



CU's first road game presents tough test

Young Buffs eye win at Stanford

By Ryan Thorburn

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PALO ALTO, Calif. -- So far this season Colorado has been out-rebounded by teams from the SWAC, Big Sky and Patriot League.

The Buffs were able to just get the better of Harvard, an Ivy League foe, on the glass -- 28-25.

However, Jeff Bzdelik's young team catches a major break in that statistical department here tonight when CU plays its first road game of the season against Stanford at Maples Pavilion (8:30 p.m., FSN) as part of the Big 12/Pac-10 Hardwood Series.

Brooke and Robin Lopez are gone.

The 7-foot twin towers left Stanford and are now thriving in a down economy, cashing large paychecks in the NBA instead of dominating college competition.

"They lost the Lopez twins," Dwight Thorne noticed. "But I still think if we go to Palo Alto and get a victory that would be very big for CU basketball."

It would certainly be the most impressive victory the Buffs -- who do not face any other teams from BCS conferences during a weak non-conference schedule -- can put on their résumé until Big 12 play begins in January.

Last season the Cardinal crushed CU 67-43 in Boulder even though Brooke Lopez didn't play and Robin scored only scored four points.

Stanford still won the battle of the boards 38-21.

"This will be the first big test of the season and it will be our first road game, so I think it will be interesting," said sophomore guard Cory Higgins, who leads the Buffs in points, rebounds, assists, steals and minutes played. "I think we'll do just fine. I don't want to over-hype what the road is. I think if we focus on ourselves we'll be fine."

Higgins, who is also Bzdelik's best defender, will be focused on counterpart Anthony Goods. The senior leads Stanford, averaging 21.3 points, under first-year head coach Johnny Dawkins.

The Buffs should have the Cardinal scouted very well because Dawkins' team is coming off a 76-57 victory over Air Force on Wednesday night. The Falcons are coached by Bzdelik's good friend Jeff Reynolds.

"We've been there," said Bzdelik, whose 2006-07 Air Force team beat Stanford 79-45 two years ago. "But it's not about me, it's about my players. And for so many of them this will be their first road game. It's going to be a great opportunity for them to grow."

The Buffs (3-1) arrived on Thursday night and practiced off their Thanksgiving dinner. The players are looking forward to playing a name opponent in a hostile atmosphere before returning home to face TCU next Wednesday in front of a bunch of empty seats.

"I just love playing and we've had so many practices that any game is like a party for me," CU senior Jermyl Jackson-Wilson said. "But everybody knows who Stanford is and has seen that big tree running around. The guys will be excited to play somebody with a big name. It will be good to play a Pac-10 opponent and get this win."

In order to do that, CU will have to do a better job rebounding and taking care of the basketball. During Tuesday's 73-59 victory over Lafayette, the Buffs were out-rebounded 35-30 and committed a season-high 19 turnovers.

The Cardinal (3-0) cashed in eight Air Force turnovers for 16 points en route to a 51-29 halftime lead and a comfortable victory.

"I just think we need to play the whole game. We can't come out slow, can't end slow, can't slow down in the middle," Thorne said. "We just have to sustain it the whole game."

The Buffs were close to getting a road breakthrough in the Big 12 last season but came up just short at Texas (69-67) and Oklahoma State (64-63).

A victory tonight at Stanford would look pretty good at the bottom of the ESPN scroll for an inexperienced CU team looking for some confidence and respect.

"I just might show the players the clip from Hoosiers when they went into that big arena and measured the court and realized it's the same dimensions and the baskets are the same," Bzdelik said. "You become a good basketball team when you realize there should be no difference between playing on the road and playing at home."

Interestingly, the Cardinal will finish off a Front Range hat trick with a game at Colorado State on Tuesday. The Buffs will host the Rams on Dec. 10.



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CU gets another shot at Cardinal

By Brian Howell
Longmont Times-Call

Dwight Thorne II hasn't forgotten Stanford's trip to Boulder a year ago.

For the University of Colorado men's basketball team, it was an opportunity to beat a traditional power. But, Stanford left the Coors Events Center with a 67-43 win.

CU was within three points at halftime of that game a year ago.

"I think we had a chance to beat them, and things didn't go our way at the end," Thorne said.

The Buffs (3-1) get another chance tonight. CU is in Palo Alto, Calif., to play the Cardinal (3-0) on their home floor in a non-league contest that means a lot, Thorne said.

"I want to go out and get a win in Palo Alto on Saturday," Thorne said Wednesday. "Maybe that Montana State loss that people are talking about won't be such a tasty taste."

After playing all four games at home so far — including that 85-82 loss to Montana State — today will be CU's first venture outside of Boulder.

Although Stanford isn't ranked, the Cardinal are averaging 84.7 points per game and are coming off a 76-57 win over Air Force on Wednesday.

A traditional national power, they advanced to the Sweet 16 round of the NCAA Tournament a year ago.

"Ready or not here we come," head coach Jeff Bzdelik said of playing arguably CU's toughest non-conference game. "I am looking forward to it. It will be a great challenge. It will give us a really good gauge to see where we are at."

Stanford doesn't have a dominating presence inside, although 6-foot-8 forward Lawrence Hill is averaging 18.0 points and 7.0 rebounds. He's the only Cardinal player posting more than 5.3 boards per game, however.

Considering Stanford isn't any bigger than CU — neither team has a player taller than 6-10 — the Buffs' struggles with rebounding may not become much of a factor today.

"The fact that they don't have a beast on the boards, it's going to help us," the 6-foot-2 Thorne said.

Air Force may help the Buffs, too. Bzdelik coached at Air Force before coming to CU a year ago, and he brought his motion offense with him. Although Air Force didn't have much success, CU could learn from the Falcons' mistakes.

Colorado men (3-1) at Stanford (3-0)

When/Where: 8:30 p.m. tonight, at Maples Pavilion in Palo Alto, Calif.

TV/Radio: FSN/KKZN 760.

The series: CU is 3-6 against Stanford. Last year in Boulder, the Cardinal defeated CU, 67-43.

Leading scorers: Stanford — Anthony Goods (21.3 points per game); CU — Cory Higgins (17.8 points per game).

Notes: This is CU's only road game among its first nine in 2008-09. ... CU has been outrebounded in three of its first four game. ... The Buffs are seeking their first 4-1 start since 2005-06. ... Under first-year head coach Johnny Dawkins, Stanford returned three starters and seven letter winners from last year's 28-8 Sweet 16 team.

“If we get the Air Force tape, we’ll be able to get more familiar with what (Stanford) tries to do to us,” Thorne said.

Regardless, the Buffs know all that really matters is what they do to improve — win or lose today. Daily improvement has been Bzdelik’s goal since he got to Boulder.

“I think we’ve gotten better every day in practice,” Thorne said. “There’s some things we need to work on a lot, but I think we have gotten better.”

Still, the Buffs haven’t been impressive in any game thus far. In addition to the loss to Montana State, the Buffs have defeated Arkansas-Pine Bluff, Harvard and Lafayette, and did blow any of them away.

That’s why a win of any kind today would be big.

“I would say there’s a little more emphasis put on it (compared to other games),” Thorne said. “This is the type of game that you can look at yourself in the mirror and evaluate yourself.

“It’s a big game for us. It’s what college basketball is all about. It’s what you signed up for. You signed up to be in a packed house in a hostile environment.

“To consider yourself a quality basketball team, you have to play quality basketball teams. If we can go to Palo Alto and get a win, I think it would be good for Colorado basketball.”

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