

## No. 8 Cornhuskers sweep CU spikers

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The Colorado volleyball team was unable to repeat history on Saturday.

Colorado, which knocked off then-No. 2 Nebraska at home last season, was swept by the Cornhuskers, ranked No. 8 coming into Saturday's match at the Coors Events Center.

The Buffs were strong at the net, out-blocking Nebraska, but it did little to stop the Cornhuskers as Colorado fell 25-15, 25-22, 25-13.

Colorado notched a season high 13 blocks.

"Our blocking is huge," CU coach Liz Kritza said. "This team has to be able to be strategic and play the game at a high level. We are learning what it means to have different types of blocking strategies. The system is our strength, and that is the reason we are coming up with 13 blocks against one of the best offensive and blocking teams in the country. That's a good highlight for this young group, and we are building on it."

The Buffs (5-6 overall, 0-2 Big 12) out-blocked Nebraska (9-2, 2-0) by a tally of 13-7.

Blocking-wise, CU's Rosie Steinhaus put up one solo and three assists, while Alex Penewell had four block assists and Kaitlyn Burkett recorded a pair of solo blocks and a pair of assists. Nikki Kinzer added three block assists and Kerra Schroeder joined in with one solo and two assists.

But as strong as CU was at blocking, the hitting never warmed up.

Colorado hit just .042 in the match and tallied just 19 kills. Becah Fogle hammered six of those and Steinhaus tallied five. Nebraska recorded a .183 percentage with 41 kills. Lindsey Licht led the Huskers with 16.

After facing top-10 teams Iowa State and Nebraska this past week, the schedule doesn't get any easier for the Buffs. Colorado next hosts No. 2 Texas at 7 p.m. on Wednesday.

"We have Texas coming up, so that is going to be really tough, too," Steinhaus said. "We have to learn from the things we didn't do well, and from those we did do well. We have to carry that over into next Wednesday."

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## Collegiate volleyball: Sport or full-time job?

It doesn't get busier than being a CU volleyball player

*By David Starcer on September 19, 2009*

The alarm clock goes off, it's 7:30 in the morning.

While most college students would hit the snooze button to avoid taking that first history midterm, there are a special few who roll out of bed to begin what will be another long, tiring day.

These early birds have a lot of preparation to do before class starts, beginning with weight training.

Wait, weight training?

"Then I have to run home, eat breakfast, shower, go to class, and then come back [to the Coors Events Center] to get ready for practice," said Kaitlyn Burkett, the lone senior and co-captain of the Colorado Buffaloes volleyball team.

Practice goes from 4-7 p.m., which may not leave much time for homework.

"It's like a full-time job," Burkett said. "I think about it 24/7. But I wouldn't have it any other way."

First-year head coach Liz Kritza said according to NCAA rules, teams are allowed a maximum of six days of practice a week with no more than four hours a day allotted to team activities. This includes regular practice weight lifting, watching film or any other activity deemed an "athletic" event. That's 24 hours a week — not counting game time — that these women have to dedicate to the sport, in addition to their responsibilities as a student.

"Academics are paramount," Kritza said. "You have to tend to your studies first, otherwise there are no athletics."

Their training regimens are just as rigorous as football, basketball or just about any other sport.

"I know people always laugh and say, 'You don't run more than five feet,' but we train a lot," Burkett said. "We'll go hard in workouts, running, jumping, agility training and conditioning. It's very intense."

Burkett said volleyball is even harder to train for than most other sports.



Senior Kaitlyn Burkett sets the ball in the Sept. 11 game against San Diego. (CU Independent file/Ilana Finer)

"You have to be in a different kind of shape [for volleyball] than you do for any other sport," Burkett said.

According to Kritza, it's all about technique in volleyball.

"Volleyball skills are not innate," Kritza said. "Nobody is born to be a good volleyball player. Obviously, athleticism increases the possibility of you being better, but you still have to have the technique. Technique and skill go hand-in-hand."

Kritza, a Colorado Springs native who came back to the state after spending 14 years at Tulane University in New Orleans, believes so much in this philosophy that she went out and hired Tom Hogan, a member of the USA Women's Volleyball National Team coaching staff, as an assistant coach.

"You have to have someone who can develop athleticism into volleyball skill," Kritza said. "There's no direct correlation. A high-level athlete, only with the proper technical training, will develop the skills necessary to be an accomplished player."

In addition to Kritza's training philosophy, she said her blueprint for rebuilding the volleyball program is centered on hard work and the importance of the team unit.

"You want that culture [of hard work] to be created and the expectation of success has to be there," Kritza said. "With us, there's continual improvement and the inevitable byproduct of that is success in the wins-and-losses column."

Success in the wins-and-losses column is something that is often difficult for a first-year coach, and patience is a virtue most programs and fan-bases cannot afford. Just ask CU football boosters. But Kritza has done this before, going 28-6 in each of her last two years at Tulane after starting her tenure 5-16 in New Orleans. For a team that was picked to finish 10th in the Big 12 Conference this year, establishing CU as a contender is the objective for Kritza and her young team.

That's something that her players agree with as well.

"I'm just excited to start Big 12 play," said sophomore outside hitter Rosie Steinhaus. "We've had some great matches [in non-conference play], and I think we're on the right track for going the rest of the way."

Steinhaus is coming off back-to-back stellar performances, leading the team in kills in their straight-set win over Cal Poly last weekend and their tough loss to No. 10 Iowa State in their conference opener on Wednesday.

Things aren't going to get any easier for the Buffs as they will host No.8 Nebraska in Boulder on Saturday, before hosting No. 2 Texas four days later.

So what's Kritza's take on the brutal start to CU's schedule?

"We look at this as a huge opportunity; not a challenge, but an opportunity," Kritza said. "We get to put our system to the test as well as our players and see what we're really made of."

The circumstances for this week's Nebraska game mirror those of last season. The Huskers came into Boulder ranked second in the nation with an unblemished 20-0 record, but they left with a three-sets-to-one loss to an unheralded Colorado team.

For Burkett, it's a memorable moment in her playing career that she'd like to replicate this season.

“They bring like 3,000 Nebraska fans here, and to beat them on our home court when they were ranked No. 2 was awesome,” Burkett said. “To do it again this year would be really great.”

However, in the grand scheme of things, the team knows the fate of the season does not hinge on this one match.

“We’re just going to treat it like any other match and come in focused and ready to win,” Burkett said.

For the 21st straight year, CU has finished above .500 in non-conference play with a 5-4 record this season. But the Buffs will really have to step up their game against Nebraska, who comes in with an 8-2 record and fresh off their conference-opening win over Texas Tech on Wednesday.

Steinhaus and fellow sophomore Becah Fogle are two of three top scorer this season with a combined 190 kills. They will have to continue their aggressive play against the Cornhuskers on Saturday.

Colorado will look to make some noise in the Big 12 this season, especially if their training regimen is any indication to their performance on the court.

There most likely will be some setbacks, as is the case with any young team with a first-year head coach, but the Buffs will be doing 7 a.m.-to-7 p.m. everyday, regardless.

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