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Sports Weekend

Rams, Buffs eager to dig into volleyball seasons

COLLEGE VOLLEYBALL

By **Natalie Meisler and Tom Kensler**
The Denver Post

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A young but promising CSU team opens the season at home tonight against Pepperdine. (Photo courtesy of CSU)

No. 24 Colorado State

FORT COLLINS — Tom Hilbert looked out at the packed room of about 80 loyal boosters and never once stated the obvious: Colorado State's volleyball coach isn't looking back at the decision to return for a 13th season.

It might have been a different scene at the annual preseason volleyball function had Hilbert taken the offer to coach at Colorado last winter. It was his job to turn down and he and his wife,

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Leslie, also employed at CSU, were checking out real estate prices in the Boulder area.

He's had other offers in the past while annually taking the Rams to the NCAA Tournament. "This is the only time it got out," he said.

CSU starts its season today in Fort Collins when the Rams take on Pepperdine at 7 p.m. at Moby Arena.

Hilbert has compiled a 307-79 record, including 125-23 in Mountain West play. While CSU coaches in other sports talk about catching respective MWC leaders, Hilbert talks about competing with big-name schools — the same day the Rams were ranked No. 24 in the preseason coaches' poll.

"I think we can be 24th. It might take us to the middle of the season," he said.

And though there are five big-name schools on the nonleague schedule, (Oregon State, Tennessee, Duke, North Carolina, Ohio State), they aren't necessarily top 25 volleyball powers.

His biggest challenge will be replacing two of the best players in CSU history, setter Ashley Fornstrom and middle blocker Mekana Barnes.

He said this team reminds him of a young team in 2006 that went on to win the MWC Tournament.

He will also take on additional duties for one day this fall — tour guide for CSU department

members and fans in Moscow, Idaho. CSU has a football game at Idaho, Hilbert's former school, Oct. 3.

With no match scheduled that day, he plans to be there.

Asics/Coors Classic

At Moby Arena, Fort Collins

Today: No. 24 Colorado State vs. Pepperdine, 7 p.m.

Saturday: Colorado State vs. Oregon State, 7 p.m.

Sunday: Colorado State vs. Cal Poly, 2 p.m.

By Natalie Meisler, The Denver Post

Colorado

BOULDER — Perhaps taking a page from Colorado football coach Dan Hawkins, first-year CU volleyball coach Liz Kritza also told her team that there will be no excuses this season.

Colorado went 13-16 in Pi'i Aiu's final season and Kritza inherited a roster that's small in numbers and even shorter in experience. Setter Kaitlyn Burkett is the only senior. CU starts its season Saturday in Florida.

"We have really, really high expectations," Kritza said. "Anytime you go through rebuilding, which I've done, you have great challenges. But with challenges come opportunities."

Kritza isn't accustomed to losing and doesn't want to start now. A Colorado Springs native and

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sister of former CU men's basketball player Ted Kritza, she compiled a 76-39 record in four seasons at her alma mater, Tulane.

In 2008, Tulane earned its first Conference USA title. The Green Wave went 28-6 the past two seasons after starting out 5-16 in Kritza's first year.

"We're a long way ahead compared to where my last program started; there's no hurricane coming," said Kritza, who had to temporarily relocate the team to Texas A&M in 2005 following Hurricane Katrina.

"When you compete in a league like the Big 12, there are opportunities for improvement because you're playing that competition," Kritza said. Players appear to have bought in.

"We're not wanting year three (of a rebuilding process)," said middle blocker Schylur Edelman, a Sterling High grad. "We're ready to turn this program into a top 10 team right now."

Kritza probably won't have the luxury of redshirting any of her four freshmen. Two that could contribute immediately are Kerra Schroeder, a 6-foot outside hitter from San Diego, and Nikki Kinzer, a 6-2 middle blocker from Rampart High in Colorado Springs.

The roster includes only three Coloradans — Burkett, Edelman and Kinzer — and in-state recruiting will be a top priority, Kritza said.

"Some of the best teams in the country are

coming in here and cherry-picking kids," Kritza said. "My intention is to put a stop to that."

Campus USA Invitational

At Gainesville, Fla.

Today: Colorado vs. Valparaiso, 3 p.m.

Saturday: Colorado vs. No. 8 Florida, 5 p.m.

By Tom Kensler, The Denver Post

STAY ON THE COUCH

Cutler's return is good TV.

The NFL preseason is a chance for teams to figure out their rosters and dust off the offseason rust. The TV networks have their own preseason football coverage too.

The personnel changes alone are a lot to work out for "Sunday Night Football." The Broncos' game Sunday against the Bears — airing nationally on NBC (KUSA-9) — will be the first game broadcast by the network's new tag team of Al Michaels and Cris Collinsworth.

Michaels worked the NFL's marquee game each week last season with John Madden, replaced this season by Collinsworth. Former Colts coach Tony Dungy will join the halftime crew.

This game may be Denver's only appearance this season on SNF. But former Broncos quarterback Jay Cutler's return to Denver in a Chicago uniform was apparently too much to pass up for NBC's "A" team.

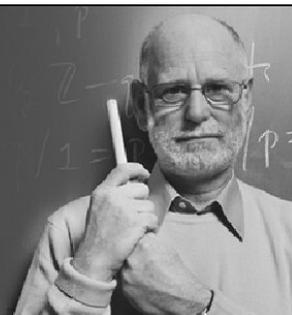
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During the preseason, the NFL has avoided scheduling Sunday night games, apparently content with avoiding a matchup against "Sunday Night Baseball" on ESPN.

The game airs at 6 p.m.

GET OFF THE COUCH

Trying to catch the Skirts.

The season's more competitive races and rides are past us now that we're toward the end of August. What's left is the creative and fun stuff.

On Saturday, the Skirt Chaser 5K in Cherry Creek will send a wave of women out from the starting line at Steele Street and Second Avenue. Three minutes later, the men's wave is let loose to catch the women. The first to cross the finish line wins. But, really, everybody wins. The race starts at 5 p.m. (skirtchaser5k.com).

And on Sunday in Longmont, don't call the women-only Venus de Miles a cycling race. It's a ride, simply. The 65- and 50-mile rides start at 7 a.m., with a 35-miler going at 8:30 a.m.

Everything kicks off at Prospect Park and proceeds help Greenhouse Scholars get kids to college (venusdemiles.com).

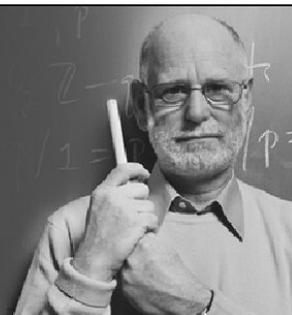
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Kritzka wins in her debut with Buffs

Four CU spikers make first career start in opener

Camera staff report
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 08/29/2009 12:22:05 AM MDT

GAINESVILLE, Fla. -- The Liz Kritzka era got off to a strong start for the University of Colorado volleyball team on Friday.

A young CU bunch topped Valparaiso 31-29, 25-22, 25-21 at the University of Florida's Campus USA Credit Union Invitational to give Kritzka a win in her first match as the Buffs' head coach.

Kritzka, who coached Tulane for four seasons and guided the school to its first-ever conference title in the sport, took over at CU this season for Pi'i Aiu, who coached the Buffs for 12 seasons.

Kritzka's first CU squad showed plenty of resiliency, rallying for victory in both the first and third sets against a Valparaiso squad that went 24-7 last season.

"The good thing about this victory is that this is our first and it really sets the tone for the season," the coach said. "But there is so much that we can improve."

The Buffs had four players making their first career starts, and it was sophomore Becah Fogle and true freshman Kerra Schroeder who led the way for CU (1-0). Fogle recorded 17 kills, including 10 in the marathon first set. Schroeder, an outside hitter from San Diego, added 12 kills.

"For young players that aren't as experienced and to have to play and be so involved in almost every aspect of the game, it's a pretty big load to shoulder," Kritzka said. "But they were really prepared and they approached the challenge with a lot of enthusiasm."

In addition to the new faces in the lineup, senior setter Kaitlyn Burkett moved to right side to make room for redshirt freshman setter Megan Cyr.

"Kaitlyn and Megan are a pretty lethal combination because they can both set and they can both hit," Kritzka said. "So being able to have that proved positive tonight."

Colorado out-hit Valpo .311 to .232, but none of the set victories came easily.

Valpo scored the first four points of the third set and led until CU tied it up at 17. Tied at 21, the Buffs won the final four points of the match, the last coming on a block by Burkett and Rosie Steinhaus.

The second set was tied 22-all, before the Buffs reeled off three straight points. And CU had to overcome an early 12-9 deficit in the first set, in which Schroeder notched six of her kills.

The Buffs are trying to improve on last year's 13-16 record. It was the second consecutive losing record for CU.

Colorado returns to action at 5 p.m. today against eighth-ranked Florida.

The road-warrior Buffs play their first seven matches away from home before hosting San Diego on Sept. 11 as part of the Colorado Invitational.

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