

Road-weary CU spikers return home

Bufs open at Coors today vs. No. 24 San Diego

By Ryan Thorburn Camera Sports Writer
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Getting on an airplane was about the last thing first-year Colorado volleyball coach Liz Kritza wanted to do this week.

In the span of seven days, the Buffs traveled to Gainesville, Fla., for a tournament, bussed to a road game in Greeley and flew out to New Haven, Conn., to play three games in two days.

But as CU's jet-lagged 2009 squad prepares for its first home games of the season, Kritza was out on the road recruiting for the future.

"It's difficult for a young team to be on the road and away from home," said assistant coach Tom Hogan, who ran practices leading up to this weekend's Colorado Invitational. "Waking up Thursday mornings at 3:15 a.m. and hopping on a 6 a.m. flight and doing the same thing on Sunday, it's difficult and it wears on their bodies and minds. But this group definitely accepted the challenge well. I was really impressed because I didn't hear one complaint the entire time."

The Buffs (3-3) are 3-0 in neutral-court matches (defeated Valparaiso, Fairfield and Georgetown) and 0-3 in true road games (lost at Florida, Northern Colorado and Yale).

Today will be another long day for CU, which will play Denver on the road at 11 a.m. and No. 24 San Diego in the Coors Events Center opener at 7 p.m.

"It's all going really well, actually," sophomore outside hitter Becah Fogle said when asked about the transition to Kritza's style of play. "We have been getting better on the road. We did well in Florida and Connecticut, and our team is doing awesome together."

Fogle and freshman outside hitter Kerra Schroeder were named to the all-tournament team at the Yale Invitational.

The Buffs have been without junior middle blocker Schylur Edelman, one of the most experienced and talented players on the thin roster, all season due to a high ankle sprain. The coaches are hoping to get her back in time for the start of Big 12 play.

"Really, it's dealing with our consistency right now," Hogan said. "As a young and inexperienced team you're going to have inconsistency in the way you play. We're trying to build that consistency from match to match."

The Buffs are also trying to execute Kritza's system, which emphasizes playing fast to neutralize the advantage many conference foes have in height and jumping ability.

"Overall, our system is definitely improving," Fogle said. "This whole system and the new ideas the coaches have brought is doing really well for me. It's pretty difficult to learn and get used to, but once you get used to it and get a feel for it, it works really well."

CU is 8-1 all-time against DU with the only loss coming in the first meeting between the programs on Sept. 16, 1986. The Buffs are 2-0 all-time against San Diego.

The Colorado Invitational concludes with a match against Cal Poly at 7 p.m. on Saturday at the Coors Events Center.

"We are excited to finally play at home after starting off this season with six road matches and traveling cross country two weekends in a row," Kritza said after Saturday's loss to Yale. "That is a lot to ask from any team, especially one in the position this team is in with the youth and inexperience on this roster in the first year of a learning new systems and acclimating to a new coaching staff."

Making a name**for themselves**

Bill Hempen's Buffs -- coming off a dramatic overtime victory over DU and a tough loss to Oregon at the Colorado Soccer Classic -- host Utah at 4 p.m. today at Prentup Field and then travel to Florida to take on the 14th-ranked Gators in Gainesville at 11 a.m. on Sunday.

Why did the coach put together such a brutal non-conference schedule?

"I always ask (recruits) to give me the first five schools you think of when you think of women's soccer," Hempen said before the season began. "Colorado is never one of those top five. That's my goal is to be one of those teams."

The 20th-ranked Buffs (3-2) have already played No. 11 Oklahoma State and No. 13 Illinois with a trip to No. 3 Stanford still looming.

Notable

Colorado head track and field coach Mark Wetmore announced on Wednesday the hiring of Drew Morano, a six-time all-Mountain West performer at Colorado State, as the Buffs sprints and hurdles coach. "Drew has served a year with us as a volunteer assistant and during that time he proved his work ethic, technical competency and that he was a good match for our staff and our style." ... Both CU golf teams return to action with the men competing at New Mexico's tournament in Albuquerque beginning Friday and the women competing in Colorado State's tournament beginning next Monday. ... Colorado will host a USTA/ITA match play tennis tournament on Sunday for juniors, college players, professionals and adults. Gates to the South Campus courts open at 7:30 a.m.

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Bufs host Utes Friday afternoon

Squad aims to build up defense

By Esteban L. Hernandez on September 11, 2009

Besides victory, the Colorado Buffaloes soccer team will take the field against Utah Friday with an additional objective: To begin developing a consistent defense.

Head coach Bill Hempen summed up his team's long term goal as the Bufs prepare for Friday's clash.

"Defenders have to almost be like sisters," Hempen said. "They've got to know what everyone is doing, and right now we are a dysfunctional family."

After a frustrating loss at home against Oregon, Hempen said his team could use some work in the back, an issue that has trifled the head coach since the beginning of the season.

"The back line is just something that has been bugging me since August 5th, actually since after we lost last year because I knew I had to rebuild the defense from that," Hempen said. "Hopefully we are closer, but we're still not a complete team right now."

According to Hempen, the team hasn't started the same group of players in the back since the first game in August.

Sophomore defender Kelci Newlin agrees with the coach's remarks on the defense and said that after reviewing film, she admits the team had trouble with spacing against Oregon last week.

"Being connected in the back is really important," Newlin said. "Organization is a big part in the back. We've been working on shooting a lot more and then just attacking and defending corner [kicks] and set pieces."

Senior goalkeeper Kara Linder said she wants to end the weekend with two wins over Utah and at Florida on Sunday, while focusing on Hempen's objective.

"We're going to really focus on organization and being accountable for each other," Linder said.

As for Utah, Linder has some ideas about the team's overall composure.

"[Coach] said they were a well-coached team," Linder said. "Last year we went up early on them, so we expect a lot. We want to come out with high energy and try to come out on top this Friday."

Newlin also shared her view on the Utes.

"I know they are really good ball-winners in the air, I think they are a really united team," Newlin said. "They are pretty connected; they play well together."

Hempen said Utah's head coach, Rich Manning, is very orderly.

"[Rich Manning's] team will be organized," Hempen said. "He does a good job of finding his teams strengths and playing for their strength and I am expecting nothing less from him."

The 4 p.m. game at Prentup Field will be Colorado's last home match for nearly two weeks, another reason why Newlin believes a home victory could aid team morale.

"We need a confidence booster," Newlin said. "This could be like the perfect opportunity to come out on top and get our confidence back."

Hempen believes in addition to defensive improvement, one other area is due for change.

"We are a very nice team," Hempen said. "We have to be a little bit more cheeky."

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