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Colorado Student-Athlete Spotlight: Kaitlyn Burkett

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By Nick Bernal

Big 12 Campus Correspondent

University of Colorado senior volleyball standout Kaitlyn Burkett is embracing her new role on the team. More like roles, actually - not only is she the lone senior and team captain, Burkett is the right side hitter as well.

Burkett spent the first three years of her collegiate career as a setter. Her freshman year she saw action in eight games as she studied under and prepared to replace All-American setter Ashley Nu'u. She proceeded to start all 57 matches during her sophomore and junior seasons before being asked to make the switch to right side hitter prior to her senior season.



Courtesy: Big12Sports.com

"I'm really starting to enjoy it," Burkett said. "It's just a really different aspect of the game, but it's a lot of fun and I'm enjoying hitting the ball.

The coaching staff approached me about making the switch; I used to be a hitter in high school, so I have the ability to do that and I think they saw that and wanted to utilize that. That's when they approached me about playing some right side in addition to playing some setter - just trying to be versatile."

Now a few matches into the switch, she has embraced and adjusted to the change. Having prior experience has helped smooth her transition, but there has still been an adjustment period.

"It's going good," Burkett said. "There have definitely been moments when I feel a little out of position, but I'm getting used to the switch and I'm enjoying it. My high school experience has helped, but I hadn't done it in three years so it took a little time, but I'm starting to pick it back up."

Burkett has been the Buffs' floor general the last two seasons, but now her leadership responsibilities extend well beyond the court. As the team's only senior, her leadership is more important because the team is directed by first-year coach Liz Kritza.

"It's definitely a different position in terms of leadership," Burkett explained. "The setter usually takes leadership of the team because they're involved in every play, but now as a right side I find myself taking a different type of leadership. Now I'm more the girl to put the ball away, so it's different but I'm enjoying the role.

"As the lone senior, I'm taking a bigger leadership role in that way too. We definitely have a very young team this year. I'm trying to provide the girls with not just volleyball insight but with everything outside of volleyball as well. I want to be the shoulder they can lean on and the person they can look up to, and go to for advice. This team is great, every girl has been great and I'm looking forward to leading this team and being a part of this team."

Burkett has been more than her share of pressure-filled situations, but her current position on the team differs from her previous experiences because the pressure is not limited to the volleyball court.

"I would say so," Burkett said. "But it's a good pressure because I want to be successful, I want our coaching staff to be successful and I want our team to be successful. It's just a pressure to go out and perform and to be a leader. I need to make sure that everyone knows what they are doing, where they are going and to make sure that we're performing our best."

Burkett has also been mentoring and helping to groom her replacement at setter, Megan Cyr. She was previously a member of the Canadian Junior National Team and tried out for the National Team last summer. She knows how valuable advice from an experienced setter can be, the luxury of being able to study under Nu'u was invaluable and she is trying to help Cyr make a smooth transition into the starting lineup.

"Megan reminds me a lot of myself," Burkett said. "She has a lot of potential and she's really good already and she's only a freshman. She's going to do great things for this program and be a great leader for years to come. She's really coming out and becoming a force. I know what she's going through being a young setter, so I'm able to give her advice on when to set and where to set and how to differentiate between the two.

"I have definitely helped her out with that, but she's helped me out and given me advice with my setting as well so we're a good duo together because we work so well together. We're really good friends and that helps us both on and off the court."

Always thinking team first, Burkett is more than happy to do whatever she can to benefit the team, and her versatility has become a huge asset to the new coaching staff. She says that despite making the switch to right side hitter, she still gets opportunities to return to her more familiar role of setting.

"Yeah, I've been playing a little setter in the games this year," Burkett said. "I think that option is always there and we'll use it. We're kind of down on hitters right now because Schylur (Edelman) is out right now, so we're using different lineups and seeing what works right now."

Despite being a young team in the midst of learning a new system under a new coaching staff, Burkett says the team has not lowered expectations and is driven to return to the NCAA tournament.

"I know a team goal of ours is to make it to NCAA's," Burkett said. "The last two years we didn't do it, but this year I think we can and I think that is our main goal. Individually, I just want to be a good role model to the girls, playing every position that I can and being versatile and doing it to the best of my abilities."

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