

Revamped CU volleyball squad circling CSU

Kritza wants to establish rivalry with strong Rams volleyball program

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Name tags might not be a bad idea for Colorado volleyball practices this year.

Certainly, fans of the program will want to acquire a roster before heading to the Coors Events Center for the 2010 season. Second-year head coach Liz Kritza's current group of 16 players includes 14 newcomers.

"The really great thing is it doesn't matter how high my expectations are. It's really neat as a coach to bring in so many players and to allow them to speak to the expectations for the program," Kritza said during CU's fall sports media day on Saturday at the Dal Ward Center. "Because it's that expectation that will get them in the gym when I can't be training them, it's going to get them in there getting extra reps and working as hard as they need to for us to complete the rebuilding of this program."

Only junior outside hitter Rosie Steinhaus remains from the Pi'i Aiu era. Kerra Schroeder, a true sophomore, is the only other returning player from last season's painful 7-22 finish. There are not any seniors in the program.

"I've grown into that position over the past couple years," Steinhaus said of being the veteran team leader. "I'm pretty excited; we have a great group of girls and we're all excited to move forward."

Despite the on-court struggles in 2009, and basically starting from scratch with nine freshmen and five transfers, Kritza said new doors are opening on the recruiting trail and there is more excitement surrounding the program with construction on a new practice facility underway and a move from the Big 12 to the Pac-12 on the horizon.

"I remember coming in as a recruit and seeing them practice in Carlson Gym, and seeing the locker room there. At that point I was just like, 'I love Boulder, I love the campus, I love the school,'" Schroeder, a San Diego product, said of her recruiting visit and decision to play for Kritza last year. "But in reality we will get a lot more recruits. We have to compete with all of these top schools with these nice locker rooms, nice gyms, nice facilities ... it's a great opportunity."

The Buffs will host Furman (Aug. 27) and Duke (Aug. 28) at the Coors Events Center to open the season before a difficult road trip to Fort Collins to face a Colorado State program that has made 15 consecutive appearances in the NCAA Tournament, including a run to the Sweet 16 in 2009.

While getting the program ready to play the likes of UCLA and Stanford on a yearly basis, Kritza also wants the Buffs to challenge the Rams for Front Range supremacy.

"This year is a great starting off point for us to reestablish that rivalry again. It's been kind of one-sided in the recent history, and we have to prepare our team so it is an actual rivalry," Kritza said. "It can't be one-sided and call it a rivalry because they are right up the road from us. ... I'm looking forward to that rivalry; it's a really good one. (CSU coach) Tom Hilbert is a good friend of mine and I have a great respect for the program that he's built, but we are going to have something that is going to be fun for us to compete against."

CU finished 2-18 in the Big 12 last season. Oklahoma visits the Coors Events Center on Sept. 15 to open the slate and Nebraska will visit Boulder for the final time as a conference rival on Nov. 13.

"The really neat thing from the first season to the second is we know our competition. We've been through a full season in the Big 12," Kritza said. "I knew coming in that it would be very challenging and difficult, it's part of the reason why I came and really a part of the reason a lot of the players are here. Now we know. We know what it means to play No. 3, No. 8, No. 10 in the country in a row."

"So I think there is a greater understanding of the level of play we have to prepare for and that kind of gives a comfort factor in our training level. We know how hard we have to push and how hard we have to prepare to make sure we are putting forth the results that we really feel is our maximum."

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