



Bzdelik looks for lift from bench against Mizzou

By Ryan Thorburn
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BOULDER, Colo. — Casey Crawford was supposed to be a Big 12 newcomer of the year candidate and a real difference-maker for Colorado this season.

But the transfer from Wake Forest has had a very disappointing season for the Buffs and hasn't even played in four of the last five games.

Having the 6-foot-9 sophomore sitting on the end of the bench obviously wasn't the plan in October after the coaching staff spent a year bragging about Crawford's shooting skills.

"Frustrating is a nice way to put it," Crawford said. "It's been very hard to deal with."

Jeff Bzdelik's message for the players who aren't playing is simple: Defense wins minutes.

"They need to defend and play with great energy all the time," Bzdelik said. "It's pretty much that. Defend and play with great energy all the time."

The head coach said he isn't getting that from Crawford in practice or he would still be a part of the Buffs' rotation.

Levi Knutson, despite struggling with his 3-point shot this season, has been the sixth man recently because of his intensity on both ends of the court.

The Buffs' starters could really use some help Saturday against No. 11 Missouri at the Coors Events Center (11:47 a.m., FSN).

CU has lost seven of its last eight conference games by single digits, but it was a much different story in Columbia on Jan. 14, as the Tigers cruised to a 107-62 victory.

"They're an experienced group that has a chip on their shoulder. They're playing like it's their last go-round," Bzdelik said. "(Our depth) has been an issue all year."

Ryan Kelley was the only bright spot in the first meeting when he scored a career-high 19 points in 19 minutes. The freshman guard has not played since sustaining a knee injury in practice on Jan. 22.

Kelley has been practicing and traveling with the team but said the knee "is not quite 100 percent." He hopes to get some more playing experience before the season ends in three weeks.

"If it doesn't happen, it doesn't happen. I understand," Kelley said. "I'm more into the team getting better and us getting wins and growing together as a team."

Crawford has had some ankle problems this season but says health is not an issue. He played seven minutes at Iowa State before getting the hook after missing three shots.

“First off, I’ve got to knock shots down when I’m in there. Coach really expects me to knock down shots,” Crawford said. “I’ve got to go in there and play hard defensively and rebound.”

Toby Veal has also spent most of the season watching the action. The coaching staff is still excited about the potential of the highly touted prospect but he’s still working on mastering the offensive and defensive schemes.

CU turned the ball over 26 times and allowed Mizzou — which was without Leo Lyons — to go on a 19-0 run in the Big 12 opener. DeMarre Carroll was one of six Tigers to score in double figures and the senior forward also grabbed 11 rebounds in just 22 minutes as Mike Anderson emptied his bench during the blowout.

“Missouri is appropriately ranked. In my mind they’re one of the top 10 teams in the nation,” Bzdelik said. “Coach Anderson has done an awesome job, and Carroll plays as hard as anybody I’ve seen in a long, long time.”

Perhaps the Buffs on the bench will take note.



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CU men's preview vs. Missouri

BOULDER, Colo. — **TODAY** -- Colorado (9-16, 1-10) hosts No. 11 Missouri (22-4, 9-2) at 11:47 a.m. in the Coors Events Center.

BROADCAST -- Television: Altitude with Dave Armstrong and Bryndon Manzer; Radio: KKZN (760 AM) with Mark Johnson and Charles Johnson.

STORYLINES -- The Buffs are coming off a 46-41 loss at Nebraska and are looking to snap a painful six-game slide. ... Today is "Youth Day" at the CEC. General admission tickets for kids 13 and under are \$3 and can take part in a postgame autograph session with the team and help Chip celebrate the mascot's birthday.

KEY STAT -- CU has lost 10 games by single digits this season, including seven in Big 12 play.

COACHES -- Jeff Bzdelik is 21-36 in his second season at CU. Mike Anderson is 56-32 in his third season at Missouri.

PROBABLE STARTERS

CU -- G Nate Tomlinson, 6-2, freshman, 7.7 ppg, 2.6 rpg, G Cory Higgins, 6-5, sophomore, 17.6 ppg, 5.8 rpg, G Dwight Thorne, 6-2, junior, 13.0 ppg, 3.2 rpg, F Austin Dufault, 6-8, freshman, 8.9 ppg, 4.0 rpg, F/C Jermyl Jackson-Wilson, 6-6, senior, 5.5 ppg, 4.0 rpg.

MU -- G J.T. Tiller, 6-3, junior, 7.6 ppg, 3.2 rpg, G Zaire Taylor, 6-4, junior, 5.6 ppg, 3.1 rpg, G Matt Lawrence, 6-7, senior, 8.8 ppg, 2.1 rpg, F DeMarre Carroll, 6-8, senior, 17.3 ppg, 6.8 rpg, F Leo Lyons, 6-9, senior, 14.3 ppg, 5.7 rpg.

SERIES -- Missouri leads 92-54, including a 107-62 victory in Columbia on Jan. 14.

UP NEXT -- The Buffs host Oklahoma State next Wednesday (8:30 p.m., FSN).



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