

# Big 12 breakthrough for Kritza's Buffs

By **Ryan Thorburn** Camera Sports Writer  
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Liz Kritza needed a hug.

And, more importantly, a win.

A challenging first season as Colorado's volleyball coach became even more difficult this week when Kritza removed junior Ellen Henry from the roster for "violating team policies" and sophomore Alex Penewell suddenly quit the team.

Senior setter Kaitlyn Burkett is limited right now due to an injury, which means the Buffs are down to 10½ bodies for the coaching staff to work with. That includes Katie Evanyo, a transfer from Florida Atlantic who was playing on CU's club team eight days ago.

"We've had an interesting week," Kritza said. "Some adversity actually strengthens the bond of the team and they understand when you have changes within a program, whether it's coaching changes or personnel changes, you really have to focus and buckle down and get to what's most important."

Winning.

And that's what CU did for the first time in Big 12 play for Kritza with a 25-23, 21-25, 25-19, 25-17 victory over Texas Tech on Wednesday night at the Coors Events Center.

The Buffs (6-11, 1-7) snapped a seven-game losing streak dating back to Sept. 12 and climbed over the Red Raiders (2-14, 0-7) on the way out of the conference cellar.

"I'm really glad it's off our shoulders. We really needed that win. No matter what, we weren't going to lose," freshman Kerra Schroeder said after her clutch 15-kill, 12-dig performance. "We deserved it. We work hard every single day in practice."

The Buffs have been practicing for months together trying to master Kritza's fast-paced system. And then Evanyo shows up out of the blue just before last Wednesday's game at Missouri and takes charge.

Is that fair?

"I thought, 'Cool, she's playing,'" Schroeder said of the rare but, much-needed mid-season addition. "Her first match she was talking to everybody and making comments, even to seniors. It was great."

Evanyo, who started against Texas Tech as the Libero and finished with a team-high 14 digs, had been attending CU's home matches as a casual observer.

"I honestly did not think I would be playing on this team at all," said Evanyo, who has two years of eligibility remaining, including this season. "It happened really fast."

Kritza invited Evanyo to try out for the team and as soon as the piles of paperwork from the compliance office were all completed and approved, she was on the flight to Columbia for the Oct. 7 match.

"It's pretty special," Kritza said of Evanyo's ability to have instant chemistry with her new teammates and to adapt to this system almost instantly. "It's a difficult position to be in because the team has been training and forming the team dynamic."

"It takes somebody who is emotionally mature, who understands the game at a high level, who understands what her contribution can be,

and who is team-minded."

Redshirt freshman Megan Cyr was another key player in the win over the Red Raiders. With Burkett hurting, the Cyr handled the bulk of the setting duties and finished with 47 of CU's 53 assists.

"Kaitlyn is a very important part of this team and she has been running the offense most of the season," Kritza said. "Cyr was able to take the serving duties tonight, and Kaitlyn is a great mentor for her and she was talking to her throughout the match."

The Buffs now lead the all-time series against Texas Tech 23-4. Kritza's crew, a very interesting work in progress, play at No. 22 Texas A&M on Saturday.

"I really feel like a weight has been lifted off their shoulders. We've been training hard, we've been doing the right things, but it's kind of disheartening when you're not coming up with the results that you want in the win-loss column," Kritza said. "This was important for reaffirming what we're doing and how our system works. And this group has faced some adversity. I'm very proud of them."

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