

CU Buffs basketball player Brittany Spears' claim to fame: Effort

CU forward immerses herself in sport, classes

By **Ryan Thorburn**, Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 10/22/2009 12:05:59 AM MDT



KANSAS CITY, Mo. -- Kathy McConnell-Miller's heart skipped a beat this summer.

The director and assistant director of the Coors Events Center entered the office of the Colorado women's basketball coach and told her they wanted to talk about a problem with Brittany Spears.

"I thought, 'Oh my God, what could she have done? What happened?'" McConnell-Miller said.

The issue? It turns out Spears, who spends her evenings alone in the Coors Events Center working on her already impressive game, wasn't shutting the lights off when her marathon shooting sessions ended.

McConnell-Miller, after promising to do her part to make sure Spears flipped the switches on her way out of the gym, exhaled and smiled. "She has the money," Spears joked of the Coors Events Center electricity bill. "She can pick it up."

Two years ago, Spears -- who never displayed her sense of humor or any aspects of her personality outside of the locker room -- received media attention because an infamous pop star shared her name.

Then her play started doing the talking. Spears became the second player in program history to reach 1,000 points by the end of her sophomore season, joining CU Athletic Hall of Famer Lisa Van Goor on the exclusive list.

The soft-spoken Spears was named to the All-Big 12 second team last season and has emerged as the Buffs' team leader. She represented CU alongside her coach during Big 12 media days on Wednesday at the Sprint Center.

"I think she's very well respected after visiting with other coaches and sharing today with her. I've gotten a lot of great feedback about the

respect other players have for her around the league," McConnell-Miller said. "There's no doubt everybody in the league knows her name and it's not because she has the same name as a pop star."

Spears has already scored 1,002 points, grabbed 542 rebounds and blocked 88 shots during her CU career. She led the Buffs in scoring (18.3 ppg), rebounding (7.8 rpg), steals (1.9 spg) and blocks (1.1 bpg) during the 2008-09 campaign.

But with the losses of Jackie McFarland (graduation), Aija Putnina (left the program) and Whitney Houston (knee injury) before the season, McConnell-Miller's star was unable to shine much light on the scoreboard as CU finished 11-18 overall and 3-13 in the Big 12.

Now Spears has a lot more talent around her. Houston is healthy again, Alyssa Fressle and Julie Seabrook should have more of an impact as sophomores, and a gifted recruiting class is ready to make an immediate impact.

The Buffs were picked to finish 11th in the conference by the Big 12 coaches, but McConnell-Miller and her players are well aware of the fact that 14 of the conference's 30 leading scorers and 11 of the top 20 rebounders are not returning.

"Nobody here has had a game yet and we don't know what's going to happen," Spears said. "Every team in the Big 12 is talented and has more than one good player on their team. I think we have a lot of good players now."

McConnell-Miller knew Spears was shy while courting her on the recruiting trail, but she was able to converse with the 6-1 forward enough during her time at prep school to make a connection and convince the gifted prospect from Pasadena, Calif., that CU was the right fit.

"Coach believed in me that I could make it here academically," Spears said. "They were always checking on me and showed me that they cared about me as a person."

During her time in Boulder, the coaching staff has never had to worry about Spears hitting the books. The only concern has been making sure she isn't too tired after studying and conducting her own workouts.

"What surprises me the most about Spears is what she does above and beyond what's required. I see that in basketball and academics," McConnell-Miller said. "If six hours are required for study hall, she's getting more. If we meet with tutors once a week, she's doing it twice. She's always stopping by the academic office to make sure she's on track and doing what she's supposed to do."

Spears obviously does a great job of leading by example. With such a young roster -- CU has five true freshmen, two sophomores and just one senior (Bianca Smith) -- the coaches needed No. 22 to be more vocal on the court.

"Coach told me, 'If you speak up, they will listen to you.' So I spoke up, and they started listening," Spears said. "When I was a freshman Kara (Richards) and other players helped me out by talking to me. I think it's good because I'm a leader now."

Spears isn't completely comfortable with her new role as team spokesperson. She would rather have been alone in the Coors Events Center than in front of the cameras and tape-recorders at the Sprint Center.

"I really don't go out a lot. I don't like house parties and stuff like that, I just feel claustrophobic," Spears said. "I just like playing basketball. When I'm in the gym I think about how someone else is out there working hard and trying to get better. If I go to a party that means I'm not going to be in the gym that night. I want to play basketball for a long time. I don't want a regular job until I have to. I want to be the best I can be."

A lights-out player.

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Five good minutes with K-Mac

Written by [ryan](#) in Wednesday, October 21st 2009 under [Uncategorized](#)
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KANSAS CITY — Greetings from the Sprint Center.

Colorado women's basketball coach Kathy McConnell-Miller, entering her fifth season in Boulder, believes the Buffs can finally take a step forward in the Big 12.

Here are some of excerpts from her conversation with the Camera at the Big 12 media days on Wednesday.

Thorburn: Brittany Spears has scored just over 1,000 points in her first two seasons at CU, a historic pace only Lisa Van Goor has experienced. But now that you have surrounded her with more talent, will her scoring average have to come down or will she continue to put up big numbers.

K-Mac: With the exception of one play last year when we had the ball in her hands at the end of the game against Nebraska, we have never designed one play to get Brittany Spears a shot or a look. It has always come within the offense. With what we're doing now, playing with more guards and more uptempo, that's only going to enhance her opportunities. Her biggest challenge is teams are really going to key on her."

Thorburn: Surprised about anything you've seen during the first week of practices.

K-Mac: Julie Seabrook has been a pleasant surprise with her confidence. She was very good last year as a freshman, along with Alyssa (Fressle). Alyssa was aggressive and an A-type personality who goes 100 percent and never lets up. Then you have Julie, who was more reserved and watched and learned. Now I'm starting to see that personality that we need to see from Julie — aggressiveness, calling for the ball in the post, being a leader.

Thorburn: Since Whitney Houston is clearly your starting point guard, will Chucky Jeffery serve as the backup or do you need to get her on the court at another position.

K-Mac: That's a great question. That's something we are continuing to explore. Chucky is getting reps at point guard but she is also going to play the two and the three spot. It remains to be seen when Whitney comes off the floor who steps into that spot. We have a lot of players challenging for it.

Thorburn: The Big 12 loses a number of dominant players from last season when nine of the 12 teams made it to the postseason. Do you think CU (picked 11th) can be a surprise team.

K-Mac: There is so much uncertainty in the league because there are going to be a lot of freshmen playing. It's going to change the dynamics of the league and the uncertainty is exciting for us. Any team can flourish.

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Buffaloes forward Spears embraces leadership role

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

Posted: 10/22/2009 01:00:00 AM MDT

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Speaking Wednesday during Big 12 women's basketball media day interviews, Colorado coach Kathy McConnell-Miller said one reason for optimism is junior forward Brittany Spears taking on a greater leadership role.

Quiet by nature, Spears has become more vocal. The 6-foot-1 Californian ranked third among Big 12 scorers last season with 18.3 points per game.

"With the addition of some young players and the subtraction of some (veteran) players, Brittany has seen her role evolve," McConnell-Miller said. "But the message has been the same since Day One. Your best players have to be your leaders.

"It doesn't have to necessarily be vocal. It could be by example, with looking out for your teammates, being a big sister to your teammates

and showing them every day in practice what it takes to be the best you can be at this level."

Spears said she never thought about speaking up before this year.

"I just thought, 'I'll just play basketball and do what I do,'" Spears said. "Now, I realize that I can help my teammates by being a leader."

Colorado (11-18, 3-13 Big 12 in 2008-09) was picked to finish 11th (ahead of Missouri) in the Big 12 coaches preseason poll. But McConnell-Miller said she feels "very good" about her team as she enters her fifth season in Boulder.

"This year (with the addition of five newcomers), we don't have a lot of uncertainties," the coach said. "Our best basketball is yet to come."

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