



Bufs aim to 'stick with it'

Bzdelik's squad looks to avoid playing down to level of opponents

By Ryan Thorburn
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NORMAN, Okla. -- Home is where the heart is.

Perhaps not in the case of the Colorado men's basketball team, which seems to play its best basketball in the most hostile road environments against the most difficult competition.

The young Bufs have played uninspired at times this season during losses to Montana State and Texas Christian in front of a bunch of empty seats at the Coors Events Center. They've also dropped games to very beatable Big 12 foes Kansas State and Nebraska in Boulder.

But for whatever reason, CU was able to raise its level of play to match defending national champion Kansas at Allen Fieldhouse and No. 2 Oklahoma here at the Lloyd Noble Center before the undefeated conference powerhouses pulled out close victories in the final seconds.

Why couldn't these Bufs play with this kind of passion and poise against Buffalo or Vermont or Southern Methodist or even Texas Tech?

"I can't tell you," freshman guard Nate Tomlinson said after CU's 77-72 loss to the Sooners. "I guess the way we played here shows you what kind of people we are. We're never going to give in and we're always up for a challenge like this. But we have to bring that same intensity at home."

The Bufs cut a 21-point deficit in Lawrence to two points before Sherron Collins made a remarkable shot to bail KU out with a 66-61 victory on Jan. 31 to extend the nation's longest home-court winning streak.

On Saturday, OU needed all of Blake Griffin's 26 points and each of Tony Crocker's seven 3-pointers to escape CU and improve to 23-1 overall and 9-0 in Big 12 play.

Cory Higgins averaged 17.5 points on the two road trips. Dwight Thorne averaged 15.5 points. Jermyl Jackson-Wilson averaged 10.0 points.

The above happen to be Jeff Bzdelik's three captains.

"That's what good players do on the big stage," Higgins said. "I think a lot of our guys are like that. When the big stage comes they want to perform on it. ... We're only going to get better, so it's definitely encouraging."

Some players might dread having to try and defend Griffin, who will be the No. 1 pick in the NBA draft

if he stays healthy and decides to leave school early.

Trey Eckloff saw it as a unique opportunity to learn from the best and scored seven points off the bench while getting physical with the likely national player of the year on the defensive end.

"Being so close at the end against the No. 2 team at their place shows that if we perfect our game and play like we need to for all 40 minutes we can play with anybody in the country," Eckloff said. "I know we've been saying that for a while, but if we can stick with the No. 2 team in the country for that long, with a few tune-ups who couldn't we stick with?"

CU shot 50.9 percent from the field and only turned the ball over nine times. If Bzdelik's bunch can produce similar numbers in those categories at Iowa State on Wednesday the program's 25-game road losing streak in the Big 12 would almost certainly be snapped.

But will the Bufs be at their best against one of the worst teams in the conference like they were at Kansas and Oklahoma?

Hard to say with so many freshmen and sophomores in the rotation.

"It's my job to keep them getting better," Bzdelik said. "But their competitive spirit is there and their heart is in the right place. We're just not quite there. ...

"My vision is to just keep teaching them, developing them, molding them together as a team to the point when they're juniors and seniors they can be a team that they step on the court with."



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