



# Bzdelik's Buffs seek end to road struggles

## CU hasn't won true road game since Dec. 22, 2007 at CSU

By Ryan Thorburn  
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DALLAS -- It's homecoming here for Dwight Thorne.

The former star at Martin High School in Arlington, Texas, will have about 25 family members and friends in the stands cheering on the Buffs when Colorado takes on Southern Methodist tonight at Moody Coliseum (6 p.m., FSN).

But the real storyline is CU's quest to get a much-needed road win under its belt before Big 12 play begins next week.

The Buffs (7-5) are coming off a disappointing 1-2 record at the Rainbow Classic, which included a neutral-court win over Coppin State, and have not won a game on an opponent's home court since beating Colorado State in Fort Collins on Dec. 22, 2007.

CU has not won a road game in the Big 12 since an 80-78 overtime victory at Oklahoma State on Jan. 21, 2006. The Buffs have lost 21 consecutive conference road games and were 0-8 in that department during Jeff Bzdelik's first season.

"Any win is a big win for us, but a road game would be even better," Thorne said. "Especially in my home town. I'm just ready to get out there and get this nasty taste out of my mouth."

Bzdelik's team lost 76-62 at Stanford on Nov. 29 in its only other true road game of the nonconference schedule.

After cruising to a first-round victory in Honolulu the Buffs appeared to be on a collision course with the rival Rams for the tournament title. Buffalo had other ideas, beating CU 62-60 on a last-second shot before taking care of CSU in the Rainbow Classic championship.

The Buffs' thin lineup ran out of gas during an 84-59 loss to Vermont in the third-place game.

"Prior to the Buffalo game we had won four straight and the Buffalo game was a game that could have bounced either way," Bzdelik said. "I think the next day (against Vermont) ... we're a team that doesn't have as much depth and isn't as physically strong as some of these other teams."

The Mustangs (4-7) will have a size advantage in the paint with 7-1 senior Bamba Fall (8.8 ppg, 7.2 rpg) at center. But this is an SMU team that has lost at home to Arkansas-Pine Bluff and Texas-San Antonio.

"I'm not worried about all that stuff," Bzdelik said when asked about taking a young team on the road. "We were close (last year) but we didn't get over the hump. It would be good to get over the hump."

Cory Higgins is certainly there as a true sophomore. He was the only CU player named to the Rainbow Classic all-

tournament team and leads the Buffs in scoring (17.9 ppg) and rebounding (6.3 rpg).

Entering tonight's game, Higgins has made 36 consecutive free throws over his last six games, including 20-of-20 in Honolulu.

The Big 12 record for consecutive free throws made is 39 (Joey Graham, Oklahoma State, 2004-05). The CU record is also 39 (Rob Gonzalez, Jan. 10-Feb. 26, 1983).

Bzdelik can only hope the rest of his young players can learn to play as consistently as Higgins.

"With a young team consistency is going to be what you're looking for," Thorne said. "Even for myself. I'm a junior but this is my second year playing significant minutes. It's going to be hard to be consistent but we've got to do it."



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## CU men's preview: SMU

**TONIGHT** -- Colorado travels to Dallas to play Southern Methodist at 6 p.m. at Moody Coliseum.

**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).

**STORYLINE** -- The Buffs (7-5) are coming off a disappointing performance at the Rainbow Classic in Honolulu where they finished 1-2 with losses to Buffalo and Vermont. ... The Mustangs (4-7) have also had some humbling losses to teams like Arkansas-Pine Bluff (64-62) and Texas-San Antonio (80-75).

**KEY STAT** -- Cory Higgins has made 36 consecutive free throws over his last six games, including 20-of-20 in the past three outings. The Big 12 record for consecutive free throws made is 39 (Joey Graham, Oklahoma State, 2004-05). The CU record is also 39 (Rob Gonzalez, Jan. 10-Feb. 26, 1983).

**COACHES** -- Jeff Bzdelik is 19-25 in his second season at CU. Matt Doherty is 28-44 in his third season at SMU.

### PROBABLE STARTERS

**CU** -- G Nate Tomlinson, 6-2, freshman, 9.3 ppg, 2.8 rpg, G Cory Higgins, 6-5, sophomore, 17.9 ppg, 6.3 rpg, G Dwight Thorne, 6-2, junior, 11.7 ppg, 3.5 rpg, F Austin Dufault, 6-8, freshman, 9.8 ppg, 3.3 rpg, F/C Jermyl Jackson-Wilson, 6-6, senior, 4.9 ppg, 4.3 rpg.

**SMU** -- G Derek Williams, 6-1, junior, 11.4 ppg, 2.0 rpg, G Paul McCoy, 5-11, freshman, 15.0 ppg, 3.4 rpg, G Ryan Harp, 6-4, sophomore, 2.2 ppg, 2.9 rpg, F Robert Nyakundi, 6-8, freshman, 5.3 ppg, 2.6 rpg, C Bamba Fall, 7-1, senior, 8.8 ppg, 7.2 rpg.

**SERIES** -- The Buffs lead 4-1 with all four wins coming in Boulder and the loss coming in Dallas in 1979.

**UP NEXT** -- The Buffs will host Western State on Wednesday in the final non-conference game of the season.



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## Dufault fitting in at CU

But freshman still enduring growing pains

*By Patrick Ridgell*  
*Longmont Times-Call*

BOULDER — The freshman on the Colorado men's basketball team who's from an 800-person town in North Dakota is playing, well, like a freshman from any town.

Austin Dufault, 6-foot-8, 210 pounds, came to Boulder as his state's first Class B player since 1994 to win its Mr. Basketball award. He arrived without a lot of national fanfare. Still, the coaches who recruited him figured he'd be good enough to make an immediate impact. That's what he's done.

Dufault has started all 12 games entering tonight's in Dallas against SMU (6 p.m., FSN). He ranks third on the team with 9.8 points per. He has, at times, flashed plenty of potential, especially Dec. 23, when he scored 21 points against Louisiana-Monroe on 9-of-14 shooting.

And at other times, he has struggled.

"He's missed six or seven layups in the last couple of games; he's just kind of rushing it around the rim," CU coach Jeff Bzdelik said. "He needs to learn to get balanced.

"He's still a freshman, he's going to have some ups and he's going to have some downs, maybe a little self doubt, a lot of confidence, it's going to be all over the map. He just has to figure this out."

Dufault said he had never seen an ocean prior to last week's trip to Hawaii, so there are a lot of things he's experiencing in this, his first year of college, for the first time. Of course, dealing with some of the talent that awaits him in the Big 12 will open his eyes, too.

Its coaches picked the Buffs to finish last in the league this season. Their performance in the non-conference has done little to create higher expectations. Bzdelik, though, envisions a day when he no longer fields a team of freshmen and sophomores, and his lineup is seasoned and strong.

That was one of the first things Bzdelik said about Dufault — he needs to get stronger. Bzdelik believes that about most of his players, though.

"We need to lift every other day. ... We just need to continue to get stronger and physically more mature and more mature about the game mentally," Bzdelik said.

The rigors of the Big 12, especially with teams like Oklahoma, with its power forward Blake Griffin, a probable lottery pick next summer, will challenge CU. Asked how prepared he feels for conference games, Dufault said what many of his teammates could also say.

"It's just something I'll have to go through," Dufault said. "There are definitely going to be ups and downs. How I handle it is going to determine what type of player I become.

"It'll be a challenge, but I look forward to it.

As for missing those layups, Bzdelik says Dufault will fare better when he slows down.

“I’m just trying to always stay on balance,” Dufault said. “In high school, I was bigger than people and if I was off balance, it didn’t affect my shot as much as it does now.

“I’m playing against more athletic guys. You just have to be on balance and go up strong and try to finish at the rim, and you have to try to shield yourself, which is another thing I don’t do very well. I leave the ball right out there for opponents to block or they alter my shots. That’s an area I feel like I really need to continue to work on and get better at.”

Dufault is from Killdeer, N.D., where his high school had around 120 students and he was busy year-round in all sorts of sports, including hunting. He golfed and played football through his senior year. He played baseball, too, but stopped after the ninth grade.

The busy schedule filled many hours that he would have used for lifting, or hoops.

“He lived in such a small town that kids had to play all the sports,” Bzdelik said.

“So there’s not a whole lot of time for offseason stuff.”

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