



CU's job? Burst bubbles

By Ryan Thorburn

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BOULDER, Colo. — Bubble, bubble ... who's in trouble?

Perhaps any team that loses to Colorado down the stretch.

The Buffs — 9-17 overall, 1-11 in the Big 12 and sporting an RPI of 224 as of Tuesday evening — will finish the regular season against four teams considered to be on the NCAA Tournament “bubble” as the madness of March approaches.

CU hosts Oklahoma State tonight at the Coors Events Center (8:30 p.m., FSN) and rounds out the schedule with Baylor, Texas A&M and Kansas State.

“I wish we were on the bubble,” Buffs head coach Jeff Bzdelik said before Tuesday’s practice. “What I’m trying to impress upon our players is that’s a great thing to feel that pressure. It’s a good pressure. It’s a wholesome pressure. It’s what you play this game for.”

The Cowboys are 17-9 overall and 6-6 in the Big 12 under first-year head coach Travis Ford. At the top of OSU’s resume is a solid RPI of 32. But a loss to the conference’s last-place team might pull the bracket out from underneath the Pokes.

“None of it matters except for Colorado at this point,” Ford said Monday. “I’m sitting here watching Colorado (tape) right now and this is a very hungry basketball team. We’ve got our hands full.

“The moment we start thinking about anything other than competing with these guys, then nothing else is going to matter.”

The Buffs have been competitive in Big 12 play with seven single-digit losses, including two in overtime. But when are all these painful lessons going to lead to some success?

Dwight Thorne, the only junior on the team, would like to believe the program will be on Joe Lunardi’s “Bracketology” radar when the ides of March 2010 are upon us.

“Hopefully next year we can be one of those teams on the bubble for postseason play. I would really like to be in that position next year,” Thorne said. “Right now my mind is still focused on this year. Thinking about next year is kind of a far stretch for me. But I’m hoping we can be a good basketball team next year and be on the brink of becoming a great basketball team.”

Believe it or not, none of the players on Oklahoma State’s roster have ever been invited to the Big Dance. That includes talented senior Byron Eaton, who has played for Eddie Sutton, Sean Sutton and Ford during his Stillwater days.

“It changes every day and it almost becomes comical,” Ford said of the bubble watch. “Our players know we’ve played ourselves back into the mix, but we have a long way to go. That has been a goal all season because nobody on our team has ever played in an NCAA Tournament. But the last two or three weeks we haven’t mentioned it.”

CU’s only chance to make it to the NCAA Tournament requires a Hollywood script. Bzdelik’s team would have to pull off a series of stunning upsets at the conference tournament in Oklahoma City to bust into the bracket.

For now the Buffs will have to settle for spoiling someone else’s party by securing that elusive second conference victory.

“You know these teams are going to come into your building with a chip on their shoulder trying to get into the NCAA Tournament. Our mindset is to beat them just like anyone else,” Thorne said. “When they come in with a little attitude or swagger about themselves, thinking they can come in here and just beat us, we need to play hard and have that same chip on our shoulder.”

Bzdelik warned Buffs fans that the first few years of the rebuilding process would be painful. However, he has also said that by the time these young players are upperclassmen CU should be winning 20 games a year and making a push for the NCAA Tournament.

“That’s what they hired me for and I hope that’s what my players are playing the game for,” Bzdelik said.



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