



Bzdelik's Buffs collapse in second half at Baylor

By Ryan Thorburn

Saturday, February 28, 2009

WACO, Texas — Listless. Lethargic. Lackadaisical.

And that was the attitude of the winning team.

Colorado, already alone in the Big 12 basement, may have hit rock bottom in this forgettable season with Saturday's 75-57 loss to Baylor at the lifeless Ferrell Center.

"We could tell they weren't really prepared and overlooked us because they didn't play that well in the first half," CU freshman Ryan Kelley noticed. "But at the end they had that spark of energy we didn't have. It seemed like they wanted it more than us."

For 32 minutes the talented Bears — who were picked to finish third in the preseason coaches poll but limped in with eight losses in their previous nine games — played like a team that had checked out mentally on the last day of February.

And then, as if to tease its sparse crowd of supporters, Baylor blew into March like a lion by closing the game with a 25-5 run.

"We played basketball," Curtis Jerrells said when asked how the Bears were able to turn a nail-biter into a laughier down the stretch. "In the first half and a little bit into the second half we weren't playing, we were just out there a little bit nervous and scared to do things. We just picked it up and started playing by putting everything behind us."

The Buffs led 50-48 after a 3-pointer by Casey Crawford with 8:49 remaining.

It would be the last field goal the visitors would make.

Meanwhile, the Bears came out of hibernation and slammed the door shut on CU's best opportunity to win a conference road game this season with a 17-0 run.

Make that 28 consecutive Big 12 road losses (a conference record for futility) for the Buffs with one trip left next Saturday at Kansas State.

"We played pretty good basketball for 30 or more minutes, but that doesn't win basketball games," Levi Knutson said. "You have to play all 40 minutes."

Jerrells began the decisive spurt with a 3-pointer and scored 24 of his 29 points in the second half. Baylor outscored CU by 20 points over the final 8:12.

“Jerrells wasn’t going to let his team lose,” CU coach Jeff Bzdelik said. “Baylor is a very explosive team, and we just couldn’t stop Jerrells.”

The Buffs (9-19, 1-13) have now lost nine consecutive games for the first time since the 1986-87 season when Tom Miller’s team finished 9-19 overall and 3-11 in the Big Eight.

“The game was there for the taking,” Crawford said after shooting 1-for-7 from 3-point distance. “Things can slip away quickly in basketball. I didn’t do my part. I had some open looks and I didn’t knock them down.”

Knutson scored the first four points of the second half to give the visitors a 28-26 lead with 16:35 remaining.

Baylor finally showed a little life and reeled off seven unanswered points to seize the lead back, but CU responded with back-to-back 3-pointers from Dwight Thorne (12 points) and Cory Higgins (20 points).

The Bears (17-11, 5-9), likely headed for the NIT despite returning four starters from last year’s NCAA Tournament squad, led 26-24 after a pathetic first half in which the teams combined for 18 turnovers and 19-for-47 shooting.

“When we started the game we weren’t playing like ourselves,” Baylor forward Kevin Rogers said. “We came together as a team and just talked some things out and just decided to have fun.”

Knutson, who made his first start of the season for Nate Tomlinson (concussion), gave CU its only lead (8-7) before the intermission on a 3-pointer with 13:01 remaining.

CU will play its home finale on Wednesday against Texas A&M. Jermyl Jackson-Wilson is the only senior the program will be saying goodbye to at the Coors Events Center.



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Knutson gets first start of season

By Ryan Thorburn

Saturday, February 28, 2009

WACO, Texas -- Nate Tomlinson and Javon Coney were not able to suit up for Saturday's game.

That doesn't mean Levi Knutson was a starter by default.

The sophomore shooting guard has earned Jeff Bzdelik's respect all season by fighting through a painful hip injury and playing with the passion missing from many of his Colorado teammates.

And Knutson earned the confidence of his coach and teammates on the offensive end after scoring a career-high 19 points during Wednesday's loss to Oklahoma State.

On Saturday, Knutson made his first start of the season and just the second of his career, finishing with seven points, three rebounds and two assists during CU's 75-57 loss to Baylor at the Ferrell Center.

With only three games promised the Buffs down the stretch, is this more-enhanced role for Knutson something to build on for next year?

"We're not thinking about next year at all," Knutson said after CU's ninth consecutive defeat. "If you start thinking about next year then you're not going to get better. That's what we need to do right now, is get better, starting with the next practice. Next year is a long way away."

Casey Crawford played 29 minutes and finished with five points off the bench. The 6-9 sophomore was just 2-for-8 from the field with four assists and three rebounds.

Ryan Kelley, a freshman guard who missed eight games after suffering a knee injury in January, had two points and two rebounds in 10 minutes.

"It's definitely good experience because we were probably playing against the quickest guards in the Big 12," Kelley said. "It lets me know where I am with my game."

Kelley struggled at times to guard Baylor star Curtis Jerrells (29 points). Then again, so did Cory Higgins and the rest of the Buffs.

"We let Jerrells get going," Knutson said. "He wanted to take over and he did. Give him credit, he's a heck of a player."

Tomlinson, CU's starting point guard, made the trip to Waco but did not play for the second consecutive game due to symptoms from a concussion sustained a week earlier against Missouri.

"Nate still has a headache," Bzdelik said. "Medically, he's not right to play."

Coney did not play due to a stomach illness. Freshman forward Toby Veal, who also missed the Oklahoma State game after having wisdom teeth pulled, did not make the trip.

Un-Bear-ably

disappointing

"I'm embarrassed to be here."

That was the feeling one of the few students in attendance shared out loud as CU and Baylor prepared to play Saturday's game in front of thousands of empty green seats.

The "paid attendance" was listed as 7,192 in the box score, but most of the disappointed supporters found something else to do instead of watching the underachieving Bears host the Big 12's last-place team.

"I want to thank all of our fans that came today because it has been a tough season for them down the stretch and it has been tough for us," is how Bears coach Scott Drew opened his postgame press conference. "We really appreciate them coming out and sticking with us and that's from the bottom of our hearts."

Baylor was averaging 7,018 per game (11th in the Big 12) and is still on pace to set a single-season home attendance record. CU is last in the conference in attendance (4,616) with one home game remaining.

The Bears, having lost eight of nine games coming into the matchup with CU, chose to wear tape over the names on the back of the player uniforms.

Foul trouble

For the second consecutive game Austin Dufault found himself in early foul trouble. And the shorthanded Buffs really needed the talented freshman forward on the court.

Dufault picked up three quick fouls in the first half, including two trying to hold defensive position on 7-foot center Josh Lomers, and was whistled for a fourth foul 3:52 into the second half.

"He's got to learn to play defense," Bzdelik said. "He's only a freshman, but 90 percent of fouls are defensive mistakes."

Dufault fouled out with 3:46 remaining, finishing with five points and one rebound in 17 minutes. He only scored two points in 24 minutes before fouling out against Oklahoma State.

Notable

CU still leads the all-time series 14-8 but dropped to 3-5 in Waco and 3-5 since the Big 12 was formed. ... The Buffs have not led at halftime in any of the 13 Big 12 games they've played this season (tied once). ... Higgins (20 points) led CU in scoring for the 16th time this season and reached 20 points in a game for the 10th time this season.

By the numbers

0-9 — CU's record in true road games this season.

18-71 — Baylor's record against Big 12 South Division programs over the last nine seasons.

23-30 — Baylor's record against Big 12 North Division programs over the last nine seasons.

28 — Consecutive Big 12 road losses for the Buffs. That's a conference record for futility.

60 — Consecutive starts Cory Higgins has made at CU (out of a possible 60).



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Another unbearable defeat for Colorado

Bufs lose second-half lead, drop ninth straight in Big 12

By John Werner
Special to The Denver Post

Posted: 03/01/2009 12:30:00 AM MST



Baylor's Henry Dugat lofts a shot over CU's Ryan Kelley during the first half of the Bears' victory in Waco, Texas, on Saturday. The loss, CU's ninth in a row, dropped the Buffs to 1-13 in the Big 12 Conference and 9-19 overall. (Rod Aydellotte, Waco Tribune Herald)

WACO, Texas — Setting the tempo with its deliberate style of play, Colorado appeared on the verge of winning its first Big 12 road game since 2006.

But once Baylor's Curtis Jerrells started running, the Buffaloes couldn't stop him.

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Jerrells scored 24 of his game-high 29 points in the second half to lead the Bears to a 75-57 win over Colorado before 7,192 fans Saturday afternoon at the Ferrell Center.

"That was a great player willing his team to victory," Colorado coach Jeff Bzdelik said. "Curtis Jerrells wasn't going to let his team lose. We didn't have an answer for him, and we couldn't defend him."

The Buffaloes (9-19, 1-13) dropped their ninth straight Big 12 game, matching their longest losing streak since 1986-87. They extended their Big 12-record road losing streak to 28 games, but it took a closing 25-5 Baylor run to seal the deal.

With a pair of Cory Higgins free throws, the Buffaloes took a 52-50 lead with 8:30 remaining. The Buffaloes had the Bears (17-11, 5-9) exactly where they wanted them.

"We played pretty good basketball for 30 minutes or so, but that's not going to win the game," said Colorado guard Levi Knutson, who made his first start of the season. "We just didn't finish, and we let Jerrells get going. He wanted to take over, and he did."

Jerrells rushed downcourt and buried a 3-pointer with 8:13 remaining to kick off a 17-0 Baylor run. Tweety Carter and LaceDarius Dunn both nailed treys during the run, and Jerrells delivered one of the most athletic plays of the night when he tipped in a missed jumper.

With 4:42 remaining, the Bears stretched their lead to 67-52, and the Buffaloes didn't have enough time to respond. The Bears shot 60 percent in the second half and committed just two turnovers.

"The game was there for the taking, but it slipped away pretty quickly after we missed three or four shots in a row and they hit some 3-pointers," Colorado forward Casey Crawford said. "It was hard to bounce back after that. We've just got to learn how to play for all 40 minutes."

Higgins led the Buffaloes with 20 points, and Dwight Thorne II scored 12. Thorne started at point guard in place of Nate Tomlinson, who has missed the last two games after suffering a concussion against Missouri on Feb. 21.

CU (9-19, 1-13 BIG 12)

Jackson-Wilson 2-3 2-5 6, Dufault 2-3 1-2 5, Higgins 5-11 7-9 20, Thorne II 3-6 4-4 12, Knutson 3-7 0-0 7, Kelley 1-3 0-0 2, Crawford 2-8 0-0 5, Eckloff 0-1 0-0 0. **Totals 18-42 14-20 57. BAYLOR (17-11, 5-9)**

Rogers 3-6 3-4 9, Lomers 1-1 0-0 2, Jerrells 8-12 10-11 29, Dunn 4-9 0-0 10, Carter 3-8 1-2 8, Acy 0-1 5-6 5, Dugat 2-4 1-2 5, Diene 2-3 1-1 5, Jones 1-2 0-0 2. **Totals 24-46 21-26 75. Baylor 26-24. 3-point goals — Colorado 7-19 (Higgins 3-5, Thorne II 2-3, Knutson 1-2, Crawford 1-7, Eckloff 0-1, Kelley 0-1), Baylor 6-15 (Jerrells 3-6, Dunn 2-3, Carter 1-5, Jones 0-1). Fouled out — Du-fault. Rebounds — Colorado 22 (Thorne II 6), Baylor**

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32 (Jerrells 8). Assists — Colorado 13
(Crawford 4), Baylor 10 (Carter 4). Total fouls
— Colorado 22, Baylor 21. A — 7,192.

Halftime —

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