

Colorado women fighting off ailments

Schedule taking toll on players

By Joshua Lindenstein Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

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Hear that tapping noise?

It might be faint coming all the way from Kansas, but it's the sound of Kathy McConnell-Miller knocking on wood that the injury bug hasn't taken a major interest in her team this season.

That doesn't mean, of course, that the Colorado women's basketball team has been immune to the wear and tear that comes with a 29-game slate and membership in one of the more physical leagues around.

While the Buffaloes have managed to avoid major setbacks, like the season-ender Whitney Houston suffered prior to the 2008-09 campaign, the everyday grind has caught up to them a bit lately as they prepare to face Kansas in Lawrence at 6 p.m. today.

Sophomore guard Alyssa Fressle's minutes were limited against Oklahoma State on Saturday because of a cold that is currently making its way through the team. Center Courtney Dunn said she was hyperventilating during Saturday's game. Guard Bianca Smith has been dealing with sore Achilles' tendons that have required extra TLC the last few weeks. Freshman Kailah Bailey has been slowed by mononucleosis. And McConnell-Miller said freshman Brenna Malcolm-Peck has also dealt with some "physical complications" through the season.

This point in the season, players said Tuesday, is just kind of when the nagging injuries and illnesses start adding up.

"You've got to just know that and play through it," junior forward Brittany Spears said. "Everybody's going through it, every team. So you've got to just play through it and play hard and not think about it while you're in the game."

McConnell-Miller said players overcome a lot during the course of a season, even if there's nothing major. The physical aspect of Big 12 Conference play, she said, adds to the bumps and bruises that accumulate this time of year.

"Every time a Big 12 team gets to the postseason, the physical nature of our league is something that everybody talks about," the coach said.

Dunn's issue on Saturday was the only one so far that really falls into the out-of-the-ordinary realm.

While she felt fine on the court, she said that when she came to the sidelines during timeouts she was having trouble breathing and sitting still and that her heart rate also dipped.

She was put on oxygen a couple of times during the game, but she and trainers still aren't sure what caused the incident. She said they've chalked it up to a panic attack.

"I guess I was just really anxious about the game," she said. "I had been sick before, so I think it was a little combination of all of that."

Smith said the pain in her Achilles' has been tough to take, though a new way of taping them recently before practices and games has helped.

As for sickness, it's tough to avoid when travel and homework and lack of sleep begin compounding.

McConnell-Miller said the coaches were careful to keep Bailey away from other players while she was contagious, and they're always reminding players to eat healthy, drink lots of water and wash their hands to minimize the spread of viruses among the team.

But prevention isn't always possible when a group is together so often.

Reserve guard Kelly Jo Mullaney got a boost in playing time on Saturday to help relieve Fressle, and McConnell-Miller said that other players will certainly have to do the same at times as the season goes on.

"If one gets sick or injured we feel confident that we have players who have played some minutes and can step in," the coach said. "It's a team game, and when your number is called you've got to be there."

Although no one is looking past games against KU and Nebraska this week, the team will get a reprieve next week with a bye slotted into the schedule. After hosting the Huskers Saturday, the Buffs don't play again until Feb. 6 at Baylor.

McConnell-Miller said the players will likely get two days off from practice next week to allow for some valuable rest and a chance to catch up on school work.

Until then, though, there's no room for the meek.

"I think you just kind of have to suck it up basically," Smith said. "You just have to do preventative stuff and gut it out."

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CU women's preview: at Kansas

Camera staff
Boulder Daily Camera

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TODAY: Colorado (12-6, 2-3 Big 12) travels to face Kansas (11-7, 1-4) in a 6 p.m. game at Allen Fieldhouse in Lawrence.

BROADCAST: Television: None. **Radio:** KKZN (760 AM) with Mike Rice (play-by-play).

STORYLINES: The Buffs enter the game after losing 74-63 at home to Oklahoma State on Sunday. ... Colorado is looking to equal its Big 12 win total from a year ago after already surpassing last season's overall tally. ... After being ranked just a few weeks ago, the Jayhawks enter the game having lost two in a row and five of their last six.

KEY STAT: The Buffs, who won at Kansas State last week, haven't notched two Big 12 road victories in a season since the 2003-04 campaign.

COACHES: Kathy McConnell-Miller is 64-77 in her fifth year at CU and 155-165 overall. Bonnie Henrickson is 90-86 in her sixth year at Kansas and 248-148 overall.

PROBABLE STARTERS:

Colorado -- G Chucky Jeffery, 5-10, Fr., 9.9 ppg, 5.1 rpg, 3.3 apg; G Alyssa Fressle, 5-10, So., 6.5 ppg, 2.6 rpg, 2.6 apg; F Brittany Spears, 6-1, Jr., 17.9 ppg, 8.8 rpg, 2.6 spg; F Meagan Malcolm-Peck, 6-2, Fr., 6.9 ppg, 4.8 rpg; C Courtney Dunn, 6-4, Sr., 6.4 ppg, 5.1 rpg.

Kansas -- G Lachelda Jacobs, 5-10, Sr., 1.1 ppg, 1.3 rpg; G Sade Morris, 5-11, Sr., 9.8 ppg, 3.1 rpg; F Danielle McCray, 5-1, Sr., 19.3 ppg, 6.8 rpg; F Aishah Sutherland, 6-2, So., 11.1 ppg, 7.8 rpg; Carolyn Davis, 6-3, Fr., 4.6 ppg, 2.4 rpg.

SERIES: CU leads 33-30 and has won five of the last eight. KU leads 16-12 in Lawrence.

UP NEXT: The Buffs host Nebraska at 3:30 p.m. Saturday.

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Kansas on its last legs

By [Max Rothman](#)

Wednesday, January 27, 2010

Another Women's National Invitation Tournament appearance isn't exactly what senior guards Danielle McCray and Sade Morris had in mind for their last hurrah. Yet with Kansas losing five of its past six games this month, the once nationally ranked Jayhawks are quickly fading out of the tournament picture.

Danielle McCray

There's no sugar coating here, senior guard Danielle McCray hasn't played her best in the last two games. For an average player, her 6.5 points per game in the last two contests might seem like a solid contribution, but McCray is not expected to be average. She is the undisputed leader of the Jayhawks. Kansas has shown an inability to win games without McCray playing to the best of her ability. Essentially, for Kansas to have a shot at beating Colorado, McCray needs to break out of her slump.

Brittany Spears

What McCray normally is for the Jayhawks, junior forward Brittany Spears is for Colorado. The Pasadena, California native has five double-doubles on the season, including one in Big 12 games. She also averages almost 18 points per game. Because Kansas' post players have suffered through some recent struggles, Spears may have a big game in store.

Prediction: Kansas 67, Colorado 59

— Andrew Taylor

And for a skidding team with high aspirations, the remainder of the Big 12 schedule allows no breathing room.

"Every night it's going to be a grind," senior guard LaChelda Jacobs said.

Kansas hosts Colorado at 7 p.m. at Allen Fieldhouse tonight in a game that could forecast its fate for the rest of the season. Will this game be looked back on as the turning point for a season with just enough time to improve or will it mark just the next stage in a continuing decline?

It is often foolish to put such vast implications on one game. However, in the loaded Big 12 conference, a winnable home game cannot be overlooked.

At the moment, Kansas is sitting in the cellar of the Big 12 (11th place) with an 11-7 record overall, but just a 1-4 mark in the Big 12. No team in the conference has a worse overall record than 11-7 and six teams in the conference currently sit in the top 25.

Coach Bonnie Henrickson said there's a reason that the Big 12 has claimed the number one RPI, a ranking for conferences, for the past five years.

"It's a combination of a lot of leagues. The SEC is really athletic and fast, the Big Ten is big and physical," Henrickson said. "We have what every league brags about. We have all of it."

So even with a team loaded with playmakers, Kansas' splashes of inconsistency have often resulted in negative plays.

"Defensively, if you make a mistake, teams are going to expose you," Jacobs said.

Kansas is currently 9-1 in Allen Fieldhouse and 2-6 on the road. But perhaps the most significant number is that 1-4 record in the Big 12. If the Jayhawks want to make the NCAA Tournament, they will need to approach something close to an 8-8 mark by season's end. Most tournament teams can win in their own conference. Kansas hasn't proven it can do so yet, but with six home games and a few winnable road tests to go, the chance to change still exists.

"Any given day, any team can lose, whether you are at the top or the very bottom," Morris said.

Lineup alterations or strategic adjustments might be the start of what looks like the need for a midseason boost for Kansas. Whether or not those potential changes are the answer, Kansas needs to find a way to change its course, and it's going to be tested against the best of the Big 12.

That test starts tonight against Colorado.

"It's got to happen Wednesday," Henrickson said. "Non-negotiable."

— Edited by Kate Larrabee

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Slumping KU women's team returns home

January 27, 2010

Bonnie Henrickson isn't ready to push the panic button and probably never will be.

"That's not going to do any good," said Henrickson, coach of Kansas University's struggling Kansas University women's basketball team.

Losers of five of their last six games after a 10-1 start, the Jayhawks will play host to Colorado today.

Tipoff will be at 7 p.m. in Allen Fieldhouse. Metro Sports (Sunflower Broadband 37) will carry a live telecast. It's a Dollar Day promotion with tickets and concessions going for \$1.

Henrickson plans no changes in the starting lineup, although one starter — point guard LaChelda Jacobs — is skating on thin ice because of recent spotty performances since being called on to replace injured and out-for-the season Angel Goodrich in the last three outings.

Jacobs, a 5-foot-10 senior, opened in Saturday's 81-69 loss at Oklahoma, but Henrickson used Sade Morris at the point during the bulk of the second half, and inserted freshman Monica Engelman to replace Morris at a wing slot.

Will Henrickson opt for that strategy again?

"If we don't get any more production out of LaChelda," the KU coach said. "But it wasn't her offense (at Oklahoma). It was more of a defensive thing."

In fact, the 81 points surrendered to the Sooners were a season-high.

"We need LaChelda to be who she needs to be on both ends of the floor," Henrickson said.

Kansas also needs Danielle McCray to emerge from her shooting slump. The Jayhawks' preseason All-American has been in a funk, particularly on the road.

In late December, McCray sparked the Jayhawks to an 89-69 win at Houston by making 17-of-22 shots and scoring a career-high 37 points. But in KU's four road games since — all losses — McCray has made only 26 percent of her shots (14 of 54).

McCray has been much better at home, hitting at a 42.8 percent clip in the two home games of the Jayhawks' tailspin.

It's no secret Henrickson's team plays better in Allen Fieldhouse than it does on the road where the Jayhawks have dropped 17 of their last 18 Big 12 Conference games.

"We just need to play well," Henrickson said. "There's no guarantee because we're at home."

Colorado (12-6, 2-3 Big 12) has won only one of its five games in unfriendly arenas this season, but that lone victory was at Kansas State (63-57) where the Jayhawks were waxed, 59-35, a couple of weeks ago.

The Buffaloes feature All-Big 12 candidate Brittany Spears who averages 17.9 points, 8.8 rebounds and 2.6 steals a game as well as super sub Bianca Smith who leads the conference in three-point goals.

Kansas (11-7, 1-4 Big 12) will go on the road again Saturday for a 5 p.m. clash with Missouri, KU's lone victim this month.

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