

CU Buffs women's basketball: Expectations high for K-Mac's squad

Entire team stayed on campus over summer to attend school, train

By Joshua Lindenstone, Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

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When the commitment was made last spring by every player on the Colorado women's basketball team -- from incoming freshmen to lone senior Bianca Smith -- to stick around Boulder for the summer, it marked the first time that had happened since Smith joined the program.

The pact, Smith believes, also brought a new mentality to the Buffs, who spent the summer months on campus going to class, working out and playing together.

"From that day on we made a commitment to win championships, and we were going to do whatever it takes to win championships," Smith said Friday at CU's women's basketball media day. "That's been our motivator, to win the Big 12 championship and make the (NCAA) tournament."

Such talk might be lofty for a group that struggled to a last-place finish in the conference a season ago. But there was no waver in the confidence that permeated the CU players on Friday, the first official day of practice.

The Buffs believe they're ready to turn the corner in coach Kathy McConnell-Miller's fifth season.

Five of the top six scorers return, including team leader Brittany Spears. So, too, does point guard Whitney Houston, who blew her knee out before last season began. And joining the squad is a talented group of five incoming freshmen, a couple of whom could make immediate impacts.

McConnell-Miller said she's as excited as she's ever been entering a season.

"I can't tell you how many games we're going to win," the coach said. "I can't tell you where we're going to finish in the conference. I can tell you, sitting here today, there is a great feeling and a great sense that the preparation was there, the talent level has improved, the athleticism, the size and of course the depth."

After a run to the WNIT semifinals two years ago, there was similar optimism heading into last year. But Houston's injury, coupled with the unexpected departure of forward AijaPutnina, helped derail those expectations before the season began.

The hopes are renewed this season largely because of the depth and experience the Buffs bring to the table.

While the loss of Kara Richards and Jackie McFarland to graduation the last two years has left the Buffs thin overall in the frontcourt, Spears, a 6-foot-1 junior forward, leads the way for CU after averaging 18.3 points per game last year.

And talent and versatility abound in the backcourt.

Smith is fifth on the team's career 3-pointers list. Sophomore Alyssa Fressle led the team in assists last season. Kelly Jo Mullaney and Britney Blythe both got starting experience in the absence of Houston, whose lightning quickness will be a welcome addition.

And then there's the freshmen, most notably Janeesa "Chucky" Jeffery, a product of Sierra High School in Colorado Springs.

"Whether it's start and play 40 minutes or come off the bench and play 25, you're going to see a player that's passionate in what she does, and you're going to see a player that makes us better immediately," McConnell-Miller said.



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McConnell-Miller said Meagan Malcolm-Peck, who grew up in Boulder and played at Horizon High School in Thornton, has also been impressive so far in showing the ability to play everywhere on the floor but point guard.

Junior Courtney Dunn (6-4) and sophomore Julie Seabrook (6-3) are two likely candidates to pick up some of the slack inside.

But the Buffs' influx of guards means they'll be relying less on the inside game and more on using their athleticism to press and play an up-tempo style of basketball.

"We've got so many different looks (with the different guards) that I think we're going to be more difficult to guard," McConnell-Miller said.

The fast-paced style has the players excited, as does the higher level of play they've faced from each other with their offseason work and the new faces.

"When we play pickup, we challenge each other," Houston said. "It's a competition in practice."

Despite all of the optimism, climbing the ladder in the loaded Big 12 won't be easy, and the league's coaches picked CU to finish 11th in their preseason poll released Thursday.

Inside the CU locker room, though, the mentality has changed.

"We don't work like we're 11th, we don't work like we're 12th," Smith said. "We work like we're No. 1, and that's our mentality, to be No. 1."

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college basketball: cu women

Colorado women's hoops going one speed - fast

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post
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BOULDER — Calling the Colorado women's basketball team the "Runnin' Buffs" this season might not be enough.

"Sprintin' Buffs," anyone?

In her fifth season, coach Kathy McConnell-Miller is turning up the tempo. Her guard-oriented lineup might at times resemble a relay team — in full stride.

Junior point guard Whitney Houston, a 5-foot-5 blur, is back after sitting out the 2008-2009 season following ACL surgery on her left knee. And the addition of athletic freshmen including 5-10 point guard Janeesa "Chucky" Jeffery of Colorado Springs Sierra and 6-2 identical twins Meagan and Brenna Malcolm-Peck of Horizon provided a needed infusion of depth, length and, especially, quickness.

"First and foremost, I feel like nobody is going to

be able to press us," Houston said Friday during CU women's basketball media day interviews. "The fast break is going to be the best thing that has happened to this team. We're not going to slow down. Coach (McConnell-Miller) is telling me to, 'Go go, go, go.'"

"It's not going to be an easy task to play us. We're going to go hard all the time."

The Buffs hope to make a dramatic improvement on last year's records of 11-18 overall and 3-13 in the Big 12. McConnell-Miller said the Buffaloes simply did not have enough players or athleticism to compete in "the strongest conference in America." Optimism abounds this season. Junior forward Brittany Spears, who averaged 18.3 points last season and earned second-team all-Big 12 honors, has more help.

"We have more weapons than we've ever had," McConnell-Miller said. "You're not going to be able to take away one of our players and shut us down. I'm as excited as I've been to start a season."

CU was a different team without Houston, the coach said. Bianca Smith, Alyssa Fressle and Kelly Jo Mullaney often shared the point-guard duties. But they are more comfortable playing off the ball and looking for shots.

"We turned the ball over more without Whitney, we were very easy to defend, we were predictable," McConnell-Miller said. "With Whitney in there, teams won't know what to expect."

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Jeffery also can put opponents on their heels.
"Chucky doesn't even know when she makes mistakes because she just keeps playing," McConnell-Miller said.

Huston and Jeffery could share point-guard time at the point and, on occasion, they may be on the court at the same time when McConnell-Miller really wants to turn on the jets. Jeffery was nicknamed after her grandfather, Charles, because Chucky's parents thought she would be a baby boy.

"We have a couple of bigs, but everybody on our team can run," said Jeffery, who averaged 22.1 points, 12.9 rebounds, 4.9 steals, 4.6 assists and three blocked shots as a high school senior.
"That's pretty much what we're going to do - killing them with our speed."

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All Things Colorado Sports — Blogs — The Denver Post

OCTOBER 16, 2009, 2:06 PM

CU's Houston aims to give opponents a problem

By **TOM KENSLE** |  No Comments

Colorado junior point guard Whitney Houston told reporters Friday during CU's women's basketball media day that she is 100-percent recovered from the torn ACL in her left knee that required surgery last fall and kept her off the court for the 2008-2009 season.

"I have all my speed back," said Houston, a 5-foot-5 blur from Memphis who averaged 6.1 points during her first two seasons. "I'm ready to go."

That's good news for a team (11-18 overall and 3-13 in the Big 12 in 2008-2009) that intends to play faster this season.

"With Whitney, we're not predictable, we're not easy to defend," CU coach Kathy McConnell-Miller, who is beginning her fifth season in Boulder.

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OCTOBER 21, 2009, 4:52 PM

Optimism reigns at Big 12 media days

By [TOM KENSLE](#) |  No Comments

One thing I have always enjoyed about preseason conference media days is that all the coaches are in such a good mood.

After all, each team is undefeated. All coaches are optimistic.

Here are comments from a few coaches Wednesday during the Big 12 women's basketball media day in Kansas City:

Missouri coach Cindy Stein: "We have great players that are working hard. We believe in what they're doing. People want to know why we think we're going to have a successful year – I think the biggest ingredients are we have the will to win, we have the work ethic to win and our hearts are bigger than they've ever been."

Colorado coach Kathy McConnell-Miller: "It's an exciting time right now for Colorado basketball. ... For our perception, and the way we feel right now, our best basketball is yet to come. ... Right now there's just a great vibe in practice."

Texas Tech coach Kristy Curry: "As young as we are, I think we have a chance to really do some special things."

And to think Missouri, Colorado and Texas Tech were picked in the Big 12 coaches poll to finish 12-11-10, in that order.

"We are going to prove everybody wrong," Missouri's Stein said.

OK, we get it. Expect the Big 12 men's coaches to be just as optimistic on Thursday during their media-day interviews.

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