



Bzdelik, Buffs gird for Air Force

Coach calls matchup vs. his former team 'just another game'

By Ryan Thorburn

Thursday, November 29, 2007

Jeff Bzdelik and the Air Force Academy seemed to have the perfect marriage.

The former Denver Nuggets head coach — after trying to motivate players with NBA egos and guaranteed contracts — fell in love with the work ethic, discipline and intelligence that are all a part of the Falcons' DNA.

Air Force, which made an NCAA Tournament appearance in 2004 under Joe Scott, continued to soar with Bzdelik on the bench, posting a 50-16 record during his two seasons there.

And then another school entered the bizarre love triangle.

Colorado was able to lure Bzdelik away from the Academy with a much larger contract and a promise to give him complete support in the challenge of building the downtrodden program into a Big 12 contender.

The Falcons administration, despite criticizing Bzdelik publicly for taking the Buffs job, hired his top assistant, Jeff Reynolds, to take over the program.

Tonight, the awkward break-up participants will reunite when CU plays Air Force at Clune Arena (7 p.m., the mtn., Comcast Channel 411).

"To me, it's just another game," Bzdelik said after the Buffs' 54-44 victory over Scott's University of Denver team on Tuesday.

"It's just the next game on our schedule," Reynolds told the Colorado Springs Gazette. Nice try, fellas.

The Falcons players want to show Bzdelik that the past two years were not as good as it will ever get at the Academy. The Buffs players want to show how far they've come since last season's 84-46 loss to Air Force in Boulder.

It should make for some compelling theater and a competitive game.

"I know the crowd is probably going to have a field day with (Bzdelik)," CU guard Richard Roby said. "But I'm sure he's going to be very professional about it. We're out there to do a job, and that's what we're going to do."

The Buffs played very well defensively against the Pioneers but shot only 40 percent from the field.

Roby (15 points) and Marcus Hall (18 points) combined to make 12 of 21 shots; the rest of the team scored 21 points on 6-for-24 shooting.

CU will need everyone executing at a high level tonight to pull off another road victory. Air Force has a 38-game winning streak at home against nonconference opponents.

That is the third-longest active streak in the country behind Duke (55) and Sam Houston State (40). The Falcons' last loss to a non-Mountain West team at Clune Arena was against Tennessee Tech on Dec. 29, 2001 (64-44).

"They play the same style of basketball, same defense (as DU)," Roby said. "It's kind of like the same prep two games in a row. We've just got to put a lot of pressure on Air Force. They lost their last two games and they're just looking to come home and win a game."

After a 5-0 start, the Falcons have dropped consecutive games to Montana and No. 9 Washington State. But since the beginning of the 2003-04 season, Air Force has won 60 of its 62 home games for a 96.8 winning percentage.

The Buffs, who only posted one victory outside of Boulder last season, picked up their first true road win at DU. Bzdelik's new team also won two games on a neutral court in Madison, Wis., earlier this month.

"Our players, when we go there (to Clune Arena), if we don't find that mental toughness ... Air Force has a huge, huge, huge edge because they already have it," Bzdelik said earlier in the week. "And that's what I want our guys to find. The sooner we find that the better. Hopefully we'll find it soon because we don't have it right now."

Despite Bzdelik's success at the Academy, the crowd isn't expected to welcome him back with open arms tonight.

"Clune's going to be nuts, fans have been talking about it since the beginning of the year," Falcons sophomore guard Saj El-Amin told the Gazette. "When you're walking through the hallway, people say, 'CUs coming. Well be ready.' 'I can't wait.'"



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air force basketball

Buzz about Bzdelik's return

By Irv Moss
The Denver Post

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The coach who went 50-16 in two seasons with the Falcons is coming back, and bringing the Buffs. (Post file)

Somewhere within all the commotion and hype, there's probably going to be a pretty good college basketball game between Air Force and Colorado tonight at Clune Arena.

But to get to the game, it requires wading through all of the intrigue about CU coach Jeff Bzdelik's return to the academy, where he spent the past two seasons. It's not only

that Bzdelik departed after two monumental seasons of a combined 50-16 record and appearances in the NCAA Tournament and NIT, but what some perceive as a less-than-clean break from the academy.

"I'm sure there will be a certain number of people that will be upset with me," Bzdelik said. "When there's change, there's going to be a certain segment of the people that know exactly what happened and

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why. And there are a certain segment of people that don't know, so they're upset.

I've been doing this for 32 years and to me this game is just another step along the way."

A capacity crowd is expected, and the "Cadets of Section Eight" cheering section will be right at Bzdelik's ear and most likely with some choice words for the former AFA coach.

"Probably not nicely," said Falcons guard Tim Anderson, a starter for Bzdelik the past two years, when asked how he thought his former

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coach will be received. "It was a big issue at the time, but we've pushed that aside. The exciting part about basketball is there's always a story to be made. This game is this story."

CU players also are wondering how their coach will be received.

"I'm sure (Bzdelik) is prepared for what's going to happen in the game," Buffs senior guard Richard Roby said. "The crowd probably is going to have a field day with him. But he's very professional about it."

In the buildup to the game, most everyone is going out of the way to call it just the next game on the schedule. But they should wink.

AFA coach Jeff Reynolds has his own problems to think about. The Mountain West Conference issued Reynolds a public reprimand for his criticism of officiating

CU Basketball

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in a Saturday game against Montana in Spokane, Wash. The Falcons (5-2) have lost their past two games, 59-57 to Montana and 71-62 to Washington State.

"No one is pretending that he (Bzdelik) isn't up there, but we have to approach it as the next game on our schedule," Reynolds said. "This game doesn't come at an opportune time for us. We're coming off a tough weekend."

CU (4-2) is coming off a 54-44 victory over Denver on Tuesday.

"Coaches are going to coach, but I'm a player," Air Force guard and forward Andrew Henke said. "I'm going to focus on what I do best and that's playing the game."

"This isn't a game between players and coaches," AFA guard Anwar Johnson said. "It's a game between opposing teams, each trying to win."

Staff writer Tom Kensler contributed to this report.

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Buffaloes stagger past Pioneers

Low-scoring affair is won by CU's disruptive defense

By B.G. Brooks

Wednesday, November 28, 2007

In some future season, Jeff Bzdelik and Joe Scott might reflect on their first-year basketball programs' first encounter and marvel at how far each has come - or at least that's the shared hope of the former Air Force Academy coaches.

The only thing they might have shared Tuesday night at the University of Denver's Magness Arena was the sentiment of how much work will be required - immediate and in the long term - to reach that point.

Mixing their defenses and frequently forcing Scott's Pioneers out of their deliberate style, Bzdelik's Colorado Buffaloes took control early and cruised - no, make it lurched - to a 54-44 victory.

Dropping to 2-3, DU was held to its lowest points total of the season, while CU (4-2) also won with its lowest total of the season.

It wasn't a high-octane, high- performance offensive night, but fans might come to expect that from Bzdelik's first Buffs team.

"We missed six first-half layups; we're not very big and we're young in certain spots. . . . That's just who we are," Bzdelik said.

That tenuous identity was enough to disrupt the Pioneers, but how it plays Thursday night when CU visits Air Force in Bzdelik's first trip back to Clune Arena might be another story.

"We wanted to give (DU) three or four types of defenses, and that made it hard for them to get into a flow," said CU senior guard Richard Roby, one of two Buffs in double figures with 15 points and the game's high rebounder (nine).

Said senior guard Marcus Hall, who scored a game-high 18 points and tied a career high with five steals: "They did a pretty good job of running their stuff, but we did a good job of defending it."

The Pioneers, who led only once (7-6), cut an 11-point Buffs lead to five (40-35) on back-to-back three-pointers by sophomore guard Tyler Bullock with 5:33 to play.

But CU quickly applied the clamps and rebuilt its advantage to nine.

The Buffs scored their final 10 points from the free-throw line and led by as many as 13 on three occasions in the final minute.

Scott said his team's first-half performance "cost us the game. We had too many turnovers (10 in the first half, 15 for the game) and we gave up too many long rebounds. You can't cough up the ball the way we did and win games."

CU led 25-17 at halftime, holding DU to its lowest first-half total of the season and limiting the Pioneers to a meager 31.6 percent from the field (6-of-19).

Senior forward David Kummer, who entered the game with an 11.5 points-per-game average, was DU's lone offensive threat in the first 20 minutes, making 3-of-5 three-point attempts for nine points. But he scored only six more points, all in the game's final 44.4 seconds.

Three of his teammates managed a first-half field goal each - not the kind of output that will keep Scott content or the Pioneers competitive. DU finished the night shooting 34.9 percent (15-of-43) and being outrebounded 35-24.

Saying it was "an honor and a privilege to have coached at Air Force," Bzdelik contended Thursday night's return to the academy will be "just another game. . . . I've been doing this for 32 years, and it's only another step."

His players, though, seem to recognize it for more than that.

"I know it's going to mean a lot to him, and it's going to mean a lot to me," Roby said. "The crowd will probably have a field day with him, but he's a professional, he knows what to do. It's going to be wild and pretty hostile, I'm sure."

Jackson-Wilson 2-4 0-0 4, Hall 5-10 6-7 18, Higgins 1-3 4-4 6, Silas 1-9 5-8 7, Roby 7-11 0-0 15, Thorne 1-3 0-0 2, Patterson 0-1 0-0 0, Knutson 1-4 0-0 2, King-Stockton 0-0 0-0 0. Totals 18-45 15-19 54.

DENVER (2-3) - Kummer 4-12 4-4 15, Tanner 0-2 1-2 1, Bullock 2-6 0-0 6, K.Lewis 2-8 0-0 6, Rohnert 1-3 1-2 3, R.Lewis 1-2 0-0 2, Jackson 3-6 0-0 7, McNally 2-4 0-0 4. Totals 15-43 6-8 44.

Halftime - Colorado 25-17. **Three-point attempts** - Colorado 3-13 (Hall 2-5, Roby 1-2, Silas 0-2, Knutson 0-2, Thorne 0-2), Denver 8-25 (Kummer 3-8, Bullock 2-3, K.Lewis 2-8, Jackson 1-4, McNally 0-1, Rohnert 0-1). **Fouled out** - McNally. **Rebounds** - Colorado 35 (Roby 9), Denver 24 (Kummer 6). **Assists** - Colorado 11 (Hall, Roby 3), Denver 13 (Bullock 5). **Total fouls** - Colorado 8, Denver 16. **A** - 5,035.

Back in time

How Joe Scott, above, and Jeff Bzdelik fared in their tenures as coach at Air Force.

* SCOTT

Season Record Pct.

2000-01 8-21 .276

2001-02 9-19 .321

2002-03 12-16 .429

2003-04 *22-7 .759

Total 48-63 .432

UP BZDELIK

Season Record Pct.

2005-06 *24-7 .774

2006-07 26-9 .743

Total 50-16 .758