



Bufs miss chance at Oklahoma upset

Higgins scores 20 in loss at No. 2 Sooners

By Ryan Thorburn
Saturday, February 7, 2009

NORMAN, Okla. -- The Buffs are tired of getting patted on the head.

But that's what Colorado -- a team that played three freshmen, three sophomores, one junior and one senior on Saturday -- had to settle for again after taking No. 2 Oklahoma to the wire in front of an estimated crowd of 10,414 at the Lloyd Noble Center.

The Buffs were within one possession in the final seconds before Blake Griffin and the Big 12-leading Sooners were able to finally close out a 77-72 victory over the conference cellar dwellers.

"We could have just laid down, but we're a Big 12 team," Jermyl Jackson-Wilson said when asked about CU cutting a 14-point deficit in the second half to three points in the final minute. "People may think they can walk over us, but we're not just going to lay down. You can give us whatever title you want to. People call us the doormats that you can just walk over or whatever, but we're not going to lay down for anyone.

"We came here to win. It's an uphill battle right now, but once we get that train going down hill teams should look out."

OU head coach Jeff Capel -- who said last season's 72-58 loss to CU in Boulder was "the most embarrassing thing I've been a part of" -- is now sold on Bzdelik's rebuilding project.

"I feel very fortunate to get this win," Capel said after his Sooners improved to 23-1 overall and 9-0 in Big 12 play. "The past six games, they (Colorado) have been right there. They have only won one, but they have been right there in every game. It seems like when I watched tape, every game they got better."

The Buffs lost to Kansas State (77-75) in overtime, beat Iowa State (55-49), put a scare into Kansas (66-61) at Allen Fieldhouse and lost by two points to Nebraska (55-53) last Wednesday.

Everyone in the visitors locker room here was encouraged by Saturday's performance. But it's difficult for the Buffs to do much bragging with a 9-13 overall record and 1-7 Big 12 mark.

"Close," Bzdelik said. "But yet so far."

Thanks in large part on Saturday to Griffin being as good as advertised.

The front-runner for national player of the year, who entered the game leading the Big 12 in scoring

(22.1 ppg) and the nation in rebounding (14.1 rpg), finished with 26 points and 12 rebounds.

The only thing Griffin didn't do was mop the floor himself after sliding across it and into the CU bench during one of his many hustle plays.

"I noticed that he said thank you to the ball boy after he was wiping the floor," Bzdelik said of the probable No. 1 pick in the NBA draft. "He plays hard and he's so strong and athletic around the basket. He needs to continue to get better with his skills, which I'm sure he will because it looks like his head and heart are in the right place. He's a young player with a great, great future."

The balanced Buffs played at a high level for the most part with four players scoring in double figures but were beaten 33-20 on the boards and allowed the Sooners to shoot 57 percent from the field.

Although CU only turned the ball over nine times, three of them came during a two and a half minute stretch in the second half that allowed OU to build a 65-41 lead.

"We turned the ball over nine times and they got 10 offensive rebounds. I believe they scored 24 points off our mistakes," Jackson-Wilson said. OU actually scored 25 points off CU miscues and offensive rebounds. "They capitalized on what we didn't do right. Those things don't take skills, it's a will and a want-to and an effort to do those things. Once we capitalize on little things like that we'll have a better outcome I believe."

Griffin was 11-for-14 from the field and 4-for-10 from the line en route to his 20th double-double of the season.

No surprise there.

But what really hurt CU was Tony Crocker knocking down 7-of-11 3-pointers to finish with 24 points, including two free throws to ice the game with three seconds left.

"How many 3's did he have? Seven?" CU shooting guard Dwight Thorne wondered when asked about his counterpart. "Anyone who does that is going to be tough all night."

OU led 70-57 after Crocker buried a shot from behind the arc with 4:02 remaining. CU answered with a 7-0 run capped with a Cory Higgins layup to cut the deficit to 70-64 with 1:04 remaining.

Higgins made it a one-possession game (73-70) with 12.2 seconds remaining, and Jackson-Wilson cut the deficit to 75-72 with 4.2 ticks left before Crocker sealed the deal at the stripe.

"We won and that's what matters," Crocker said. "But we didn't play the way we should have played. We didn't win the way we should have won."

Higgins finished with 20 points on 9-for-18 shooting to lead the Buffs. Thorne (13 points), Austin Dufault (13) and Nate Tomlinson (11) also scored in double figures as CU shot 50.9 percent from the field.

"I thought we competed hard. We never gave up," Thorne said after scoring 13 points for CU. "It hurts that we lost but we have some things to build off from this game."

The Buffs -- despite allowing OU to shoot 73 percent from the field (16-for-22) and getting out-

rebounded 14-5 -- trailed just 38-35 at halftime.

The Sooners struggled to guard Bzdelik's offense early, allowing three backdoor layups and sending CU to the line four times after fouling on other point-blank opportunities for the Buffs.

Trey Eckloff gave the Buffs their second and final lead at 18-17 with a shot over Griffin.

"They're not getting rewarded with W's," Bzdelik said of his young team. "But they keep battling and that shows you what type of young people they are and the type of program we want to build."

Oklahoma 77, Colorado 72 COLORADO

FG FT Reb

Min M-A M-A O-T A PF PT

Jkn-Wsn 25 4-4 0-0 2-5 3 3 8

Dufault 28 4-8 5-6 1-3 2 1 13

Tmlnsn 38 4-6 0-0 0-4 4 5 11

Higgins 36 9-18 0-0 1-3 0 3 20

Thorne II 38 4-12 4-4 0-2 2 4 13

Coney 12 0-1 0-0 0-2 1 1 0

Knutson 8 0-2 0-0 0-0 2 2 0

Eckloff 15 3-4 0-0 0-0 0 3 7

Totals 200 28-55 9-10 4-20 14 22 72

Percentages: FG .509, FT .900.

3-Point Goals: 7-18, .389 (Tomlinson 3-3, Higgins 2-4, Eckloff 1-2, Thorne II 1-6, Knutson 0-1, Dufault 0-2).

Team Rebounds: 1.

Blocked Shots: 1 (Jackson-Wilson).

Turnovers: 9 (Tomlinson 4, Higgins 2, Eckloff, Thorne II, Dufault).

Steals: 6 (Thorne II 3, Higgins 2, Eckloff).

Technical Fouls: None.

OKLAHOMA

FG FT Reb

Min M-A M-A O-T A PF PT

BGriffin 35 11-14 4-10 5-12 1 2 26

TGriffin 23 2-3 0-0 1-2 4 2 5

Crocker 36 7-12 3-4 1-3 3 2 24

Warren 31 2-7 1-1 0-2 6 1 5

Johnson 36 3-7 0-0 0-4 3 1 6

Wright 2 0-0 0-0 0-1 0 0 0

Leary 0 0-0 0-0 0-0 0 0 0

Pattillo 27 3-5 2-4 2-5 3 1 8

Davis 10 0-1 3-4 0-2 2 2 3

Totals 200 28-49 13-23 10-33 22 11 77

Percentages: FG .571, FT .565.

3-Point Goals: 8-20, .400 (Crocker 7-11, T.Griffin 1-1, Davis 0-1, Johnson 0-3, Warren 0-4).

Team Rebounds: 2.

Blocked Shots: 4 (Pattillo 3, B.Griffin).

Turnovers: 17 (B.Griffin 6, Warren 4, Pattillo 3, Johnson 3, Crocker).

Steals: 6 (T.Griffin, Johnson, Warren, B.Griffin, Pattillo, Crocker).

Technical Fouls: None.

Colorado 33 39--72

Oklahoma 38 39--77

A -- 12,414.

Officials -- Donnee Gray, Terry Davis, Terry Oglesby.



Buff frosh Eckloff getting Big 12 baptism

By Ryan Thorburn

Saturday, February 7, 2009

NORMAN, Okla. -- Trey Eckloff does not back down from anyone in the Big 12.

Not even Blake Griffin.

After holding his own during a couple meetings with Kansas center Cole Aldrich, Colorado's quickly developing 6-9 freshman got physical with Oklahoma's sophomore superstar on Saturday.

Eckloff made his first shot attempt right over the top of the likely No. 1 NBA draft pick and even tossed Griffin to the ground for a foul in the first half of CU's 77-72 loss to the No. 2 Sooners at the Lloyd Noble Center.

"Blake's a very high level NBA-caliber player and just getting to play against him is good learning experience," Eckloff said. "It kind of taught me what I need to do in terms of getting position and how to score down low.

"You'll be hard pressed to find someone in the college ranks who is talented and as big as him."

A number of NBA scouts attended Saturday's game to keep tabs on Griffin, who finished with his nation-best 20th double-double of the season (26 points, 12 rebounds).

Eckloff came off the bench and gave the Buffs a spark, finishing with seven points on 3-for-4 shooting, including a basket that gave the visitors their final lead (18-17) and a 3-pointer to cut their deficit to 45-40 with 15:47 remaining.

CU head coach Jeff Bzdelik was disappointed that Eckloff didn't take a charge on Griffin during a key play in crunch time but is well aware of the growing pains his promising 18-year old post player is experiencing at this level.

"He's so young and I don't have the luxury of redshirting him," Bzdelik said. "He goes 3-for-4 out here and bangs a three and makes a nice post move. He's someone we need to continue to develop and mold into a Big 12 player."

CU senior Jermey Jackson-Wilson was 4-for-4 from the field with eight points and five rebounds. Freshman forward Austin Dufault also played well on the front line with 13 points and three rebounds.

That wasn't quite enough to top Griffin, who was 11-for-14 from the field with plenty of help from shooting guard Tony Crocker (24 points).

"We did as good as we could do. He's an All-American and definitely plays like it. Top draft pick

possibly," Jackson-Wilson said. "Not much you can do when he gets the ball down there. You try to play fair, play the right way and play good defense. You don't want to just go out there and beat someone up."

Griffin was 7-for-7 from the field with 15 points in the first half, but CU's aggressiveness throughout the game forced the big guy into committing six of OU's 17 turnovers.

"My mindset was just come in there and not make any silly mistakes, but at the same time don't be afraid to play very aggressive," Eckloff said.

Above the rim

Griffin had a couple of SportsCenter-worthy dunks on Saturday, but the Buffs were just as impressed with the athleticism of OU junior Juan Pattillo, who had a spectacular block on a Dwight Thorne layup attempt and a rim-rocker of his own off an offensive rebound.

"He had a couple blocks where I believe his head was over the rim," Jackson-Wilson said. "When he dunked one time it looked like his nose was touching the rim, probably kissed it. He's an athlete and that energy is contagious."

Pattillo finished with eight points and five rebounds. OU had 11 points off the bench compared to seven for CU, which were all scored by Eckloff.

"(Pattillo) just blew by us a couple times and he gives them another great offensive rebounder," Bzdelik said.

The Sooners scored 11 second-chance points compared to eight for the visitors and won the battle of the boards 33-20.

Playing catch-up

CU senior associate athletic director Tom McGrath said before Saturday's game that the athletic department still plans to break ground and begin construction on a new basketball/volleyball practice facility this summer.

The privately funded new \$10 million facility will be constructed adjacent to the Coors Events Center.

Oklahoma completed a \$20.2 million expansion and renovation project on the Lloyd Noble Center prior to the 2001-02 season. The 70,000-square-foot addition on the south side of the building includes two full-sized practice courts, offices for men's and women's basketball, film rooms, training rooms, locker rooms, spa/sauna rooms and a full-sized weight room.

Prior to the 2007-08 season, a \$3.1 million high-definition scoreboard and sound system was added to the arena.

Kelley update

Ryan Kelley warmed up with the Buffs but did not play. The freshman guard is recovering from a left knee sprain sustained during practice 17 days ago.

Notable

Crocker's seven 3-pointers ties for the most against CU in Big 12 history, matching OU's Nate Erdmann (seven 3's vs. the Buffs on Feb. 12, 1997 at Norman). ... The Buffs have trailed at the half in all eight Big 12 games this season. ... CU has made at least one 3-pointer in 217 consecutive games. ... At 23-1, the Sooners are off to the best start in the program's history.

By the numbers

7 -- Made 3-pointers by the Buffs in 18 attempts, the same number Crocker (7-for-11) made from behind the arc. Nate Tomlinson was 3-for-3 from distance for CU.

10 -- Free throws OU (13-for-23) missed, including five in the final minute to keep hope alive for the Buffs. CU was 9-for-10 at the stripe.

23 -- Consecutive losses for CU in Norman dating back to a 60-59 victory on Feb. 9, 1980. The Buffs are 12-48 at OU since 1948 and are 4-12 overall in Big 12 play against the Sooners (0-7 in Norman).

25 -- Consecutive Big 12 road losses for CU dating back to an 80-78 overtime victory at Oklahoma State on Jan. 21, 2006.



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cu basketball

Bufs' best effort falls short

Solid shooting can't trump Sooners' Griffin-Crocker combo

By Jake Trotter
Special to The Denver Post

Posted: 02/08/2009 12:30:00 AM MST



The Sooners' Blake Griffin powers down a rebound between CU's Austin Dufault, left, and Dwight Thorne II on Saturday afternoon at Norman, Okla. (Sue Ogrocki, The Associated Press)

NORMAN, Okla. — Colorado did almost everything right Saturday afternoon.

The Buffaloes shot 50.9 percent from the field, forced 17 turnovers and made all but one of their free-throw attempts.

But no matter what they tried, the Bufs couldn't stop Blake Griffin in the paint or Tony Crocker from 3-point range as the No. 2 Sooners (23-1, 9-0 Big 12) held off CU 77-72 at the Lloyd Noble Center.

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Griffin hit his first nine shots and finished with 26 points and 12 rebounds for his NCAA-best 20th double-double of the season.

He also brought the Sooner crowd of 12,414 to its feet with a pair of ferocious dunks.

"He's an All-American and he played like it," said CU forward Jermyn Jackson-Wilson, who was charged with guarding Griffin for much of the game. "Not much you can do when he gets the ball down there."

Crocker did as much damage, connecting on a career-high seven 3-pointers to finish with 24 points.

But even with Griffin dominating and Crocker on target, the Buffs (9-13, 1-7) didn't go down easily.

Despite trailing by 14 points with six minutes to go in the second half, CU fought its way back into the game.

With the help of OU's poor free-throw shooting down the stretch, the Buffs cut the lead to 73-70 following Cory Higgins' jump shot with 12 seconds remaining.

But the Buffs couldn't climb any closer, as OU converted its final four free-throw attempts to seal the victory.

"For such a young team, our heart is in the right place. We're just not getting rewarded with the wins," said Buffs coach Jeff Bzdelik, whose club

has lost three straight games by five points or less. "But the guys keep battling, and that's the kind of program we're trying to build at Colorado."

Higgins, one of four Buffs to score in double figures, led CU with 20 points.

Dwight Thorne II and Austin Dufault scored 13 points apiece, and Nate Tomlinson added 11.

"We could've just laid down," Jackson-Wilson said. "People may think they're going to walk all over us, but we're not going to just lay down. People can call us the doormats, but we came here to win."

The Buffs made 28-of-55 shots, becoming only the third Sooner opponent this season to shoot better than 50 percent.

But thanks to Griffin and Crocker, the Sooners shot 57.1 percent and outrebounded CU 33-20, handing the Buffs their 25th consecutive Big 12 road loss.

"We're close, yet so far," Bzdelik said. "We're not quite strong enough under the boards."

"The competitive spirit is there. We just need to get better."

COLORADO (9-13, 1-7 BIG 12)

Jackson-Wilson 4-4 0-0 8, Dufault 4-8 5-6 13, Tomlinson 4-6 0-0 11, Higgins 9-18 0-0 20, Thorne II 4-12 4-4 13, Coney 0-1 0-0 0, Knutson

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0-2 0-0 0, Eckloff 3-4 0-0 7. **Totals 28-55 9-10 72.**

OKLAHOMA (23-1, 9-0)

B.Griffin 11-14 4-10 26, T.Griffin 2-3 0-0 5, Crocker 7-12 3-4 24, Warren 2-7 1-1 5, Johnson 3-7 0-0 6, Wright 0-0 0-0 0, Leary 0-0 0-0 0, Pattillo 3-5 2-4 8, Davis 0-1 3-4 3. **Totals 28-49 13-23 77. Oklahoma 38-33. 3-point goals — Colorado 7-18 (Tomlinson 3-3, Higgins 2-4, Eckloff 1-2, Thorne II 1-6, Knutson 0-1, Dufault 0-2), Oklahoma 8-20 (Crocker 7-11, T.Griffin 1-1, Davis 0-1, Johnson 0-3, Warren 0-4). Fouled out — Tomlinson. Rebounds — Colorado 20 (Jackson-Wilson 5), Oklahoma 33 (B.Griffin 12). Assists — Colorado 14 (Tomlinson 4), Oklahoma 22 (Warren 6). Total fouls — Colorado 22, Oklahoma 11. A — 12,414.**

Halftime —

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