

McConnell-Miller's Buffs turn attention to boards

Opponents have out-rebounded CU by at least 10 in 4 of last 5

By Joshua Lindenstein Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 01/20/2010 12:03:29 AM MST

Chucky Jeffery didn't need the experience of an upperclassman or wisdom of a coach to diagnose the Colorado women's basketball team's recent rebounding deficiencies.

The freshman guard didn't try to sugarcoat them either.

"We didn't box out," she said after the Buffaloes' loss Saturday to Iowa State in which the Cyclones out-rebounded CU 43-26. "It's simple as that. We just keep trying to out-jump people and it's not working."

A solid rebounding team the first six weeks of the season, the Buffs have been out-rebounded by at least 10 boards in four of their past five games, losing three of those contests.

CU (11-5, 1-2 Big 12) enters today's 6 p.m. game at Kansas State ranked 11th in the conference in rebounding margin at plus-1.2 overall and minus-7.3 in league play. The only team ranked lower than the Buffs is Kansas State (10-7, 2-1).

"With the exception of (forward Brittany) Spears and Chucky, we're not (going to out-jump) people," CU head coach Kathy McConnell-Miller said Tuesday. "We've got to be more technical and go after it. This is the Big 12. There's nothing easy."

It was no secret entering the season that the Buffs would field a smaller, more guard-heavy lineup than many of their opponents. But McConnell-Miller said size hasn't been the issue so much as a lack of fundamentals.

Her players are going after the basketball, she said. They're just doing so without sealing off their opponents first.

"It's not just our bigs," said McConnell-Miller, whose preference is to have all five players go to the boards on defense and three on offense. "It's our guards, too. (Five-foot-8 Iowa State guard Denae) Stuckey came up with 10 rebounds, five offensive."

The Buffs cruised through most of their early schedule by out-performing seven of their first 11 opponents on the boards. They were out-rebounded by more than three just once.

For the most part, the Buffs were bigger and more athletic than those opponents, which Jeffery said allowed them to get away with some bad habits.

Starting with the Buffs' non-conference game against Virginia, that all changed. In the Big 12, the team that's won the rebounding battle has won each of the Buffs' games.

"Now that we're in the conference things are different than preseason," said Jeffery, who is second for CU at 5.3 rebounds per game. "You've got tougher, stronger opponents, so you've got to do the little things."

Much of Sunday's and Monday's practices were spent working on boxing out, with the Buffs toeing the line to run if they didn't perform. McConnell-Miller had the Buffs working against the team's male scout team players so that they couldn't take the easy route.

"We can't out-jump our guys," the coach said. "So it just emphasized the importance of boxing out to them."

Perhaps the most disturbing for McConnell-Miller on Saturday were the Cyclones' 17 offensive rebounds, which led to 13 second-chance points.

Especially heading into a road game where the whole environment will be against them, the Buffs know that limiting their foes' second chances is one thing they can control.

"It's very important that we get the rebound on the road because they're at home and that gives them momentum if they get offensive rebounds over and over," said Spears, who leads CU with 8.8 rebounds per game. "We've got to get the ball, one shot and done."

Even a freshman knows the likely outcome if the Buffs can win those battles.

"If we out-rebound anyone, we'll pretty much get the win," Jeffery said.

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CU women's preview vs. Kansas State

By Joshua Lindenstein Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 01/19/2010 11:54:54 PM MST

TODAY: The Buffs (11-5, 1-2 Big 12) travel to face Kansas State (10-7, 2-1) in a 6 p.m. game at Bramlage Coliseum.

BROADCAST: Television: FSN with Brent Stover (play-by-play) and Missy Heidrick (color). **Radio:** KVCU (1190 AM) with Mike Rice (play-by-play).

STORYLINES: Colorado enters on a two-game losing streak, and the Buffs will be aiming to halt an eight-game streak on the road. ... Tonight's game begins a stretch in which CU plays five ranked opponents in seven games. The other two games are tonight's and another road contest at Kansas next week. ... Kansas State has been up and down this season but solid since Big 12 play began. The Wildcats knocked off then-ranked Kansas 59-35, beat Missouri and lost a 10-point game at Oklahoma State.

KEY STAT: KSU is the most accurate 3-point shooting team in the country at 42 percent. The Wildcats average 8.3 made 3s per game.

COACHES: Kathy McConnell-Miller is 63-76 in her fifth year at CU and 154-164 overall. Deb Patterson is 275-153 in her 14th year at Kansas State and overall.

PROBABLE STARTERS:

Colorado -- G Chucky Jeffery, 5-10, Fr., 9.9 ppg, 5.3 rpg, 3.2 apg; G Alyssa Fressle, 5-10, So., 6.2 ppg, 2.6 rpg, 2.6 apg; F Brittany Spears, 6-1, Jr., 18.1 ppg, 8.8 rpg, 2.4 spg; F Meagan Malcolm-Peck, 6-2, Fr., 7.6 ppg, 5.1 rpg; C Courtney Dunn, 6-4, Sr., 6.1 ppg, 4.7 rpg.

Kansas State -- G Brittany Chambers, 5-8, Fr., 12.6 ppg, 4.4 rpg, 2.2 apg; G Taelor Karr, 5-8, Fr., 8.8 ppg, 3.8 rpg; G Kari Kincaid, 5-10, Sr., 9.6 ppg, 3.4 apg; F Ashley Sweat, 6-2, Sr., 17.9 ppg, 6.0 rpg; F Jalana Childs, 6.6 ppg, 4.7 rpg.

SERIES: Tied 32-32. KSU has won 12 of the last 15 meetings, including all three last season.

UP NEXT: The Buffs host Oklahoma State at 2 p.m. on Sunday.

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Longmont, Colorado
Friday, April 30, 2010

Publish Date: 1/20/2010

CU's Smith playing through injuries again

By Patrick Ridgell
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BOULDER — Bianca Smith is pretty beat up these days.

As usual.

What's new is Smith, a fifth-year senior on Colorado's women's basketball team, is battling a nagging Achilles' tendon injury that needs rest to heal. She won't take any rest. Her coach knows why.

"I think regardless of what's physically going on with her, she knows this is her last season and her last chance to do this, and she's going to play through just about anything," Kathy McConnell-Miller said.

Smith said her Achilles' started hurting prior to the start of conference play. She said she relies on heavy taping and adrenaline to make it through games and practices — and sometimes has it re-taped at halftime. She added that she's been taking so much ibuprofen lately, that team doctors have asked her to back off so she doesn't harm her kidneys.

"I've been taking them, like, all day, because of the pain," Smith said.

Despite her injuries, which are not limited to the tendon, Smith will enter tonight's game at Kansas State leading the Big 12 with 48 3-pointers. She's second in the league in free throw shooting, at 88.4 percent. And despite coming off the bench, she's CU's second leading scorer, at 14 points per game. She needs 23 points to become the program's 23rd player to reach 1,000.

McConnell-Miller laughs when she discusses the physical challenges Smith has faced to make it this far. This year, she's had to deal with a brace on her left — non-shooting — hand, on which Smith had surgery, McConnell-Miller said. The coach added Smith has dealt with an arch in her back that frequently makes it tight since she arrived in Boulder. And knee issues once prompted Smith to say she limps because she's old.

There's a picture in the program's media guide of Smith being helped off the floor after she suffered an injury in a game. In the picture, Smith smiles widely.

To McConnell-Miller, that sums her up. The injuries just never seem to stop.

"I love Bianca," McConnell-Miller said

"(Smith's Achilles') is a new injury for us. I will tell you she's as diligent as any player I've ever known. I was the first one in here (Monday), and she was the second one in here, getting rehab."

Smith said she's not missing practices, which she said have been shortened to preserve the team's legs. She also said her latest injury is not why she comes off the bench.



Colorado guard Bianca Smith is helped off the floor by CU trainers Nicole Makris, left, and Kortny Cook after Smith suffered an injury during the 2007-08 season. Despite her injuries, Smith has become a CU and Big 12 standout. **Courtesy CU Sports Information**

"Coach just feels the five who start get us off to our best start right now," Smith said.

Perhaps because she's seen Smith deal with so much, McConnell-Miller said she is not concerned with whether Smith will make it to March. But the coach did say she's aware of the minutes that Smith logs.

Entering tonight, she's averaging 23.3 a game. In CU's three league games, she's averaged 27.3. McConnell-Miller said she wants Smith to return to the amount of time she played in non-conference games.

"If we can keep her to 22-23, that's where she's at her best," McConnell-Miller said. "It's been our objective to bring her off the bench and keep her fresh. Twenty-two minutes is what we envisioned for her, and it's worked for her."

Read Patrick Ridgell's CU sports blog at www.timescall.com/blogs/ridgell. He can be reached at pridgell@timescall.com.

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Longmont, Colorado
Friday, April 30, 2010

Publish Date: 1/20/2010

Tonight's games

By Patrick Ridgell
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Colorado women (11-5, 1-2) at Kansas State (10-7, 2-1)

When/Where: 6 p.m. tonight at Bramlage Coliseum in Manhattan, Kan.

TV/Radio: FSN/KVCU AM 1190.

The series: Tied 32-32. Kansas State has won 12 of the past 15 meetings, including all three meetings last season (one came in the Big 12 Tournament).

Leading scorers: CU — Brittany Spears (18.1 points per game); Kansas State — Ashley Sweat (17.9 points per game).

Notes: CU is coming off consecutive losses. It's the first time this season the Buffs have lost two games in a row. ... CU has lost eight straight road games. ... CU averages 73 points per game, but only 62 in its three conference games. Its shooting percentage is 43 percent, 37 percent in Big 12 play. ... Spears had her 20th double-double during Saturday's loss to Iowa State. ... Kansas State had a six-game winning streak snapped when it lost Saturday to Oklahoma State. The Wildcats lead the nation in 3-point shooting at 42 percent.

Colorado men (10-7, 1-2) at Oklahoma State (13-4, 1-2)

When/Where: 7 p.m. tonight at Gallagher-Iba Arena in Stillwater, Okla.

TV/Radio: ESPNU/KKZN AM 760.

The series: Oklahoma State leads 59-47, 26-10 in Stillwater. Oklahoma State beat the Buffs 76-55 last season in Boulder.

Leading scorers: CU — Cory Higgins (18.9 points per game); Oklahoma State — James Anderson (21.6 points per game).

Notes: CU has lost 30 straight road conference games. The Buffs' last road Big 12 victory came in January 2006 at Oklahoma State. ... Fourteen Buffs have fouled out of games this year, matching the total from 2008-09. ... CU has shot 50 percent or better in each Big 12 game. ... Nate Tomlinson leads CU with 72 assists. He had 54 assists in 17 games last season. ... Oklahoma State's James Anderson leads the league in scoring. The Cowboys are 9-0 at home.



Kansas State women looking to rebound

By Arne Green - Special to The News

MANHATTAN - For the first time since mid-December, Kansas State's women face a bounce-back game at 7 tonight when they entertain Colorado at Bramlage Coliseum.

The Wildcats, 10-7 with a 2-1 Big 12 record, saw their six-game winning streak snapped Saturday at No. 15-ranked Oklahoma State (66-56). And now they face a much-improved Colorado team (11-5, 1-2) that is looking to shake off a two-game skid of its own.

"I think they look as comfortable, as a unit, as I've seen them for quite a while," K-State coach Deb Patterson said of the Buffaloes, who like the Wildcats have inserted a pair of freshmen into the starting lineup this season. "(Freshman guard) Chucky Jeffery obviously has had a major impact with her strength and athleticism and she's someone that over time in this league is going to be an extremely fine player.

"More than anything, you've got (freshman forward Megan) Malcolm-Peck on the floor now who can extend and shoot the three, and they've grown up a little in their other positions."

While Jeffery averages 9.9 points and 5.3 rebounds with Malcolm-Peck adding 7.6 points and 5.1 boards, junior forward Brittany Spears remains the leader for the Buffs. She averages 18.1 points and 8.8 rebounds.

Colorado also gets 14 points off the bench from senior guard Bianca Smith.

For K-State, senior forward Ashley Sweat continues to lead the way with 17.9 points and 6.0 rebounds a game, and senior guards Kari Kincaid adds 9.6 points. But freshmen guards Brittany Chambers (12.6) and Taelor Karr (8.8) have played part in the Wildcats' recent surge.

"For us it's just an everyday process of trying to integrate in a lot of players that have not had experience," Patterson said. "And in this league (experience) is gold. So we're up and down and we're learning every day about one another."

Karr, a 5-foot-8 guard from Paola, averaged 14.5 points last week as the Wildcats split two road games at Missouri and Oklahoma State. On Monday she was named Big 12 co-freshman of the week.

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KSU women get to work on Buffaloes

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Kansas State's Mariah White looks to dribble past a Kansas defender on Jan. 9 at Bramlage Coliseum. Staff photo by Michael Schweitzer.

The six-game streak is over. The undefeated conference record is no more, and the Kansas State women's basketball team has just two days to learn from a stingy zone defense that Oklahoma State used on Saturday to expose the young Wildcats.

It was quite fitting that following their 10-point loss to the Cowgirls, the Wildcats returned home in dense fog, both figuratively and literally.

But that's how life is in the deeply competitive Big 12, and KSU coach Deb Patterson spent Monday morning in Bramlage Coliseum transitioning her team's focus to its next opponent on Wednesday in the Colorado Buffaloes.

"It's one of those things where obviously it was a tough loss for us," senior forward Ashley Sweat said Monday. "I look at that game and feel like I could do much better. I needed to come out more ready for my team.

"But we have got to forget that game because we play again in two days."

What the Wildcats are attempting to forget, could be what other teams in the Big 12 will look to learn from before they play K-State down the road.

The Cowgirls continually rotated between a 2-3 and 1-3-1 zone defense after the Wildcats scored a quick eight points to begin the game against their man-to-man defense.

Unable to get the good shots inside the myriad of zone looks, the Wildcats were forced to pass the ball

around the perimeter during most of their possessions, settling for 26 3-pointer attempts.

"We basically played catch," Patterson said. "I thought we were trying out for Major League Baseball."

Senior guard Kari Kincaid was a part of the back-and-forth game of catch, and was forced to take eight shots from behind the arc, converting four of them.

"I'm comfortable taking those shots if they are in the flow and open shots," Kincaid said. "I'm not the person who goes and creates my own shot. That's not the type of player I am. We definitely need to get more players shots and in the flow and rhythm for our offense to succeed."

Colorado enters the contest having lost two consecutive games, and are looking for their first road victory of the season.

Colorado dropped a close 68-62 game against Iowa State in the Coors Event Center on Saturday.

Colorado (11-5, 1-2) is led on offense by junior forward Brittany Spears. The dangerous 6-foot-1 forward scored a game-high 25 points against the Wildcats in their last meeting at Bramlage Coliseum last season. She is averaging 19.1 points per contest, good enough for sixth in the league 12.

But Patterson said this Colorado team looks much more balanced than a year ago. Including Spears, the Buffs also have Bianca Smith, who averages 14 points a game.

"I think now it's more that you have to defend all five positions out there on the floor for Colorado," Patterson said.

Tip-off is slated for 7 p.m. with the game being televised on FSN-Kansas City.

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