

CU men's basketball: Buffs having fun with CBI

Boyle wants players to enjoy the ride in tournament

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Colorado's Tory Miller maneuvers for a layup against Gardner-Webb on Wednesday night in the Buffs' 87-78 victory in the CBI at Coors Events Center. (Jeremy Papasso / Staff Photographer)

Buff basketball report

Current record: 16-17.

Last game: 87-78 win vs. Gardner-Webb on Thursday.

Next game: Monday at Seattle (17-15), 8 p.m. MDT.

Injury report: All the Buffs are healthy and ready to go for Monday.

Buff bits: This game is part of the quarterfinal round of the College Basketball Invitational. ... Seattle defeated Pepperdine, 62-45, in Wednesday's first round. Isaiah Umipig had 24 points. ... CU is 4-2 in its last six games, while Seattle is 6-2 in its last eight. ... CU and Seattle have the fewest wins in the 16-team CBI field. ... CU is 15-8 in postseason games in five years under coach Tad Boyle. ... Seattle won the only other meeting between the schools, 86-69 on Dec. 17, 1965. ... Seattle is coached by former UCLA standout Cameron Dollar.

Tad Boyle's goal for the College Basketball Invitational is to get the young Colorado Buffaloes some experience and, hopefully, to bring home a championship trophy.

While attacking those goals, the CU head coach wants to make sure his team has a good time, too.

"I told them, 'Guys, I want this thing to be fun,'" Boyle said after the Buffs defeated Gardner-Webb 87-78 in the first round of the CBI on Wednesday night. "College basketball is supposed to be fun.

"These are young kids and they play the game because they love it. Sometimes the pressure and spotlight and all the negativity can seep into them. I think it's important that we try to lighten it up."

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With the win, the Buffs (16-17)

moved into the CBI quarterfinals and will play at Seattle University (17-15) on Monday at 8 p.m. MDT.

Before taking the floor against the Runnin' Bulldogs, Boyle told the Buffs, "Let's go have some fun

tonight. I want to see you smile and laugh and enjoy yourself."

The Buffs (16-17) accomplished all of their goals, as they played free and loose in getting the victory.

Perhaps nobody had more fun than junior guard Eli Stalzer. In his eight minutes, he scored a career-high 11 points on 4-for-4 shooting, including a pair of 3-pointers.

"I didn't really think about it too much," Stalzer said. "I was just happy and was like, 'I'm in the game; all right, let's make the most of it.'"

In the previous 10 games, Stalzer had played in just two of them, and both times it was for a few seconds. His previous career-high was eight points, on March 1, 2014, at Utah, and he had scored just 13 points all season before Wednesday.

"I know I'm always capable of doing this kind of stuff," he said. "I just went out and played."

With senior Askia Booker and sophomore Dustin Thomas both skipping the tournament, the Buffs had the opportunity to use different players and rotations. Stalzer was the first guard off the bench and it didn't take him long to sink his first 3-pointer.

"A lot of guys realize this is their time to step up," junior forward Josh Scott said. "I think you got to see how practice looks for us, because Eli doesn't get to step on the court (on game nights). He can shoot the ball. It may not look like it from his game statistics, but in practice, he's known for hitting you with a 3 in your eye."

Walk-on guard Brett Brady also got a chance to play. He had played just 10 minutes all year, but got five minutes on Wednesday and registered his second career assist.

"Not a lot of people know how much work he puts in during the offseason," Scott said of Brady.

"For us, it's a special thing to watch them be out there and get minutes."

Boyle said he doesn't want to sacrifice the goal of winning games in the CBI, but it certainly adds to the fun when players like Stalzer and Brady can contribute to a win.

"Yeah, it's always fun to see the whole bench play," Stalzer said. "Whenever there is more guys that can play, it's always a good time watching everyone get involved.

"It felt like a new team. This is the team we're going to be looking at next year, so that's kind of how I see it a little bit. For me, it feels like this is the start of next year a little bit."

Notable

Although the Buffs will be on the road in the next game, there's a chance they will host again if they continue winning. ... Against GW, the Buffs had a stunning 66-30 advantage in points in the paint, while out-rebounding the Bulldogs 43-18. Scott had a career-high and CBI-record nine offensive rebounds. ... Scott had just the eighth 15-rebound game in the eight-year history of the CBI. The record is 17. ... The Buffs' 38 field goals was one shy of the CBI record.

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