball team plays. (Getty | Jamie Squire)

Rather than telling his young basketball squad to brace itself for the inevitable horde of Kansas fans invading the Coors Events Center on Saturday, Colorado coach Jeff Bzdelik is asking his players to embrace the overall atmosphere.

"KU fans are great," Bzdelik said Thursday. "There will be enthusiasm in this building. There will be spirit in this building. Whether fans are for you or against you, that's a good thing.

"It's all part of the pageantry, especially at the collegiate level. I applaud their fans for what they do."

Colorado (8-7, 0-1 Big 12) probably will get its biggest home crowd of the season against Kansas (12-4, 1-0). But in recent years, a third or more of the fans cheer for the Jayhawks. Tipoff is at 1:30 p.m. (KMGH-TV).

"I've heard about the Kansas fans coming in here," CU freshman forward Austin Dufault said. "That's just the way it's going to have to be until we start beating them."

Colorado was hoping to play its best basketball of the season by the start of the Big 12 schedule, but that's not the case. The Buffaloes have lost four of their past five games, winning only against Division II Western State. In its league opener, Colorado was mauled 107-62 at Missouri on Wednesday, getting outscored 27-5 to end the first half.

Look for two freshmen, 6-foot-9 forward Trey Eckloff (three points, five rebounds against

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Missouri) and guard Ryan Kelley (19 points off the bench), to get more playing time against Kansas. Eckloff, a Cherry Creek High product, may be a candidate to start.

Colorado committed a season-worst 26 turnovers against the Tigers.

"We need to strap it on against Kansas," Bzdelik said. "It's got to come down to our guys saying enough is enough, in terms of being manhandled all the time."

Kansas is the reigning national champion, but no current Jayhawk has started a game against Colorado. However, junior guard Sherron Collins (18.5 points) and 6-11 sophomore center Cole Aldrich (15.3, 9.8 rebounds) have developed into two of the Big 12's best players. And KU's newcomers were rated among the nation's best recruiting classes.

"We have a nice ballclub," Kansas coach Bill Self said. "But we haven't displayed the consistency, intangibles or toughness to win on the road."

Invariably, Kansas players remark after a game in Boulder that it does not feel like a regular road game.

"We know the crowd is going to be half them, half us," CU junior guard Dwight Thorne said. "But at least it's going to be a packed house. It's going to be something our young guys haven't experienced. I'm interested to see how they react."

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AROUND TOWN

Local Center of attention.

The Denver area will be abuzz this weekend with a busy back-to-back- to-back schedule of games at the Pepsi Center.

What started Thursday with an NBA game will have the Nuggets and Avalanche trading the spotlight through Sunday. The Nugs went against Phoenix on Thursday, the Avs host Edmonton tonight at 7:30 p.m., then the Nugs play Orlando on Saturday at 7 p.m., and the weekend ends with the Avs facing off with Calgary on Sunday at 6 p.m. The busy schedule means juggling all kinds of concerns, including changing out the hardwood for an ice rink, vice versa, and back again. And the games mean plenty of airtime for Altitude. The network will televise each game.

- By Nick Groke

STAY ON THE COUCH

Wall-to-wall basketball.

Call it a baker's double dozen. There are no less than 26 college basketball games airing on TV on Saturday.

There are so many cable and satellite channels available, viewers will get to choose from highlights including East Stroudsburg vs.

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Shippensburg women and Pacific vs. Cal State Fullerton men. Of course, the Colorado, Colorado State and Air Force men and Wyoming men and women will also be on the tube.

But Friday night will have the best basketball action. ESPN will air an NBA doubleheader showcasing some of the stars of the Olympic gold medal-winning U.S. team.

Chris Paul and the New Orleans Hornets tip off against LeBron James and the Cleveland Cavaliers at 6 p.m. Dwight Howard and the Orlando Magic travel to play Kobe Bryant, Pau Gasol and the L.A. Lakers in the nightcap at 8:30 p.m.

- By Nick Groke

GET OFF THE COUCH

Active way to remember.

We officially celebrate Martin Luther King Jr. Day on Monday, but the spirit of the occasion reaches throughout the year. Kick off a weekend of activism and remembrance Saturday with the Run for the Dream 5K Run and Walk at 10 a.m. in Aurora.

The Dream 5K will start at Aurora Municipal Court and take runners and walkers through the city. The race is organized by Potts Trotters, a nonprofit running club that promotes health and fitness.

Check out drmartinlkingjrhc.org for more

information on the 5K and about all the weekend's events, in Denver and beyond.

- By Nick Groke

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE

Showcase for shredders.

In its quest to dominate international competition, the U.S. Snowboarding Association is always on the lookout for up-and-coming riders.

For Colorado boarders this weekend, that means showing off at the Revolution Tour stop at Copper Mountain, a four-day competition that started Wednesday and runs through Saturday. U. S. Snowboarding's rookie squad will be among the competitors in an open field, including Colorado standouts Matt Ladley of Steamboat Springs and Silverthorne's Kim Krahulec.

Slopestyle finals start today at 1 p.m., with snowboardcross finals going Saturday at 1 p.m. Check copperseries.com for more info.

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