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The Names Ring a Few Bells

By DAVID WALDSTEIN

[Whitney Houston](#) and Brittany Spears shared a college dorm room two years ago. It was a unique pairing that quickly evolved into a strong friendship, but there were no albums or [Grammy Awards](#) to show for it, and no paparazzi lurking when they went out to eat.

Now, after a year apart, the two are together again, but their fans won't hear "Toxic" or "I Will Always Love You" when they perform. No, these two stars are less likely to produce a hit single than a fast break or a double-double.

As starters for the [University of Colorado](#) women's basketball team, Houston and Spears share the names, if not the spellings, of two far more famous entertainers.

To have one star player with the same name as an internationally known recording star is novel. To have a pair of them is downright gaudy, especially given that they are both superb players and [tri-captains along with a senior guard named](#) — no, not [Beyoncé](#) — Bianca Smith.

"I remember when we were recruiting both of them and we thought, 'Wouldn't this be something if we had both Brittany Spears and Whitney Houston on our team?'" said Colorado Coach Kathy McConnell-Miller, whose team is 2-1. "And sure enough, they both committed in the same year."

It was a defining moment for the Colorado program, which relies heavily on the two stars: Houston, [a lightning-quick 5-foot-5 guard](#) who can actually sing, and Spears, [a multidimensional talent](#) on pace to become Colorado's career leading scorer and possibly rebounder, too.

The junior point guard Whitney Christina Houston was born Aug. 7, 1988, three years after the singer Whitney Elizabeth Houston released her self-titled debut album. That record would go on to be the best-selling debut album by a female artist until Spears — Britney, that is — broke the mark in 1999 with "... Baby One More Time."

Brittany Lynette Spears, a junior forward, was born Sept. 27, 1988, four years before Britney Jean Spears, the singer, made [her first national TV appearance on "Star Search."](#)

With realistic visions of the [W.N.B.A.](#) in her future, the 6-foot-1 Spears was [named Big 12 co-player of the week](#) Monday after [her 27-point, 13-rebound performance in a loss to Minnesota on Nov. 22.](#) In three games, she is averaging 21.3 points and 11.3 rebounds.

"She's one of the best players we'll see all year," Minnesota Coach Pam Borton said. "There's nothing she

can't do on the floor. And Whitney Houston is one of the fastest players we'll face all year. You've got two players with rock-star names there, but they are also the rock stars of that team."

Funny, but Brittany Spears is not a huge [Britney Spears](#) fan, although the tune "Sometimes" can be found on her iPod. Whitney Houston likes Britney Spears a lot, especially the song "Toxic." And of course Whitney Houston likes Whitney Houston.

"I want to meet her sometime," said the guard, who was not named for the singer. "It's one of my dreams. I would love to meet her and sing with her."

A bright, cheerful personality, Houston says that growing up with the same name as a famous artist was never a burden, and sometimes amusing. When she was introduced at games as a schoolgirl, people would say, "Where's Bobby Brown?" referring to the famous Whitney Houston's famous ex-husband.

"It's pretty comical sometimes with the names," the Colorado assistant coach Patrick Harrington said. "For a while we were recruiting a player from California named [Sweets Underwood](#). I think if her name was Carrie, we definitely would have signed her. It's fun sometimes with their names, but it's more fun when you see them play ball."

Or sing. Colorado's Spears is not much of a vocalist, but Houston trained her voice in a church choir in her hometown, Memphis, and later unleashed it in Boulder. Three times she delighted fans at Coors Events Center by singing "The Star-Spangled Banner" before her games, though never a prerecorded version as the other Whitney [mimed at the 1991 Super Bowl](#).

Houston, who is averaging 10.5 points, first learned she would soon be playing alongside Spears back in 2007, and she could barely contain her excitement. Although the same age, Spears had spent an extra year at prep school, so Houston (who missed all of last season after injuring her knee) had already been at Boulder a year when Spears arrived as a freshman from Pasadena, Calif.

The day they met, Spears was first in their dorm room on the second floor of Kittredge West, lying on the bed waiting to greet the energetic young woman who would be so instrumental, so to speak, to her college years.

"I walked in," Houston recalled, "and she said, 'Hi, I'm Brittany,' and I said, 'Hi, I'm Whitney,' and we laughed. I knew it right then, I had another sister."

They would share bonds of basketball, of teammates and of the common experiences of growing up with a familiar name. They each knew that feeling of people assuming they were pulling a prank when they gave out their name.

As in, I'd like to order a large pizza. What's the name? Brittany Spears. Click.

"You get used to it," Spears said. "But now, when the two of us are at security in airports, they're like: 'Really? No way.' It's funny. But it's good because now we go through it all together."

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Mullaney looks to sustain solid start

Junior moves back to shooting guard this season

By Joshua Lindenstein Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

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Kelly Jo Mullaney showed last weekend at Minnesota's Subway Classic the value that she can provide the Colorado women's basketball team.

Now she and her coaches are hoping she'll be able to sustain that level of play even when she doesn't have the added motivation of playing in her home town in front of friends and family.

After scoring just five points and grabbing two rebounds in 13 minutes in CU's opener, Mullaney turned in a pair of standout performances off the bench in Minneapolis.

She scored 13 points and grabbed seven rebounds in 28 minutes in a win over Illinois-Chicago. Two nights later she turned in nine points, two rebounds and two assists in 29 minutes in a close loss to Minnesota.

CU coach Kathy McConnell-Miller saw it coming last week in the way Mullaney was preparing.

The 5-foot-8 junior guard was hustling a step more. She was asking more questions about schemes than normal. And she was deeply in-tune to opponents' personnel and system changes.

"She was the same today," McConnell-Miller said after a practice earlier this week. "We talked about coming back to Boulder and, even though we didn't have the Minnesota trip at the end of the weekend, she still needed to be that focused."

"If she continues to prepare like that and stays committed to her performance and her energy and defense as she was (last weekend), then we've found another piece to the puzzle."

When she's clicking, Mullaney brings another scoring threat to the floor for the Buffs with her shooting range and accuracy. And her fiery competitiveness adds energy to CU's game.

But her CU career has been up-and-down so far.

After transferring in from Colorado State and redshirting a year, Mullaney started 14 of 28 games last season and averaged 5.3 points and 1.4 assists.

Coach and player chalk up the inconsistency to a variety of factors.

For one thing, Mullaney spent most of her time last season playing out of position at point guard due to the preseason injury to Whitney Houston. Normally a shooting guard, Mullaney felt out of sorts having to be in charge of running the offense, and she struggled at times with the ball-handling duties at the point.

McConnell-Miller said she also thinks Mullaney was still getting accustomed to being on a team where she wasn't the best player on the floor like she'd been her whole life.

Mullaney averaged 23 points per game as a senior in high school for a state championship team. She then led CSU in scoring as a freshman before missing the second half of the season.

But McConnell-Miller knows Mullaney -- whose father Mark was a defensive end for the Minnesota Vikings for 13 years -- has the fire to be a productive player, even if she's not the team's main threat.

"She's got the extra 'I want to be great mentality' and 'I want to be the toughest kid on the floor,'" the coach said. "She's got that. It's taken her some time to adjust to relaying that consistently on the floor."

Mullaney admits that she had some transforming to do.

"I think I've grown a lot in that when I'm out there I just want to play my best and that will keep me on the floor longer," she said.

Back to playing shooting guard, Mullaney has been more comfortable from the start this season, and it showed in Minnesota.

Mullaney knows, however, that she can't just show up when there's reason for extra motivation. One of the other top games of her CU career was a 14-point effort last season against her old team, CSU.

"I definitely had the same mentality (in practice this week)," Mullaney said. "It's nice that (the success in Minnesota) was at the beginning of the year, because now I can do it the entire year and just know how I prepare well and the focus I need in practice."

The Minnesota game in particular provided a similar lesson for the entire Buffs squad, which started slow in wins over lesser opponents before competing at a high level from the start against the Gophers.

The Buffs host New Orleans, Harvard and Georgia Southern -- three beatable foes -- in their own Omni Hotels Classic today and Saturday at the Coors Events Center.

"Everybody, individually, we've got to all step it up and prepare the same way we did going into that Minnesota game," Mullaney said.

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