Two weeks ago, the University of Wyoming lost 109-7 to California, in a game where the Bears led 64-0 at halftime.

Last fall, they lost to Colorado State 29-5. So this weekend's pre-CPL friendly between the Cowboys and the CSU Rams should have been another win for Colorado State, especially given how you'd expect Wyoming to be down after the Cal beating.

All together now ... that's why they play the game. Wyoming was not discouraged by the Bear-mauling in Las Vegas. Instead, it jolted the Cowboys into action.

"I didn't offer them any false hope against Cal," said Wyoming Head Coach Rich Cortez. "They were fully aware they were overmatched. But what they got out of that game was invaluable experience. They saw they didn't lose because Cal was tougher. They lost because Cal was technically better and more experienced. They play hard and clean."

Cortez and the team studied the film of that match, identifying not only their mistakes, but also the positives (at least Wyoming scored a try), and the running lines, support, and precision of the Cal team.

It was an eye-opener for a program where 75 percent of the players have only three games under their belts. It's a program that has lost several experienced players because the University is dropping certain majors (one player tried to get approval for independent study to finish his major at Wyoming and play rugby as Wyoming. They said no and he was forced to transfer).

"We've been practicing indoors, sharing the gym with the women's team," said Cortez. "We're doing what we need to do. But In the end that game carried some extremely valuable lessons."

"After that game we knew we had to get fitter and stronger," said Wyoming flyhalf and captain Derek Ogren. "Cal exposed our fitness."

The players practice at 9pm, but they also have regular 6am runs. Leading up to the Las Vegas Invitational numbers had dropped off at the runs - mostly due to exams.

Numbers have bounced back.

"We met as a team and the players committed to being more dedicated to school outside of rugby, rather than going out with friends," said Ogren. "We needed to balance our time more efficiently, and now the numbers are much better. Guys are working much harder on their fitness."

The players got to work putting those lessons into practice, and the result Saturday was a 36-26 come-from-behind victory over CSU.

The Rams led 26-17 at halftime, and it was then that one Wyoming player simple advised his teammates to come up on defense as a unit. A simple observation, but an effective one, as that change led to two interceptions and two tries moments into the second half. Wyoming suddenly had the lead, and their tails up. They would score once more, but they also left three tries on the plate thanks to two forward passes and a knock-on.

Nevertheless it was enough for the win.

"We were 200 percent better than Las Vegas," said Cortez.

"Wyoming is much improved," added a less-than-thrilled CSU Head Coach Blake Stevens. "I thought our defense was poor, but Wyoming out-physicled us and showed what a good program they are."

It's a turnaround moment for Wyoming, where Cortez has been a little frustrated in recent years, trying to figure out what kind of team he has. In the end, the players responded to adversity, taking an embarrassing scoreline in one game as a wakeup call to work hard and work together to be a better team.

That trip to Vegas, said Cortez, "was money well spent. The guys just came back and concentrated on our training differently."

"Winning that game has given us an even greater sense of urgency," said Ogren. "We look at the CPL and know we want to win this. We want to compete."