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Weakened opponents may allow Buffs a shot

By Patrick Ridgell

Longmont Times-Call

Opportunity beckons this week for the Colorado men's basketball team.

No one will ever claim the Big 12 is a bad hoops conference. It has an RPI around fourth in most rankings entering this week, and No. 6 Oklahoma looks like a national title contender. But it isn't in 2008-09 what it normally is, and it certainly isn't what it was a year ago, when six teams reached the NCAA Tournament, including national champion Kansas, and it had 10 players drafted by NBA teams.

With youthful programs the norm this year, only two Big 12 teams are ranked this week. That youth, alone, should boost hopes for anyone who might wonder where the Buffs will find some league wins in 2008-09.

This week's opponents — Texas Tech (10-7, 0-2) and Kansas State (11-6, 0-3) — both enter today with three-game losing streaks and winless conference records.

Tonight at Texas Tech (6 p.m., FSN) is first. Red Raiders coach Pat Knight wants leadership, and to make his point about his team's lack of it, he told a story Monday from the 2005 NCAA Tournament.

The Red Raiders trailed 38-29 to Gonzaga at halftime in a second-round game. In the locker room, guard Ronald Ross had grabbed forward Devonne Giles by the jersey and shoved him into a locker, according to Knight, who was an assistant coach for that team. Ross told Giles, "You're not going to ruin my senior season by playing like a dog." Giles made some key plays in the second half, and Tech rallied for the win.

This year's Red Raiders don't have a Ronald Ross, Knight said. He'd like to see guard Mike Singletary assume that role, but Singletary must first play better before he can. Knight also said the recruits he signed in November might have some who can be an extension of the coach, but, "we don't get those kids until next season," he said.

Kansas State, which visits Boulder on Saturday, figured to drop off after losing all-American Michael Beasley, whom Miami chose second in the 2008 NBA Draft, and Bill Walker, who went in the second round. Saturday's 73-21 loss at Nebraska ran its losing streak to three, and coach Frank Martin was especially peeved after it.

He told the Kansas City Star, "Obviously the way I prepared my team to play ... wasn't good enough." When asked if he was embarrassed, Martin answered with a bemused, "What do you think?"

"We're OK," Martin said Monday.

"The last game, we did not play well. We had 25 turnovers and it was just a bad performance. "But our other two conference games (losses to Oklahoma and Kansas), we just did not do a good job shooting the basketball."

The Buffs, meanwhile, have lost 22 straight Big 12 road games. So they won't exactly strut into Lubbock.

Around the Big 12

Texas A&M coach Mark Turgeon made a hero's return to Allen Fieldhouse on Monday night. A Topeka native, a two-time Kansas captain and a member of its 1986 Final Four team, he worked as an assistant for five years in Lawrence. It was his first game at Kansas as A&M's head coach.

Turgeon said he expected lots of family and friends there, but he sounded Monday morning like he wanted to minimize the fuss.

"My players don't care ... they're only worried about trying to beat Kansas," he said.

Interesting news broke the other day for height-starved Nebraska.

Brian Jorge Diaz enrolled in classes at the school and is officially on the team. Diaz, 6-foot-11 and 235 pounds, committed to Nebraska in August, and the NCAA Clearinghouse cleared him. But according to the Lincoln Journal-Star, he did not meet the school's admission standards because he had yet to pass an English proficiency test, which is required because the Puerto Rico native did not attend an English-speaking school.

Nebraska's tallest player, Chris Balham, is 6-8 and plays only 10 minutes a game, so the Huskers could use some size. Coach Doc Sadler said Diaz has yet to practice with the team.

"Obviously, if I think he can help us win a basketball game, the sooner (he plays) the better," Sadler said. "I'll visit with him in a few days and see what he thinks and where he's at."

Missouri's Leo Lyons only served a one-game suspension for his multiple traffic violations last week. He returned for Saturday's win against Iowa State. He had 12 points and eight rebounds in 17 minutes.

The league's best game this week could be when Baylor visits Oklahoma. Baylor is 0-24 against Oklahoma since the Big 12 formed.

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



Bufs face desperate Red Raiders

Buffaloes look to stop Big 12 road game losing streak at 22

By Ryan Thorburn

Tuesday, January 20, 2009

LUBBOCK, Texas -- It should be an interesting atmosphere tonight at United Spirit Arena.

And not because there is a buzz around here about Jeff Bzdelik's Colorado Buffs coming to town.

After Texas Tech's 71-49 loss to No. 11 Texas on Saturday, Red Raiders head coach Pat Knight didn't bite his tongue when asked how he felt about the state of the program he inherited from his famous father last season.

"We didn't have one guy who looked like he could play in the Big 12. That's the bottom line," Knight told the Lubbock Avalanche-Journal. "We're an awful basketball team. I'm an awful coach right now. This team's bad right now. There's no sense analyzing."

Knight also called out the Red Raiders student body for waiting until the Texas game to help fill the arena.

"We're busting our (butts). I'm doing more stuff media-wise, things to try and generate students for these games and we just get it for one game," Knight said. "It's not the fans that show up. I love the fans that show up. They are the most loyal fans. I'm calling out the students. They need to show up."

But which desperate team will show up tonight at United Spirit Arena (6 p.m., FSN) more determined to get its first Big 12 victory, the Red Raiders (10-7, 0-2) or the Buffs (8-8, 0-2)?

CU has lost 22 consecutive Big 12 road games dating back to Jan. 21, 2006. Tech's only road win since Knight took over was an 87-69 victory in Boulder last season.

"The level of play has gone up in the Big 12, and we expected that," struggling Buffs point guard Nate Tomlinson said after finishing with seven turnovers and one assist during Saturday's 73-56 loss to Kansas. "We feel if we execute our stuff we can shoot well. We just haven't done a very good job the last few games."

CU is shooting 37.1 percent from the field through two Big 12 games after averaging about 49 percent during non-conference play. Texas Tech is averaging 79.9 points per game this season but gives up a conference-worst 77.3.

"It's a shame," Bzdelik said when asked on the Big 12 coaches teleconference Monday about the differences between the Red Raiders under Bob Knight's son. "Pat's an excellent coach and of course he has a father who is one of the greatest of all time. I know Pat is tired of getting compared to his dad, but

that's what he has to deal with. ...

"Pat has opened it up more for his players to run more and defensively he'll give you some different looks."

Both Bzdelik and Pat Knight believe difference-making help is on the way when their respective recruiting classes arrives to add depth and perhaps toughness to their programs.

"The problem is I don't get them until next year," Knight said. "We've got to figure this out now."

Bzdelik knows what the young Bufs are doing wrong -- poor rebounding, too many turnovers, unreliable play off the bench, etc. -- but the veteran head coach hasn't been able to find any quick fixes to the growing pains.

"When they learn that they'll be able to win some games down the stretch," Bzdelik said.

One of two things will happen tonight:

Either the Red Raiders are going to respond to Knight's challenge and pick up their first Big 12 victory at the expense of CU.

Or the Bufs are going to take advantage of an opponent that is also struggling and end their painful Big 12 road losing streak in Lubbock.



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CU men's preview: Jan. 20

By Ryan Thorburn

Tuesday, January 20, 2009

TODAY -- Colorado travels to Lubbock to take on Texas Tech at 6 p.m. in the United Spirit Arena.

BROADCAST -- Television: FSN with Drew Goodman (play-by-play) and Ceal Barry (color); Radio: KKZN (760 AM) with Mark Johnson (play-by-play) and Charles Johnson (color).

STORYLINES -- The Buffs (8-8, 0-2) are coming off a 73-56 loss at Kansas. CU has not won a Big 12 road game since Jan. 21, 2006. ... The Red Raiders (10-7, 0-2) are also winless in conference play after a 71-49 loss to No. 11 Texas.

KEY STAT -- Both teams are struggling to put 40 good minutes together. CU was outscored 39-29 in the second half against the Jayhawks and only made nine field goals in the last 20 minutes of the 73-56 loss. Texas Tech was outscored 41-25 in the second half against the Longhorns and only made eight field goals in the final 20 minutes of the 71-49 loss.

COACHES -- Jeff Bzdelik is 20-28 in his second season at CU. Pat Knight is 14-14 in his second season at Texas Tech.

PROBABLE STARTERS

Colorado -- G Nate Tomlinson, 6-2, freshman, 8.2 ppg, 2.6 rpg, G Cory Higgins, 6-5, sophomore, 17.6 ppg, 6.1 rpg, G Dwight Thorne, 6-2, junior, 11.8 ppg, 3.4 rpg, F Austin Dufault, 6-8, freshman, 9.4 ppg, 3.9 rpg, F/C Jermyl Jackson-Wilson, 6-6, senior, 5.4 ppg, 4.1 rpg.

Texas Tech -- G Alan Voskui, 6-3, senior, 14.3 ppg, 4.6 rpg, G John Roberson, 5-11, sophomore, 14.1 ppg, 3.5 rpg, F D'walyn Roberts, 6-7, sophomore, 7.2 ppg, 4.5 rpg, F Robert Lewandowski, 6-10, freshman, 4.8 ppg, 3.1 rpg, F Michael Prince, 6-7, senior, 4.1 ppg, 3.3 rpg.

SERIES -- CU leads 16-11.

UP NEXT -- The Buffs host Kansas State at 4 p.m. on Saturday.



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