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Buff's looking to get well

*By Patrick Ridgell
Longmont Times-Call*

BOULDER — If the Colorado men's basketball team sought an opponent to rough up following last week's frustration, it should've looked elsewhere besides the University of New Orleans.

The Privateers visit CU tonight (7 p.m., FSR) at 5-1 and owning a win at North Carolina State during which they trailed by seven with 2 minutes to go. New Orleans is a veteran bunch that's endured a hurricane and coaching changes. And it's older players have chips on their shoulders, according to CU forward Jermey Jackson-Wilson. CU coach Jeff Bzdelik agreed.

"They're one of the hardest-playing teams I've ever seen. They're on a mission," Bzdelik said.

So are the Buffs, sort of. CU smarts from two straight defeats, including Saturday's loss at Wyoming. More specifically, CU believes sleepwalking through the first half in Laramie cost it the game. Bzdelik railed at that effort, and added he has failed to instill the passion and desperate energy his players must use.

So tonight offers CU another chance at finding it, which is becoming the season's mission.

"All I can do is encourage, educate, attempt to inspire them through various ways," Bzdelik said.

"I think changing the culture and attitude is as difficult, perhaps more difficult, than changing anything from an X and O standpoint. We play in spots, but we don't play consistently.

"Winning, learning how to win when shots aren't falling, getting loose balls, every rebound, every second matters in so many ways."

After what happened in the first 20 minutes last week, Jackson-Wilson said there's more emphasis placed in practice on starting fast tonight. Wyoming led, 40-20, at the break thanks to shooting 58 percent before halftime and making the Buffs appear timid.

"Obviously, we showed in the second half ... that we should have won that game if we hadn't come out flat," he said.

Bzdelik also said Saturday he'd be fortunate to still have his job on Monday. He was, and on a three-hour commute to work through snow Tuesday morning, he contemplated plenty.

What might bug him most with his first CU team is its inconsistency. Less than two weeks ago, CU won at Air Force, where the Falcons never lose, and owned a three-game winning streak. And the second half in Laramie saw a vastly different bunch of Buffs playing basketball than the group from the first half.

Bzdelik wonders where the urgency is.

"I coach out of fear; I always played out of fear, because I had to," he said. "And I want my team to do that, too.

"Fear of not being good enough, fear of getting beat. ... I just want to know when the game's done, I gave it my very

best and I'm exhausted with my effort. Because that's what you're supposed to do in anything you do."

He figures he'll see that tonight out of New Orleans, and he hopes it rubs off.

"They are in some ways what we would like to become in an effort area," Bzdelik said.

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Adversity makes CU opponent New Orleans stronger

New Orleans brings 5-1 record to Boulder

By Ryan Thorburn

Wednesday, December 12, 2007

So, you think the Colorado men's basketball program has gone through some tough times recently?

Not compared to tonight's opponent.

The Buffs (5-4), coming off back-to-back losses, host New Orleans in a 7 p.m. nonconference game at the Coors Events Center (FSN).

The Privateers (5-1) — the only team in Division I to open the season with three consecutive true road wins, including an upset of then-No. 21 North Carolina State — finally have something to smile about after suffering through the awful aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

Six of the players on the roster, including star point guard Bo McCalebb, are from New Orleans and had their childhood homes destroyed or seriously damaged by the storm.

And four of the Privateers, who are expected to challenge for the Sun Belt title and perhaps a berth in the NCAA Tournament, were recruited by CU women's assistant Patrick Harrington.

"He's a guy I went to when I had problems," McCalebb said on Tuesday by phone as the team made the long trek from 80-degree temperatures in New Orleans to the snow-packed streets of Boulder.

Harrington was an assistant coach and the recruiting coordinator in the men's program at New Orleans during his stint there from 2001-05. He moved his family just weeks before Katrina hit after taking a job at Oregon State.

"We were very blessed," said Harrington, who has a wife and three small children. "I sold the house 60 to 90 days before Katrina, and after the storm it had 14½ feet of water in it. I feel for the people who bought it."

Harrington developed a close relationship with McCalebb's mom, Tara Butler Batiste, during the recruiting process. Like the team, she and other parents were displaced to Dallas and Houston after Katrina.

McCalebb reports that his mom is finally back at her home in New Orleans this year and enjoying the Privateers' fast start to the season.

The team, however, still isn't able to play in its storm-damaged arena, making do in the tiny Human Performance Center (1,200 capacity) on campus.

"We went through the hurricane together," McCalebb said when asked about the strengths of this year's team. "And getting through all of this made us stronger. If you can go through that you can go through anything."

McCalebb, the reigning Sun Belt Conference player of the year, is averaging 20.2 points, 4.8 rebounds and 3.0 assists per game. Two other talented New Orleans natives, forward Kyndall Dykes (16.3 ppg, 6.0 rpg) and guard James Parlow (6.2 ppg, 2.7 apg), are also in the starting lineup.

"When we signed them our feeling was that it was a real solid group of kids," Harrington said. "I have a tremendous amount of respect for them for what they've had to go through. I'm really proud of the fact that they were able to stick together through this tough situation."

Harrington plans on attending tonight's game and reuniting with his former players.

"I want the Buffaloes to win," Harrington said. "But I would like to see those kids have a good game and make the NCAA Tournament. I kind of have some torn feelings."



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