



Bzdelik's Buffs prepare for physical Huskers

Undersized Cornhuskers lead Big 12 in scoring defense

By Ryan Thorburn

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BOULDER, Colo. — Eventually, the winning and losing will take care of itself.

The above is one of Jeff Bzdelik's favorite clichés as the veteran head coach attempts to clean up the rubble that is Colorado men's basketball and build a winner out of it.

Entering tonight's game against Nebraska at the Coors Events Center -- get ready to brew some coffee because it's another 8:30 p.m. start on FSN -- the Buffs are 9-11 overall and 1-5 in the Big 12.

Bzdelik was asked before Tuesday's practice if the losing makes it difficult for the players to realize that they are making progress.

"They know how they felt when they left Missouri compared to how they felt when they left Allen Fieldhouse," Bzdelik said. "They left Missouri going, 'I don't know if we can do this.'"

"They left Allen Fieldhouse going, 'We can do this.'"

CU opened conference play with a 107-62 loss to Missouri in Columbia. Bzdelik's team turned the ball over 26 times in that game and allowed the Tigers to shoot 63.3 percent from the field with six players scoring in double figures on a night when Leo Lyons was suspended.

On Saturday at Kansas, the Buffs shot 65.2 percent in the second half, cutting a 21-point deficit to two points before succumbing to the Jayhawks 66-61 in the final seconds.

"We grew up in that second half. Really, it's about time," Nate Tomlinson said. "Now we feel like we can play with anyone. That was the confidence we needed."

Tomlinson struggled during the team's 0-4 start to Big 12 play with 17 turnovers over that span.

In the past two games, the near-miss at Allen Fieldhouse and last week's victory over Iowa State, the freshman point guard hasn't turned the ball over once in 65 minutes.

That trend will have to continue against the Cornhuskers (13-7, 3-4), who lead the Big 12 in scoring defense (58.9 ppg) and are second nationally in turnover margin (+6.8).

"I felt like I let us down a couple times with turnovers. I have tried to take control of the game and not try to do too much," Tomlinson said. "I'm just trying to understand what I have to do to put our team in the best position to win."

The Buffs had a chance to win at Texas Tech but allowed a tough foul call to rattle them during crunch time and lost 63-55. They had opportunities to beat Kansas State but lost 77-75 in overtime. And they had the Jayhawks on the ropes until Sherron Collins came to the rescue in the final minute.

"We've come a long way," freshman forward Austin Dufault said. "But at the same time, we have a long way to go."

CU had better be ready for a physical game tonight. Doc Sadler's feisty, under-sized team has sent Cole Aldrich home with a broken nose and got under Pat Knight's skin in recent games.

In Big 12 play, the Huskers (27.3 rpg) -- whose tallest player is 6-8 forward Chris Balham -- are the only team other than the Buffs (27.5) averaging less than 33 rebounds per game.

"They're one of the hardest working teams in the Big 12. Regardless of how big they might be, they play as hard as anybody," Dufault said. "Instead of blocking shots, they take a lot of charges. We've talked about how physical they're going to be and how they're going to get into us."

CU defeated Nebraska 55-51 in Boulder last season for one of its three conference wins.



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CU men's preview: Feb. 4

TODAY -- Colorado (9-11, 1-5) hosts Nebraska (13-7, 3-4) at 8:30 p.m. in the Coors Events Center.

BROADCAST -- Television: FSN with Drew Goodman (play-by-play), Ceal Barry (color) and Allana Rizzo (sideline); Radio: KKZN (760 AM) with Mark Johnson and Charles Johnson.

STORYLINES -- The Buffs cut a 21-point deficit to 54-52 in the second half on Saturday at Kansas before falling 66-61. ... Jermyl Jackson-Wilson played inspired basketball, shutting down Cole Aldrich in the second half and finishing with 12 points and five rebounds. ... The Cornhuskers are coming off an 82-69 victory at Texas Tech. ... Nebraska leads the Big 12 in scoring defense, allowing just 58.9 points per game.

KEY STAT -- After committing 17 turnovers in his first four Big 12 games, CU freshman point guard Nate Tomlinson didn't turn the ball over at all against Iowa State or Kansas.

COACHES -- Jeff Bzdelik is 21-31 in his second season at CU. Doc Sadler is 50-34 in his third season at Nebraska.

PROBABLE STARTERS

Colorado -- G Nate Tomlinson, 6-2, freshman, 8.1 ppg, 2.6 rpg, G Cory Higgins, 6-5, sophomore, 17.5 ppg, 5.9 rpg, G Dwight Thorne, 6-2, junior, 13.0 ppg, 3.4 rpg, F Austin Dufault, 6-8, freshman, 8.9 ppg, 3.9 rpg, F/C Jermyl Jackson-Wilson, 6-6, senior, 5.8 ppg, 4.0 rpg.

Nebraska -- G Steve Harley, 5-11, senior, 11.8 ppg, 3.4 rpg, G Sek Henry, 6-3, junior, 9.2 ppg, 3.1 rpg, G Ade Dagunduro, 6-5, senior, G Cookie Miller, 5-7, sophomore, 7.8 ppg, 2.3 rpg, F Chris Balham, 6-8, junior, 2.1 ppg, 2.5 rpg.

SERIES -- Nebraska leads the all-time series 74-68 but CU has a 40-24 edge in Boulder.

UP NEXT -- The Buffs travel to Norman to face Blake Griffin and the No. 2 Oklahoma Sooners on Saturday (11:30 a.m., Altitude).



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