

Bufs' Burkett has strong leadership role model

CU's lone senior grew up following Kritza's path

By Ryan Thorburn Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 09/23/2009 12:08:41 AM MDT

Liz Kritza didn't inherit much depth or experience when she was hired as Colorado's volleyball coach on Feb. 10.

There was, however, one very familiar face in the locker room when she arrived.

Kritza and Kaitlyn Burkett both grew up in the same Colorado Springs neighborhood and were star volleyball players at St. Mary's High School, where CU's head coach was a legend before graduating in 1995 and CU's only senior also made a name for herself before graduating in 2006.

"I know our high school was so excited that Liz got the job. We went to the same little elementary school, so I always knew about Liz Kritza because she was such a big-time volleyball player," Burkett said. "She built up the program in high school, so I was blessed to sort of work off of her. St. Mary's has always had a strong volleyball program because of what she was able to do."

It's going to take some time before Kritza can build the Bufs into a Big 12 contender. She said Burkett can help lay the foundation this season by taking charge of a young team.

"Kaitlyn shoulders a big burden because she is the lone senior on this team and it's not easy for her because I expect a lot from her," Kritza said. "It's difficult when you face a really tough schedule and you have to allow time for a young team to get their feet under them and learn how to play the game."

"So the way she responds, the way she leads, is crucial to the success of this team."

The Bufs (5-6 overall, 0-2 Big 12) -- coming off back-to-back losses to No. 10 Iowa State and No. 8 Nebraska -- continue their brutal early-conference schedule tonight when they host No. 2 Texas at the Coors Events Center.

The Longhorns are 7-0 this season and CU will be the first opponent they have faced that was not ranked entering the match. Texas swept Baylor and Iowa State to open Big 12 play.

"Texas will contend for a national championship. They really are one of the elite teams in the country this year, mostly because of their physical prowess," Kritza said. "They're so athletic and their offense is based on having quality players who can reach really high. They have a number of players who are touching close to 11 feet."

"Those athletic differences and physical attributes are what set them apart from so many teams in the country. It's going to be a great challenge for us to play arguably the best team in the country."

In order to pull off what would be a stunning upset, CU will have to be very aggressive when serving, avoid unforced errors and find a way to get the Longhorns' out of rhythm on offense. Texas is led by All-American returners Ashley Engle (setter), Destinee Hooker (outside hitter) and Juliann Faucette (outside hitter).

"It's kind of an eye-opener for some of these younger girls, just realizing how tough the Big 12 is every night," Burkett said when asked about starting the conference grind against three top-10 teams. "It's funny to watch film from a month ago to now. We see the difference. And it's exciting to see it and it makes us want to work harder and keep improving."

The Bufs enter tonight's match with much to gain. They are expected to lose but prepared to win in the film room and on the practice court.

"Is Texas beatable? Yeah," Kritza said. "It will take our best performance individually and team-wise, but anything can happen on any given night. That's the beauty of athletics, particularly a game like volleyball where it is a true team sport. ...

"Every time we play a top-10 opponent it's like taking a magnifying glass to our team. We are really able to show them video and show them where they're getting better and where they need to improve. They can see how they're measuring up against the barometer of college volleyball."

Notable

CU's tennis team opens its fall schedule hosting the three-day Colorado Invitational beginning Friday. Air Force, Arkansas, Colorado State and Louisiana-Lafayette make up the rest of the field.

Play begins at 8:30 a.m. on Friday and then continues at 9 a.m. Saturday and Sunday. Friday and Saturday play will be all day with Sunday a half day.

On Friday morning at 8:30 a.m., the Buffs will kick off the event with a presentation to HealthLinks Foundation and the Boulder Community Hospital with the earnings from the 2009 Tennis Marathon for Breast Cancer. Everyone is welcome and free to watch all of the weekend's events.

Bill Hempen's soccer team will try to snap a three-game losing streak -- all against nationally ranked opponents -- and improve to 2-0 in Big 12 play when Nebraska visits Prentup Field for a 4 p.m. match on Friday. The Buffs, who opened the season with a victory over Oklahoma State, also host Iowa State at 1 p.m. on Sunday.

Close Window

Send To Printer

- [News](#)
- [Entertainment](#)
- [Sports](#)
- [Opinion](#)
- [Subscribe](#)

Bufs look to challenge Longhorns

Volleyball hosting No. 2 Texas on Wednesday

By Gina Yocom on September 23, 2009

It's an exciting time for the Colorado Buffaloes volleyball team.

Colorado is entering deeper into the Big 12 Conference portion of its schedule — with arguably the best teams in the country coming to Boulder — by playing Texas on Wednesday and Oklahoma on Saturday.

The Texas Longhorns are ranked second in the nation, but that doesn't scare the Bufs.

"That will be [the Longhorns'] advantage, being bigger and being able to score at such a high pace," said CU head coach Liz Kritza. "We need to lessen that advantage as much as possible."

Because of this advantage, the Bufs are expected to play a more intelligent game on their side of the net.

Kritza knows the challenge the Bufs will face when Texas comes into the Coors Events Center.

"They have some of the most dynamic, athletic, powerful hitters in the country," Kritza said. "So for us, we have to be the aggressive one in our defense."

This doesn't scare Kritza. She said she is confident that the smaller CU team will deliver.

"Our hitters, who will be smaller, but they have to be faster, more aggressive and intelligent," Kritza said.

Senior setter Kaitlyn Burkett and freshman middle blocker Nikki Kinzer said scouting the opponent is a big change they have made this year in comparison with previous years.

"We watch a lot of film," Kinzer said. "Both of our opponent and ourselves, and it helps because there was stuff I didn't know I was doing."

Burkett said watching film has made the team more prepared for matches.

"You get on the court and you feel like you already know what they are going to do," Burkett said.



Freshman outside hitter Kerra Schroeder spikes over Nebraska Sept. 19. (CU Independent file/Adam Alberti)

Burkett, the only senior on the team, said she expects the squad to improve even more after their match with the Longhorns.

"I'm expecting another big step," Burkett said. "We're going in with a mindset that were going to improve."

Texas is really going to test the Bufs, and they know that.

"Every point is going to be a fight, but we're really starting to enjoy and understand the accomplishment in fighting for points against arguably the best team in the country," Kritza said.

If one thing is guaranteed, it is that the Bufs are going to fight, and we can expect this throughout the rest of the Big 12 season, Kritza said.

"Most nights they are going to be bigger than us," Kritza said. "Most nights they are going to jump higher than us, that doesn't mean we can't beat them. It just means we have to be more disciplined and intelligent in our approach to the game."

Contact CU Independent Staff Writer Gina Yocom at Gina.yocom@colorado.edu.

Share and Enjoy:



Posted in [Sports](#)

Copyright © 2009 CU Independent