



Bufs out to avenge another '06 loss

Wyoming won in Boulder last season

By Ryan Thorburn
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The spotlight was on Jeff Bzdelik when Colorado's head coach returned to Air Force for the Buffs' last road game.

But after CU's 60-50 victory, the players said their true motivation was to avenge last season's humbling 84-46 loss to the Falcons.

So while the Buffs would love to get a win today at Wyoming for CU assistant coach Steve McClain, who was fired in March after nine seasons in Laramie, the focus for the returning players is to turn the tables on the Cowboys, who pulled off a 76-73 victory in Boulder last season.

Tipoff at the Arena-Auditorium is scheduled for 2 p.m. (the mtn.—Comcast Ch. 411, radio on KKZN-760 AM).

"I think it will be a pretty good game, but I don't think it will be as close as it was last year," CU sophomore Xavier Silas said. "I think we're a lot more diciplined than last year and our defense is a lot better than last year. I think the outcome will be a lot better for us this year."

Last year, Wyoming's gifted guard tandem of Brandon Ewing and Brad Jones combined for 46 points for McClain at the Coors Events Center. CU freshman Cory Higgins and senior point guard Marcus Hall will have to play an outstanding game defensively today if the visitors really expect to pull off a comfortable road victory.

Working with McClain's scouting report should help. "We've got to be ready to keep them out of the middle with dribble penetration. That's pretty much the key," Higgins said. "(McClain) gives us an inside look on what they're doing. ... I love guarding tough guards and getting up for the challenge. It's going to be exciting."

Bzdelik posted an almost unbelievable 50-16 record during his two seasons at Air Force. The Falcons were only 3-3 against McClain's Cowboys, however, including two losses in the Mountain West Conference Tournament.

Ewing, who led the MWC in scoring last season, is averaging 18.8 points this year for the 3-3 Cowboys. Jones finished last season as the third-leading scorer in conference and is averaging 14.2 points so far this year.

"I'm all too familiar with Jones and Ewing," Bzdelik said. "Jones is a talented guard who is going to put his head down and go to the rim. Ewing is a player who can get really hot and streaky from deep range.

He can shoot it off the bounce and catch and shoot it with deep range. Those two guards can really create a lot of problems."

Neither team has much size or depth inside and the tempo of the game will probably determine the winner. Wyoming averages 73.2 points and gives up 73.3 points per game while CU averages 59.4 points and gives up 56.6 points.

"They're going to really push the ball at home," Bzdelik said. "We're going to have to be great in our transition defense and of course that starts with efficient offense and not turning the ball over."

During his time on the Wyoming bench, McClain won the second most games in school history with 157, posted a home record of 102-26 (.790) and won a pair of Mountain West Conference titles.

"That's a big upside for us to have their head coach as one of our coaches," Silas said. "We'll be more prepared than anyone else will ever be against them."

This will be CU's sixth game outside of Boulder already this season. The Buffs won two games on a neutral court against Florida A&M and Savannah State and are 2-1 in true road games with the only loss coming at Wisconsin.

The Buffs (5-3) will play four of their final five nonconference games at home, beginning with New Orleans Wednesday at the Coors Events Center.



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CU coach bracing for 'weird' game

*By Patrick Ridgell
Longmont Times-Call*

BOULDER — Steve McClain insists he's at peace.

So today in Laramie, Wyo., no matter what he hears or feels, McClain will hold his head high when he enters an arena he once called home. And then he'll sit somewhere he said he's never been: on the visitors' bench.

"It'll be a little weird, because I've never been the visiting team," he said.

McClain, hired last spring to be an assistant at Colorado, returns to the Arena-Auditorium at Wyoming today when the Buffs visit (2 p.m., the mtn.).

McClain spent the previous nine years as Wyoming's head basketball coach. He won 157 games, an average of 17.5 per season, plus two Mountain West titles and an NCAA Tournament game.

But his success waned as his tenure passed. Wyoming's attendance and season ticket sales decreased during the final four years he was there, and McClain was criticized for relying too heavily upon junior college transfers. He was fired in March.

His successor in Wyoming — Heath Schroyer, who worked as an assistant for McClain in 2001-02 — dismissed questions about McClain's return: "We haven't spent any time on it."

Still, at least six media outlets in Wyoming requested interviews with him this week. While it's unlikely McClain will face the vitriol that Air Force fans threw at CU coach Jeff Bzdelik last week, the welcome might not be warm.

"I think (the fans) will be all over him because of the fact he was here and now he's gone to a rival," junior guard Brandon Ewing said.

McClain, though, claims no hard feelings.

"I'm completely at peace with it," he said of his dismissal. "I think this: Sometimes you can get caught up too much and forget what you accomplished, forget what good we did do while we were there. In nine seasons, we had seven winning seasons. We did a lot of first-time things there during those nine years.

"The hardest part for me is probably my family having to leave and the adjustment they had to go through. That's the hardest part of coaching, when something like that happens. It isn't so much you as a coach; it's what your family goes through. But at the end of the day, it happens, and you have to move on."

McClain said he wanted another 10 years at Wyoming and enjoyed his experience there. Asked why success was difficult to sustain, he said sometimes the ebbs and flows of coaching can't be survived.

"I read where somebody wrote Sonny Lubick created his own monster, and maybe I did that, too," he said, referring to the recently fired Colorado State football coach.

"At the end of the day, you want to be able to get one more year and get one more shot, but it doesn't always happen. ... I know we left the program in better shape than when we walked in there nine years before."

McClain left Wyoming with Ewing and Brad Jones, possibly the MWC's best backcourt. Ewing, whom McClain signed out of Chicago, said he chose Wyoming over Louisville, Marquette and DePaul because "coach McClain showed the most interest."

Ewing called McClain's firing "real hard on me." Jones called it "a weird situation." Ewing also said McClain has tremendous energy and is "a great head coach" whom he'll hug before tip-off.

But Ewing added that things have turned out well.

"He gave me a chance coming out of high school," Ewing said. "But I guess everything works for the best. He got a good offer at Colorado, and we got a good coach here. I guess everything's going good for both of us."

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