



Bzdelik wants CU to ramp up its intensity

Coach emphasizes playing hard even if shots don't fall

By B.G. Brooks

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Basketball coaches crave pinpoint production from their offenses, and Jeff Bzdelik stands foremost among them.

That he hasn't gotten it on a consistent basis nine games into his first season as University of Colorado men's coach hasn't driven him to deviate from, or even modify, his motion offense, a philosophy that was highly successful during a two-season stint at Air Force.

But it isn't offensive improvement he's solely targeting as the Buffaloes head into their final five nonconference games, four at the Coors Events Center.

"There's so much focus on offense, but it's the effort areas - the pursuit of loose balls, rebounding, the running of the court, the defensive transition, the hard cuts . . . it's not allowing when we miss a shot to affect the next five minutes of the game in terms of what we're supposed to be doing (overall)," he said Monday. "That's my biggest concern. Typical players allow their games to be affected when their shots aren't going down. We have to strive to be the atypical player, where we make a positive impact on the game regardless of what we're doing offensively. . . . That's what good teams do."

So far, the sporadic Buffs are a win above average (5-4), with their biggest improvement from last season shown on defense (80.1 points a game yielded in 2006-07 to 58.4 this season). Yet Bzdelik believes the only way improvement will occur is if the level of intensity steadily climbs and the overall consistency stabilizes.

In practice, CU's players claim Bzdelik hasn't backed off even slightly from offensive concepts he has emphasized from Day 1.

"He's definitely into what he's (always) taught," senior guard Marcus Hall said. "He's trying to emphasize to guys that we're still trying to play basketball, but if you've got the opportunity to break off and deviate from what he has going on, to make a play, then play basketball and make a play."

Hall said Bzdelik is staying within his system "because it's worked - with us and other teams. You just have to have faith in it, learn how to play out of it and make the plays we're capable of making."

The Buffs averaged almost 69.1 points a game last season compared with 59.9 through their first nine games under Bzdelik. But their shot quality also is up and their turnovers have subsided (14.1 last season to 12 in the past five games).

Asked if his team was matching his expectations a month into the season, Bzdelik answered, "At times, yes; other times, no - and that goes back to the consistency. How can we be 20 points down at the end of one half (in Saturday's loss at Wyoming), then cut it to three? . . . We have to be more consistent in the effort areas."

Exhibit A this week is New Orleans, the Sun Belt Conference team that visits the Events Center on Wednesday. Through what he called "unbridled effort at all times," the Privateers (5-1) won at then-No. 22 North Carolina State 65-63 last month.

New Orleans "is a perfect example of a team that can win games when the shots aren't falling," Bzdelik said.

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