



Hempen's Buffs face early test

No. 17 Colorado hosts No. 11 Oklahoma State in season opener today

By Ryan Thorburn
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BOULDER, Colo. — As Nikki Marshall made her way off the field for a post-practice interview, Bill Hempen reminded her not to produce any "bulletin board material" for the opponent to use.

When asked about her expectations for Colorado soccer this season, however, the senior All-American wasn't shy about setting the bar high.

"We talked about our team goals. We'd like to win a Big 12 championship and advance to at least the Sweet 16 (of the NCAA Tournament)," Marshall said.

No. 17 CU will learn a lot about itself today when the Buffs open the 2009 season against No. 11 Oklahoma State at Prentup Field. Kickoff against the Cowgirls is at 2:30 p.m.

"I think it's good because right away you're going to find out your strengths and your deficiencies against a quality opponent," Hempen said of starting his ninth campaign at CU against the defending Big 12 regular season champions.

OSU was 18-1-4 last season and returns seven starters, including All-Big 12 performers in Kasey Langdon and Siera Strawser.

In 2008, the two teams met twice. They tied 1-1 in double-overtime in the regular season. The Buffs prevailed on penalty kicks 2-1 in the second meeting, a Big 12 Tournament semifinal game.

Erin Stigler stopped 22 shots on goal for the Cowgirls, and CU counterpart Kirstin Radlinski stopped 20 shots on goal in the two meetings last season. Both keepers were seniors.

Kara Linder, a regular starter her sophomore year who shared time with Radlinski last season, says she's ready for this early test.

"I'm really excited about it," Linder said. "If it's a battle between the goalkeepers again, I'm ready to step up."

CU leads the series 8-3-3 overall, including a 5-0-2 advantage in Boulder. OSU coach Colin Carmichael, willing to try anything to combat the change in altitude from Stillwater, decided not to fly the Cowgirls here until this morning.

"Some teams that play the (Colorado) Rapids have tried this before," Hempen said. "I don't know if it works or if it doesn't work, but their coach wanted to try it. We'll find out if it works."

In addition to the altitude, OSU will also have to worry about Marshall, who was named to Soccer American Magazine's preseason All-American first team. Despite losing six key seniors from last year's team, CU's leader isn't

worried about breaking in younger teammates against a nationally ranked foe.

"We're a team and we're going to play to Colorado's standards no matter what the other team is like," Marshall said.



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