



Bufs hoping to prove resilient against Kansas

After lopsided loss to Missouri, CU hosts Jayhawks

By Ryan Thorburn
Saturday, January 17, 2009

BOULDER, Colo. — What Missouri game?

Understandably, the Buffs seem to be suffering from amnesia in the aftermath of their 107-62 loss in Columbia on Wednesday.

Even the detail-oriented Jeff Bzdelik wasn't interested in studying the film from Colorado's lopsided loss in the Big 12 opener.

"That's one of those DVD's you make a Frisbee out of," Bzdelik said with a chuckle.

There are, of course, plenty of other things for the Buffs to worry about moving forward.

Starting with today's game against the defending national champion Kansas Jayhawks at the Coors Events Center (1:30 p.m., ABC).

History is not on CU's side today. A large portion of the crowd won't be either.

But this is an opportunity for a young team to make a statement by at least competing against a Big 12 powerhouse at home.

"We're going to see the resiliency of our team," Dwight Thorne said. "We have the defending national champions coming in. As long as every-body has their head and their heart right we should be all right. It's going to be a good challenge for us."

The Jayhawks (12-4, 1-0) had six players from last year's team drafted into the NBA.

As Bill Self experiments with his promising young roster he can also lean on junior guard Sherron Collins (18.5 ppg, 5.1 apg) and sophomore center Cole Aldrich (15.3 ppg, 9.8 rpg).

KU opened conference play with an 18-0 run on the way to an 87-71 victory over Kansas State on Tuesday.

"I don't care if it's against Kansas or whoever, it's an opportunity to improve," Bzdelik said.

Despite an 8-7 overall record and inauspicious 0-1 beginning to the Big 12 portion of the schedule, Bzdelik remains confident that his young team will improve as the season wears on and will be ready to compete at a much higher level in a couple years.

However, it sounds like Bzdelik is getting frustrated with CU's lack of resources. Before Friday's practice he noted that the Buffs are the only program in the Big 12 without a full-time strength coach and video coordinator.

"I'm kind tired of being politically correct," Bzdelik said. "We have a long way to go and we're not playing on a level playing field. But our administration understands that."

And the 45-point thrashing from the Tigers wasn't the only loss CU suffered in the Show Me State this week.

According to the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, highly touted Australian recruit Cody Ellis verbally committed to Saint Louis instead of CU.

The 6-8 forward is a star on the Australian Institute of Sport and Australian U-19 national team. Ellis' AIU teammate Shane Harris-Tunks, a 6-11 senior, has already committed to CU to reunite with Australian U-19 point guard Nate Tomlinson.

Saint Louis is coached by Rick Majerus, who recruited Andrew Bogut from Australia to Utah and tried to get Tomlinson to play for the Billikens.

Tomlinson will start against KU after suffering muscle cramps and finishing with just two points at Missouri.

"We've talked about it and the only way we can get this feeling to go away is to play again," Tomlinson said after the loss at Mizzou Arena.

The Jayhawks have won 11 consecutive games against CU and 38 of the last 39 meetings. Since the inception of the Big 12, KU is 24-1 against the Buffs.

"It will be fun. I know a lot of guys on their team and I grew up around there," said CU forward Casey Crawford, an Overland Park, Kan., product and former Gatorade Player of the Year in Kansas. "It's definitely a chance to get a big win for our program. A win against Kansas is a big win for anyone."



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CU men's preview: Kansas

TODAY: Colorado hosts Kansas at 1:30 p.m. at the Coors Events Center.

BROADCAST: Television: ABC with Brad Nessler (play-by-play) and Jimmy Dykes (color); Radio: KKZN AM 760 with Mark Johnson (play-by-play) and Charles Johnson (color)

STORYLINES: The Buffs (8-7, 0-1) are coming off a 107-62 Buff-whipping at Missouri and need to prove they can at least compete in the Big 12 at home. ... The Jayhawks (12-4, 1-0) opened conference play with an 87-71 win over rival Kansas State but are still looking for their first true road win of the season.

KEY STAT: Kanas opened Big 12 play with an 18-0 run en route to an 87-71 victory over Kansas State. CU allowed a 19-0 run in the first half of its conference-opening 107-62 loss at Missouri.

COACHES: Jeff Bzdelik is 20-27 in his second season at CU. Bill Self is 154-36 in his sixth season at KU.

PROBABLE STARTERS:

CU -- G Nate Tomlinson, 6-2, freshman, 8.8 ppg, 2.6 rpg, G Cory Higgins, 6-5, sophomore, 17.5 ppg, 6.3 rpg, G Dwight Thorne, 6-2, junior, 11.9 ppg, 3.5 rpg, F Austin Dufault, 6-8, freshman, 9.3 ppg, 3.8 rpg, F/C Jermyl Jackson-Wilson, 6-6, senior, 5.4 ppg, 4.4 rpg.

KU -- G Sherron Collins, 5-11, junior, 18.5 ppg, 2.7 rpg, G Brady Morningstar, 6-3, sophomore, 7.4 ppg, 2.6 rpg, G Tyshawn Taylor, 6-3, freshman, 10.1 ppg, 2.2 rpg, F Markieff Morris, 6-9, freshman, 5.3 ppg, 4.8 rpg, C Cole Aldrich, 6-11, sophomore, 15.3 ppg, 9.8 rpg.

SERIES: Kansas leads 115-39 overall, including a 22-7 advantage at the Coors Events Center.

UP NEXT: The Buffs travel to Lubbock to take on Texas Tech on Tuesday (6 p.m., FSN).



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Frustration grows for Buffs

By Patrick Ridgell

Longmont Times-Call

BOULDER — The Kansas men's basketball team makes its annual trek to Colorado today, where it usually feasts upon hapless hosts before a packed Coors Events Center that's half full of Jayhawks fans (1:30 p.m., Ch. 7). ABC is airing it, too, which will expose CU's progress to millions.

With that kind of platform on which to vent, guess what topic Buffs coach Jeff Bzdelik focused on? Asked Friday about trying to build a winner in Boulder, a question Bzdelik hears frequently, he said it's a taller task than he'd imagined.

"I'm kind of tired of being politically correct," he said. "We have a long ways to go. We are not on a level playing field as of this moment with other schools in the Big 12. Fortunately, our administration understands that. So it's a process.

"I'm excited about where we're headed. I know the support is here to get us to a level playing field."

Whether Bzdelik actually believes what he said or just wanted to relay a message to someone, somewhere, is debatable. His list of what's needed to reach that level playing field is not short.

He wants a basketball-only strength and conditioning coach, not a "football guy" working with his players. He wants a basketball-only video coordinator. There's the ongoing efforts to improve the Events Center's weight room and locker rooms, which he said are not complete.

Of course, CU hopes to break ground on a practice facility by summer. Given the economy, the lack of tradition and its current chances at success, pumping more money into this program can't be too appealing. Then again, having a decent place to practice isn't an outrageous request.

"Quite frankly, there are some times we're like orphans in not having a place to practice," Bzdelik said.

Clearly, frustration is simmering within the coach, who began Friday's briefing talking about his Air Force teams that beat Stanford, Wake Forest and others by more than 30 points. Now, his Buffs are trying to forget a 107-62 pummeling Wednesday in Missouri.

Bzdelik has never even hinted at anything that might build expectations for this year. If his team comes out and lays another egg today, though, the coach might find keeping his composure another taller task than he'd ever imagined.

"There's lots of teams that have taken a whupping. ... It happens quickly, and it can happen quickly when you turn the ball over 26 times and miss layups," he said.

"What's most important is how you respond from it and understand why that happened."

Do they? Junior guard Dwight Thorne said he'd be surprised if the Buffs aren't very intense today.

"We have to come out with a high level of intensity, because if we're feeling sorry for ourselves, we can get our ass drilled, just like we did the other day," he said.

Thorne said he remembers running out of the Coors Events Center tunnel two years ago to take on Kansas — and being booed. That's how it is every year Kansas visits Boulder.

There will be differences, though. This is not your classic Kansas team. It's unranked, and in two true road trips, it's been drilled twice — 84-67 at Arizona on Dec. 23, and 75-62 at Michigan State on Jan. 10.

The Jayhawks replaced every starter from last year's national champion team, which saw five players drafted last summer by the NBA. That ties a record for the league since it went to a two-round draft.

Otherwise, Kansas has two future NBA players, Bzdelik said, and guard Sherron Collins — the Big 12's sixth man of the year in 2007-08 — has emerged as one of its best point guards this season.

CU has dropped 38 of its past 39 meetings with Kansas, mainly because the Jayhawks' talent overwhelms the Buffs'. When asked if a watered-down Kansas is still a measuring stick for the Buffs, Bzdelik echoed the point he seemed eager to make.

"Every time we play against someone in the Big 12, it's a measuring stick," he said.

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Kansas (12-4, 1-0) at Colorado men (8-7, 0-1)

When/Where: 1:30 p.m. today at the Coors Events Center in Boulder

TV/Radio: Ch. 7/KKZN 760

The series: Kansas leads 115-39. Kansas has won the past five meetings, and 38 of the past 39.

Leading scorers: **Kansas** — Sherron Collins (18.5 points per game); **CU** — Cory Higgins (17.5 points per game)

Notes: CU reported that less than 500 tickets remained as of Friday morning. ... Cody Ellis, the star 6-foot-8 forward at the Australian Institute of Sport and on the Australian under-19 team, has committed to play for Saint Louis, according to the St. Louis Post-Dispatch. Ellis chose SLU over CU and Wake Forest. ... Higgins' consecutive free-throw streak ended at 45 Wednesday at Missouri. ... CU hasn't blocked a shot in its past three games. ... This is the first time Kansas is not ranked when it plays CU in Boulder since January 2006.

Patrick Ridgell

Colorado women (8-6, 0-2) at No. 16 Texas (13-3, 1-1)

When/Where: 6 p.m. today at the Frank Erwin Center in Austin, Texas

TV/Radio: Ch. 7/KKZN 760

The series: Texas leads 13-4. It has beaten CU six of the seven times they've played in Austin.

Leading scorers: **Texas** — Brittainey Raven (14.6 points per game); **CU** — Brittany Spears (18 points per game)

Notes: CU has lost two straight, both in the Big 12, after winning its final five games of non-conference play. ... Kathy McConnell-Miller is seeking her 50th win as CU coach. ... CU hasn't won on the road against a team from the Big 12 South since winning at Baylor in January 2004. ... Texas has lost three of its past five since it started 11-0 and was ranked No. 4. ... Texas leads the Big 12 in field goal defense, holding teams to .332 shooting, and blocked shots, with 6.5 a game.

Patrick Ridgell

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The Rocky

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It could have been the aftershock of a 45-point loss in his team's Big 12 Conference opener two nights earlier at Missouri. Or maybe it was the prospect of a visit Saturday by defending national champion and model program Kansas (1:30 p.m. Ch. 7), a team Colorado has beaten just three times in the past 48 meetings.

More than likely, though, it was the weight of the task he faces continuing to bear down.

Whatever, Jeff Bzdelik, his second season at CU barely at the halfway point, struggled to contain his frustration Friday with the men's basketball program.

"I'm tired of being politically correct," Bzdelik said. "We're not on a level playing field as of this moment with other schools in the Big 12. Fortunately, our administration understands that.

"So, it's a process. I'm excited about where we're headed; I know the support is here to get us to a level playing field."

Nonetheless, Bzdelik, whose overall mark at CU is 20-27 (8-7 this season), ticked off several items he believes are imperative before the Buffaloes are consistently competitive in the Big 12: A strength and conditioning coordinator for basketball, a video coordinator for basketball, completion of the basketball locker room and weight room, and an overall upgrade of the Coors Events Center.

Ground is to be broken near the Events Center in the near future on a multipurpose practice facility mentioned prominently in Bzdelik's five-year contract.

He repeatedly has said he knew of CU's mediocre hoops history and the malaise surrounding the program when he signed on. But Friday, he noted, "It's what I thought – and more than what I thought," adding that another "two to three" recruiting classes are needed to complete an on-court makeover.

Bottom line: Forget quick fixes and great expectations for a while – but expect a better effort than what the Buffs delivered at Missouri. Bzdelik said he didn't review the 107-62 blowout with his team: "That's one of those DVDs you make a Frisbee out of and toss it."

He hopes a pride factor comes into play today against the Jayhawks: "The only way you get respect is to earn it . . . what's most important is how you respond and to learn from (a blowout). We'll see (today)," he said.

Kansas hasn't visited Boulder unranked since Jan. 11, 2006, but exclusion from the top 25 didn't make much difference in that outcome. The Jayhawks won 75-63, using that game among its springboards to enter the top 25 a month later.

This season, the defending national champs haven't been treated like visiting dignitaries. The Jayhawks are 1-3 away from Allen Fieldhouse (0-2 road, 1-1 neutral site), but Coors traditionally has offered them a "home away from home" feel with more KU than CU fans attending.

"I don't care who's in the stands; the more people the better," Buffs guard Cory Higgins said. "If there are fans in the stands, that's extra motivation."

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