

denverpost.com

THE DENVER POST

sports

Victory remains elusive for Buffs

Colorado falls flat in OT, nets another loss

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

Posted: 02/14/2009 07:55:00 PM MST

Updated: 02/17/2009 05:15:00 PM MST



Colorado's Cory Higgins searches for an opening while trying to penetrate the Texas defense of Damion James (5). Higgins scored a career-high 34 points, but he was the only Buff to hit a field goal in overtime. (Kathryn Scott Osler, The Denver Post)

BOULDER — At this point, Colorado's only senior, Jermyn Jackson-Wilson, is out of answers. What will it take for the Colorado men's basketball team to turn close losses into big victories?

"I don't know. You tell me?" Jackson-Wilson said Saturday after another heartbreaker — this time

Advertisement



A bright idea in online advertising.

PrinterStitial® ads by Format Dynamics.



FormatDynamics®

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™

denverpost.com

THE DENVER POST

a nationally televised 85-76 overtime loss to Texas before a Coors Events Center crowd of 7,881, many departing without their voices.

"Everybody sees we're playing hard," the veteran forward added. "We're going to get over that hump. . . . I promise it. It didn't come today. We've got a game Wednesday (at Nebraska), though."

Six of Colorado's last seven conference losses have come by single digits. In recent weeks, the

CU Basketball

[View](#) slide show of Texas-CU men's basketball Feb.

- 14 .
[Visit the CU Stats Page for men's boxscores, Big 12 standings, team leaders and more](#)
- [Visit the CU Stats Page for women's boxscores, Big 12 standings, player pages and more](#)
- [Visit Tom Kensler's All Things Buffs blog for a behind-the-scenes look at CU sports](#)

Buffaloes (9-15, 1-9 Big 12) took Kansas and Oklahoma to the final minute and also lost in overtime to Kansas State. Colorado fought back Saturday from an early 30-15 deficit and pulled even in the second half with 60 percent field-goal shooting and 14-for-14 accuracy from the free-throw line.

But CU couldn't find the hoop during the five-

minute extra period. A sweet reverse layup by Cory Higgins gave the sophomore guard a career-best 34 points. Trouble was, that basket came with 23 seconds remaining and Texas (17-7, 6-4) leading 83-76. Higgins' field goal was the only one in OT for the Buffs in eight attempts.

"We just weren't as aggressive (in overtime) as we were earlier in the game," CU junior guard Dwight Thorne said.

Nervousness, perhaps? It's hard to play loose in crunch time when success always seems just out of reach.

"I'm proud of my team," Colorado coach Jeff Bzdelik said. "Gaining wisdom and experience come at a high cost. That high cost is tough losses. They need to keep believing."

Thorne was credited with just three shots from the field and finished with 10 points, three below his average. He had other things on his mind — chasing Texas senior guard A.J. Abrams, the Big 12's all-time 3-point scorer.

Advertisement



A bright idea in online advertising.

PrinterStitial® ads by Format Dynamics.



FormatDynamics®

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™

denverpost.com

THE DENVER POST



Although Thorne was praised for his defensive effort, Abrams still scored 29 points, 5-of-11 from 3-point range. Abrams was the only player to play all 45 minutes.

"Does anybody know if (Abrams) runs cross country?" Jackson-Wilson asked reporters. "That rascal really runs around."

Another NBA prospect, high-flying, 6-foot-7 junior forward Damion James, turned from goat to hero by scoring six of his 21 points in overtime. At the end of regulation, James was fouled by Jackson-Wilson with 1.6 seconds left but missed both free throws.

Saturday's matchup was a reunion of sorts for Bzdelik and Texas coach Rick Barnes. In the late 1970s, they learned the game together as 20-

something assistants at Davidson.

TEXAS (17-7, 6-4 BIG 12)

Johnson 2-6 4-6 8, James 9-14 2-6 21, Abrams 11-19 2-3 29, Balbay 3-4 0-2 6, Mason 2-4 3-3 7, Hill 0-0 0-0 0, Atchley 0-1 2-2 2, Pittman 2-3 0-0 4, Ward 2-3 4-6 8. **Totals 31-54 17-28 85.**

COLORADO (9-15, 1-9)

Jackson-Wilson 3-5 4-4 10, Dufault 3-6 2-2 8, Tomlinson 1-5 2-3 5, Higgins 11-20 9-11 34, Thorne II 2-3 5-6 10, Coney 0-0 0-0 0, Veal 0-0 0-0 0, Knutson 2-4 1-1 5, Eckloff 1-4 2-2 4.

Totals 23-47 25-29 76. Texas 36-32. End of regulation — Tied 72-72. 3-point goals — Texas 6-15 (Abrams 5-11, James 1-2, Mason 0-1, Atchley 0-1), Colorado 5-14 (Higgins 3-5, Thorne II 1-2, Tomlinson 1-4, Eckloff 0-1, Knutson 0-2). Fouled out — Jackson-Wilson. Rebounds — Texas 29 (James 14), Colorado 27 (Higgins 9). Assists — Texas 15 (Balbay 7), Colorado 12 (Tomlinson 5). Total fouls — Texas 24, Colorado 22. A — 7,881.

Halftime —

Tom Kensler: 303-954-1280 or
tkensler@denverpost.com

Advertisement



A bright idea in online advertising.

PrinterStitial® ads by Format Dynamics.



Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™

denverpost.com

THE DENVER POST

tom kensler

Cold Knutson finds new niche with Buffs

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

Posted: 02/15/2009 12:30:00 AM MST

In high school, Levi Knutson rarely missed. But when the Colorado sophomore guard takes a jump shot these days, it must seem like there's a lid on the basket.

Knutson led the state in scoring (28.6) during his senior season at Arapahoe High School. At CU, Knutson entered Saturday's game against Texas hitting just 5-of-32 (.156) on 3-pointers. As a freshman, Knutson connected on only 26.8 percent of his treys in Big 12 games.

Colorado coach Jeff Bzdelik can't figure it out. While at Air Force, Bzdelik recruited the 6-foot-4 Knutson but lost him to CU. Then, in a twist of fate, Bzdelik inherited Knutson, who had signed with Ricardo Patton but never played for him. Bzdelik thought he had himself a reliable long-range shooter.

"I don't know why it has taken so long," Bzdelik said of Knutson's inability to find his stroke. "Levi

is a great shooter, he really is. It's just one of those deals where, if he gets one or two to go down, he could rattle off several in a row."

All Things Buffs



Post reporter Tom Kensler posts entries on this blog devoted to CU athletics. [Visit it here](#).

In the meantime, Knutson has become a do-everything handyman off the bench. He has developed into one of the team's best defenders.

Knutson said he did not have to reinvent himself.

"Going all out, diving on the floor, taking a charge, boxing my guy out . . . those things have always been there," he said.

Knutson had offseason hip surgery but does not believe health issues have contributed to his shooting slump. He has been "tweaking" his mechanics in practice. Bzdelik wants him to keep firing.

"I tell shooters, especially a guy like Levi, 'You

Advertisement



A bright idea in online advertising.

PrinterStitial® ads by Format Dynamics.



Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™

denverpost.com

THE DENVER POST

have to be cocky and arrogant as a shooter and know that the next one is going in," Bzdelik said.

Senior moment.

Air Force was counting on its seniors but it hasn't worked out. A 76-66 home loss to New Mexico on Wednesday marked the first time this season that the senior trio of Matt Holland (20 points), Andrew Henke (19) and Anwar Johnson (11) had reached double figures in the same game.

Footnotes.

In Colorado State's 94-60 loss Wednesday at Brigham Young, Rams senior guard Marcus Walker (academic issues) returned to the starting lineup for the first time since Dec. 20. He responded with 19 points. . . . There's a freshman for you: CU's 6-9 Trey Eckloff, a former Cherry Creek standout, entered Saturday's game against Texas hitting 7-for-18 on 3-pointers for a healthy 38.9 percent, but had made only 5-of-14 free throws (35.7 percent).

Advertisement



A bright idea in online advertising.

PrinterStitial® ads by Format Dynamics.



FormatDynamics®

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™



Bufs fall to Longhorns in OT

Camera staff report

Saturday, February 14, 2009

BOULDER, Colo. — The writers at Hallmark would have a tough time finding new ways to describe the Bufs.

It's one heartbreak after another for this lonely last-place team in the cold, harsh Big 12 world.

So what else did you really expect to happen to Jeff Bzdelik's baby-faced bunch on Valentine's Day?

Colorado competed hard and took another prominent program to the wire before losing 85-76 in overtime to Texas on Saturday at the Coors Events Center.

Before Wednesday's 70-42 head-scratcher at Iowa State the Bufs had dropped their previous five games by single digits.

The familiar script seems to write itself twice a week.

"We're going to get over that hump, I swear we are," Jermyl Jackson-Wilson said. "I promise you."

Rick Barnes is a believer. The Longhorns head coach knows it would be wise of his team to finish strong and earn a first-round bye at the Big 12 Tournament.

"Nobody looks forward to playing Colorado, I can promise you that," Barnes said after improving to 11-3 against CU. "We all have great respect for what Jeff (Bzdelik) is about. They are going to break through. I promise you, there is nobody looking forward to playing them."

The Bufs became the first No. 12 seed to knock off a No. 5 at last year's conference tournament.

Jackson-Wilson is determined to be a part of some March madness in Oklahoma City. At this point a miracle run is all the program's only senior can really cling to.

"Didn't Georgia win their conference tournament last year?" Jackson-Wilson wondered aloud. "The basketball season isn't over. Don't write us off."

It looked like curtains for the Bufs on numerous occasions Saturday.

Texas opened up a 30-15 lead with 5:32 remaining in the first half before the home team finally came to life and scored seven unanswered points to get back into the game.

CU trailed 36-32 at the intermission by closing the frame with an 8-0 run in the final 1:56 with Dwight Thorne and Nate Tomlinson knocking down back-to-back 3-pointers.

Levi Knutson converted an old-fashioned three-point play and then scored on a backdoor layup to bring the Buffs all the way back to 57-57 with 7:32 remaining in the second half.

The Longhorns regrouped and led 68-59 after a basket by Varez Ward with 4:12 remaining, but CU clawed back again by holding the visitors to just one field goal the rest of the way in regulation and going 7-for-7 at the line.

Jackson-Wilson, who was averaging 57.5 percent at the line entering the game, made a pair of pressure free throws with 7.6 seconds left to knot the score at 72-72.

On the other end Jackson-Wilson was called for a foul trying to deny Damion Jones last-second shot to win the game. The Texas standout finished with 21 points and 14 rebounds but missed both free throws to send the game into overtime.

"You know how they say the ball doesn't lie? That's all I have to say about that," Jackson-Wilson said of the tough whistle. "The call didn't go my way, but he didn't make the free throws. We had another chance to win the game."

Texas went on a 9-0 run and outscored CU 13-4 in overtime to avoid the upset and break the Buffs' heart.

Texas 85, Colorado 76 TEXAS

FG FT Reb

Min M-A M-A O-T A PF PTS

Johnson 24 2-6 4-6 0-0 2 4 8

James 31 9-14 2-6 2-14 0 4 21

Abrams 45 11-19 2-3 1-1 1 1 29

Balbay 37 3-4 0-2 0-1 7 4 6

Mason 29 2-4 3-3 4-4 4 3 7

Hill 5 0-0 0-0 0-0 0 0 0

Atchley 14 0-1 2-2 1-3 0 4 2

Pittman 12 2-3 0-0 0-0 0 0 4

Ward 28 2-3 4-6 1-3 1 4 8

Totals 225 31-54 17-28 11-29 15 24 85

Percentages: FG .574, FT .607.

3-Point Goals: 6-15, .400 (Abrams 5-11, James 1-2, Mason 0-1, Atchley 0-1).

Team Rebounds: 3.

Blocked Shots: 4 (Atchley 2, Johnson, James).

Turnovers: 12 (James 3, Mason 3, Ward 3, Johnson, Balbay).

Steals: 7 (Abrams 3, Mason 2, Balbay, James).

Technical Fouls: None.

COLORADO FG FT Reb

Min M-A M-A O-T A PF PTS

J-Wilson 29 3-5 4-4 3-4 3 5 10

Dufault 42 3-6 2-2 0-5 1 4 8

Tomlinsn 44 1-5 2-3 0-1 5 3 5

Higgins 43 11-20 9-11 0-9 1 2 34

Thorne II 39 2-3 5-6 0-1 1 3 10

Coney 3 0-0 0-0 0-0 0 0 0

Veal 2 0-0 0-0 0-0 0 0 0

Knutson 15 2-4 1-1 0-0 1 3 5

Eckloff 8 1-4 2-2 1-1 0 2 4

Totals 225 23-47 25-29 9-27 12 22 76

Percentages: FG .489, FT .862.

3-Point Goals: 5-14, .357 (Higgins 3-5, Thorne II 1-2, Tomlinson 1-4, Eckloff 0-1, Knutson 0-2).

Team Rebounds: 6.

Blocked Shots: 0.

Turnovers: 16 (Higgins 4, Thorne II 2, Knutson 2, Dufault 2, Eckloff 2, Jackson-Wilson 2, Tomlinson).

Steals: 4 (Thorne II 2, Dufault, Jackson-Wilson).

Technical Fouls: None.

Texas 36 36 13--85

Colorado 32 40 4--76

A -- 7,881.

Officials -- Mark Whitehead, Don Daily, Randy Heimerman.



© 2006 Daily Camera and Boulder Publishing, LLC.



Lack of depth hampering Buffs

Knutson only reserve to play at least 9 minutes

By Ryan Thorburn
Sunday, February 15, 2009

BOULDER, Colo. — If there was a trade deadline in the Big 12, Jeff Bzdelik's phone would be ringing off the hook.

Any of the conference contenders would love to have Cory Higgins for postseason play.

Fortunately for Colorado, the sophomore star will be sticking around the program for two more years.

"He is an all-Big 12 player," Bzdelik said after CU's 85-76 overtime loss to Texas on Saturday at the Coors Events Center. "His leadership is awesome. Losing can beat you up, yet his competitive spirit is there."

Higgins led the Buffs with 34 points and nine rebounds. He was 11-for-20 from the field, including 3-for-5 from behind the arc, and 9-for-11 at the line.

It still wasn't enough to counter Longhorns stars A.J. Abrams (29 points, three steals) and Damion Jones (21 points, 14 rebounds).

"I thought he was great," Texas coach Rick Barnes said of Higgins. "I'd like to think that we have some guys that can guard, but it's hard when a guy gets going like he's going. But he worked really hard and made some tough shots."

It was the 14th time this season that Higgins was CU's leading scorer and rebounder in the same game.

"He can do a lot of great things for the basketball team," Bzdelik said. "It is only his second year and he is still learning a lot. I keep challenging him because he can get better in a variety of ways."

Hooked at altitude

You would think the Longhorns would have been the team that ran out of gas in overtime at 5,430 feet.

But the visitors used a full-court press in the first half and still had plenty in the tank with nine different players in the rotation, including eight who played at least 12 minutes.

CU had three players log over 40 minutes and Levi Knutson (15 minutes) was the only bench player who Bzdelik entrusted more than eight minutes to.

"We need depth," Bzdelik said. "We don't have a lot of depth right now and that's something else that

takes time. You have to put together several recruiting classes."

Knutson scored five consecutive points to tie the score 57-57 in the second half. But the sophomore guard was 0-for-2 from behind the arc and is now 0-for-9 on 3-pointers in Big 12 play.

Trey Eckloff added four points but had just one rebound and two turnovers. Toby Veal and Javon Coney made very brief appearances.

Casey Crawford, a player the coaching staff was depending on this season, did not pull the warm-ups off.

"I need to see it in practice," Bzdelik said. "You need to know what you're doing. Players determine playing time, coaches don't."

Abrams played all 45 minutes and made Dwight Thorne (10 points) chase him all over the court most of that time.

"He never stops moving and his teammates screen for him," Thorne said. "It was a tough task, but I did my best."

Notable

The Buffs shot 86.2 percent (25-for-29) from the free-throw line and were 14-for-14 in the second half. ... Texas outscored CU 34-22 in the paint, 24-15 off turnovers and 16-10 on second-chance opportunities. ... CU had made a 3-pointer in 219 consecutive games.

By the numbers

0-for-15 -- How CU players other than Dwight Thorne shot from the field during the first half at Iowa State on Wednesday night. The Buffs trailed 37-9 en route to a 70-42 loss.

1-9 -- CU's conference record. That's the worst start the Buffs have had through 10 games in Big 12 history.

2-8 -- The Buffs' record in games decided by less than 10 points this season.

8-for-16 -- How CU players other than Thorne shot from the field during the first half against Texas. The Buffs trailed 36-32 with Cory Higgins accounting for 15 points.

11-3 -- Rick Barnes' record against the Buffs. Texas leads the all-time series with CU 12-8.



© 2006 Daily Camera and Boulder Publishing, LLC.