

People in Your Hood: Liz Kritza

CU's new women's volleyball coach is one tough cookie

by Andra Coberly / photo by Niall Bouzon



Liz Kritza is home. Years ago, Kritza was a Colorado teenager and a high school volleyball star. Today, she's the new coach of CU's beleaguered women's volleyball team. During the time in between—more than a decade at University of Tulane in New Orleans—she got educated, learned to be a collegiate-level coach and a mentor, survived Mother Nature's ire and became a buoy even after the waters waned in Katrina's wake. There were losses and wins—big wins—and victories off the court.

And then, she decided Colorado was calling.

"It's a homecoming of sorts," Kritza said. "I couldn't ask for anything better."

Kritza—a self-described "tough cookie"—spent the last 14 years as a student, graduate student, athlete, assistant coach and head coach at Tulane. She took the Green Wave to its first conference championship in 2008.

Pi'I Aiu had coached CU's team for the last 12 seasons, taking the Lady Buffs to nine NCAA Tournaments. But they had losing records the past two years, and Aiu was fired. Aiu was actually the one who encouraged Kritza to apply for the job.

Months later, the team is in serious rebuilding mode; Kritza lost players in the transition and the players who remain are still getting used to her brand of training. Recruiting is usually stunted, if not debilitated, when a coach is replaced. Now it's about finding the right players and teaching them to be more than just players.

"I really do expect a lot. I ask a lot of my players," she said. "But I believe in promoting a program that produces self-directed, successful women. If I just have them focus on volleyball without tending to their needs as a whole person, I am short-changing them."

On positioning CU: "I've really felt that Colorado has positioned itself well, as an athletic department and as a university. It's one school you expect to be successful. It has an amazing location, reputable academics, a great community. That's a positive package. I see nothing but possibility."

On local players: “The more Colorado kids, the more well grounded this program will be.” She will also keep her eye out for transfer players, young blue chip players and even international players.

On the game: “My responsibility is to teach this group how to play this game properly and how to give us the best chance to win. ...But you have to win and lose appropriately and use it to get better. This group right now has grit and backbone and they don’t go away. They are starting to embrace (my coaching). My personality transfers to the team. We will get beat, everyone eventually gets beat, but if we lose it won’t be because we didn’t play hard, that will never happen here. They are learning to fight.”

On Katrina: Kritza’s first season as Tulane’s head coach was marked by Hurricane Katrina. “I’ll never forget that season, and not just because it was my first season as head coach: It was the way I was required to take care of my team. That’s shaped my philosophy. I was responsible for 15 players that year. It wasn’t about volleyball. It was about continuing to develop them as players and to get through the experience safely. We practiced and focused on the game even as everything around us was crumbling. And it was very difficult personally. I lost a lot. My house was flooded. It’s funny because now I know that nothing can phase me. We had a team with absolutely nothing, no resources to compete. I found my way around that.”

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