

Buffaloes close out Big 12 era vs `Huskers

Today`s South Campus match to be CU`s last contest in Big 12

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Posted:

Folsom Field is as quiet as Norlin Library these days.

The only pressure-packed events still scheduled for the Coors Events Center this semester are final exams.

But there is still athletic history to be made on Colorado`s South Campus Courts.

The Buffs will host Nebraska at high noon today in tennis, which will be the final Big 12 sporting event contested in Boulder.

On June 30, 2011, CU will officially become a member of the Pac-12. Nebraska is joining the Big Ten this summer.

This is the only sport where love-love is a part of the Buffs-Cornhuskers story.

"When you see red it gets the blood rising," CU`s Abbie Probert said when asked if any of the emotions associated with the classic football rivalry apply to the hard courts. "It will be the same for us."

The Buffs` last Big 12 season has been a difficult one. Probert is the lone senior on a roster that includes four freshmen, a sophomore and two juniors. CU is currently 3-16 overall and 0-9 in conference matches.

"We`ve been through a lot of ups and downs," head coach Nicole Kenneally said. "Obviously, to go out and get the win would be unbelievable. We`re up for the challenge and ready to keep fighting like Buffaloes."

Kenneally knew there would be some growing pains this season without any experience returning at the No. 1 or No. 2 singles spots and very little experience to draw from at any spot. Entering the Pac-12, CU`s returning players will have garnered the court time necessary to start enjoying some success.

"It`s been pretty tough, that`s undeniable," Probert said. "But no matter what has been happening in the first part of the season and in the Big 12, we`ve approached it with a fresh, positive attitude."

The Buffs are looking forward to a new beginning in the Pac-12, which happens to be the most dominant conference in the sport.

Since the NCAA began crowning a national champion in women`s tennis in 1982, Stanford has won 16 titles, USC has two and UCLA has one. Texas (two titles) is the only Big 12 program with a championship.

The latest rankings include five Pac-10 teams -- No. 2 Stanford, No. 6 UCLA, No. 9 Cal, No. 11 Arizona State and No. 14 USC -- in the top 15. The Big 12 has three teams -- No. 7 Baylor, No. 21 Oklahoma and No. 25 Texas -- in the top 25.

"Colorado moving to the Pac-12 will definitely open some avenues out West," Kenneally said when asked about recruiting and playing in some of tennis` most fertile talent areas. "I would say it`s the elite conference in women`s tennis ... the competition we`re going to get is going to be fabulous."

CU`s players have remained confident individually throughout the final Big 12 campaign and are showing signs of putting things together as a team.

The Buffs are coming off a 6-1 loss to the conference-leading Bears, but three of the matches went three sets and a couple of the straight-set losses were also tightly contested.

A breakthrough victory over Nebraska (17-6, 5-4) would certainly give the CU program some much-needed momentum heading into the regular-season finale at Missouri and the Big 12 Tournament in Waco, Texas.

"Probably indescribable," is how Probert described what it would feel like to beat the Huskers today and end a brutal 13-match losing streak. "It's sad to leave (the Big 12). At the same time, the Pac-12 will be a rise in our competition and it will raise our team's standard."

The Big 12 was formed on Feb. 24, 1994, when the members of the Big Eight added four Texas teams from the Southwest Conference. The athletic competition began on Aug. 31, 1996.

On June 10, 2010, CU accepted an invitation to become the Pac-10's 11th member. The conference later added Utah from the Mountain West. Nebraska accepted an invitation to join the Big Ten a day later.

Today on the South Campus Courts the Buffs and Huskers bring an official end to the era in Boulder. CU leads the all-time women's tennis series 18-16. Perhaps fittingly, the old foes are tied 8-8 in Big 12 matches.

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