



Higgins needs help for Buffs to break through

CU visits Nebraska with hopes of ending losing streak

By Ryan Thorburn
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LINCOLN, Neb. -- Be like Cory.

That will be Jeff Bzdelik's message to the returning players when Colorado's painful season ends next month.

After a solid but not spectacular freshman campaign, Cory Higgins worked very hard to get stronger in the weight room and developed a better all-around game by spending countless hours in the gym.

Granted, Higgins does have the advantage of being able to play with NBA players (his father Rod is the general manager of the Charlotte Bobcats) and a current team executive you may have heard of (Michael Jordan) during his summer vacation.

But Bzdelik's point is that a strong offseason work ethic is the main reason why Higgins has emerged as one of the Big 12's best players.

"Cory has put his time in and that's what all of our players need to do," Bzdelik said before Tuesday's practice. "This spring, summer and fall are critical for our basketball team turning the corner."

Higgins will need more help tonight when the Buffs face Nebraska at the Devaney Sports Center (7 p.m., ESPN). During CU's 55-53 loss to the Cornhuskers two weeks ago at the Coors Events Center, Higgins (15 points, six rebounds) and Dwight Thorne (21 points on 7-for-13 shooting) did most of the heavy lifting.

Austin Dufault was the team's third-leading scorer in the game with six points. Levi Knutson (six rebounds in 18 minutes) was the only other player besides Higgins who seemed interested in going after the ball.

The Huskers, who are easily the smallest team in the Big 12, out-rebounded the Buffs 30-22 in their own house.

"There's always one or two key rebounds at the end of the game we haven't been able to come up with," CU associate head coach Steve McClain said when asked what's been missing in close loss after close loss. "You have to have a nose for the ball. We don't have that guy right now."

Higgins, who is coming off a career-high 34 points in the overtime loss to Texas, is third in the Big 12 in scoring at 17.9 points per game. Only Oklahoma's Blake Griffin (22.8) and Iowa State's Craig Brackins (19.7), two players likely headed for the NBA lottery, are ahead of him on the list.

The problem is Higgins leads CU in rebounding with 5.8 boards per game. Where are Casey Crawford and Toby Veal?

"The players who are not playing, there's a reason," Bzdelik said. "They need to improve their game so they can get their game to a point where they can contribute on the court."

The Buffs (9-15, 1-9) are in danger of having their Big 12 road losing streak -- which stands at 26 games entering this trip to the heartland -- carry over to the 2010 conference schedule.

CU is 2-10 at the Daveny Sports Center since the Big 12 was formed and 50-13 in Lincoln since 1903. After tonight the only remaining road games are at Baylor and Kansas State.

"We've been really close in some hard places. The kids know it's just part of the maturation of this program," McClain said. "There's nothing better than winning on the road, and I think we're close to pulling one off."

The Huskers (15-8, 5-5) lead the Big 12 in scoring defense (59.0 ppg) and are second in turnover margin (+5.61). The Buffs are second-to-none in single-digit defeats with six in Big 12 play and nine on the season.

"We only have to score one more point than they do," freshman point guard Nate Tomlinson said. "That's what we're looking for."



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CU men's preview: Feb. 18 at Nebraska

TODAY -- Colorado travels to Lincoln to play Nebraska at 7 p.m. at the Devaney Sports Center.

BROADCAST -- **Television:** ESPNU with Mitch Holthus (play-by-play) and Rich Zvosec (analyst); **Radio:** KKZN (760 AM) with Mark Johnson and Charles Johnson.

STORYLINES -- The Buffs (9-15, 1-9) are coming off an 85-76 overtime loss to Texas. ... Cory Higgins scored a career-high 34 points and is currently third in the Big 12 in scoring (17.9 ppg). ... CU has lost 26 consecutive conference road games. ... Since beating CU in Boulder on Feb. 4, the Huskers (15-8, 5-5) have defeated Texas (58-55) and lost to Missouri (70-47). ... Nebraska is 12-3 at home this season.

KEY STAT -- Colorado has lost nine games this season by single digits, including a 55-53 loss to Nebraska two weeks ago at the Coors Events Center.

COACHES -- Jeff Bzdelik is 21-35 in his second season at CU. Doc Sadler is 52-34 in his third season at Nebraska.

PROBABLE STARTERS

Colorado -- G Nate Tomlinson, 6-2, freshman, 7.7 ppg, 2.6 rpg, G Cory Higgins, 6-5, sophomore, 17.9 ppg, 5.8 rpg, G Dwight Thorne, 6-2, junior, 13.2 ppg, 3.1 rpg, F Austin Dufault, 6-8, freshman, 8.9 ppg, 4.0 rpg, F/C Jermyl Jackson-Wilson, 6-6, senior, 5.5 ppg, 3.9 rpg.

Nebraska -- G Steve Harley, 5-11, senior, 11.0 ppg, 3.4 rpg, G Sek Henry, 6-3, junior, 9.0 ppg, 3.2 rpg, G Ade Dagunduro, 6-5, senior, 11.8 ppg, 4.2 rpg, G Cookie Miller, 5-7, sophomore, 7.3 ppg, 2.2 rpg, F Chris Balham, 6-8, junior, 2.2 ppg, 2.6 rpg.

SERIES -- Nebraska leads the all-time series 74-69, including a commanding 50-13 advantage in Lincoln.

UP NEXT -- The Buffs host No. 10 Missouri on Saturday at the Coors Events Center (11:30 a.m., Altitude).



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