



Senior Chelsea Dale is putting her all into her final semester of eligibility.
Photo Courtesy: CUBuffs.com



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Brooks: Dale Making Most Of Her Final Semester

BOULDER - Chelsea Dale doesn't see herself living/playing in a "making-up-for-lost-time" mode. It's just the opposite, in fact.

Dale is living/playing in the moment - and largely reveling in it. The fact that she missed the first half of her senior season on the Colorado women's basketball hardly registers with her anymore. Truth is, she's so far past it that it's barely a memory, a foggy one if that.

"It's kind of like now that I'm back in it, I've forgotten that I missed all those games," Dale said. "It doesn't feel like I did; there was nothing different about the way my coaches or my teammates coached me or treated me. It's in the past and we've gone on from there. We still kick each other's butts in practice and all that stuff."

Maybe of more importance, sitting out the fall semester for academic reasons got her full attention and re-focused her priorities. "It was unfortunate it happened, but I took a lot away from it," she said.

A 6-foot-1 senior guard from Palos Verdes Estates, Calif., Dale is making the most of her final semester of hoops. She's started seven of the past 13 games (the ones since regaining her eligibility in mid-December) and is fulfilling the role she's been assigned by Coach Linda Lappe.

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"Her starting is the best thing for our team right now," Lappe said. "I always like to have players that bring energy and a spark off the bench. With her starting, I think we have a good bench game, and I think that's important . . . it's also important to start the games well and I think she's helped us do that."

Dale was her high school's all-time leader in points and three-pointers, but she's adjusted to life on the lower half of the stat sheet at CU. Dale is averaging just under five points and two rebounds a game. Her 63 points in 13 games this season are 20 more than she scored in the first 47 games of her CU career.

"I think every game is kind of a different role for me," she said. "Whether it's defense or offense, I just try and contribute what the coaches need. I'm not the top scorer on the team, I'm not the go-to shooter or anything like that. But when I do get the ball I'm expected to shoot it and knock it down."

"I've never heard it before, but the coaches say if I get a pass and am wide open, I need to knock it down or I'm selfish. I've never heard that before. So I just try to do everything I can, and I feel like I'm doing it pretty well."

The Buffs are coming off what Dale and Lappe consider their "most complete" game of the season - a 70-45 rout of Nebraska last Sunday.

Dale called it "a great win for us . . . every athlete needs the reinforcement that they're great at what they do, and they're contributing. Everyone in that game got that feeling - whether it was defense or offense. When we pulled it all together and saw what damage we could do, that was just a great feeling. We take that going into Saturday's game (against Texas Tech, 4 p.m., Coors Events Center).

"Every game we're always critical of ourselves, no matter how well we did. I think overall it was up there - a solid 'A' for us. Our defense and offense were really good. But like the coaches say, there's always stuff we can watch film on and improve on. But what you really take away from that one is that it was a really good one for us to win."

Lappe agreed, even taking it a step further. In her estimation, it was even more satisfying than last month's 66-60 overtime win against No. 16/17 Iowa State because her team "kind of kept our foot on the gas pedal and didn't let them come back. They made a little run in the second half and we came right back at them and hit them again. And I thought everybody played well, from our post players to our guards, offensively and defensively, and we scored in a lot of different ways and weren't relying on the three."

"But we were knocking them down when they were open and our ball movement was fantastic - probably the best it's been all year. And the defense was as good as on a couple of other occasions. But to put both of them together is always key."

The Buffs haven't played since dispatching the Huskers, and a couple of off-days were welcomed by players and coaches to attend to the small details of life and school. There also was the matter of rest.

"In practice (Wednesday, the first day back) everyone looked and felt great," Dale said. "I think it just gave us a time to refocus on what's coming next - not just the next game but what the road ahead of us might bring. I think, too, it was a great time for us to get our academic stuff in order, because we have been going full speed since the semester started. A good two days is a great time to get caught up on things."

There's a school of thought (probably old school) that contends a break after such a focused, effective performance might lead to losing an edge. But schedules are what they are, and given her thin roster Lappe believes the timing of the break was opportune.

"We'll see how we play (Saturday)," she said. "But I think everybody came back kind of like they did after Christmas . . . our legs were a little tired; we've got some players who've played a lot of minutes because we just don't have a lot of players."

With Big 12 Conference play inching toward its final month, CU is hoping to resurrect last weekend's momentum and sustain it through early March. The arrival of Texas Tech offers a nice first step; the Buffs are tied with the Lady Raiders and Missouri (all are 3-6) for seventh place in the conference. Tech brings a six-game losing streak - currently the

league's longest - to Boulder.

"I think we're really close to peaking and plateauing . . . we're right there," Dale said. "And that's what Coach Lappe is always talking about; she says that February is the month to play our best basketball. I think Sunday's game (against Nebraska) is very indicative of what we can do and what we're becoming."

Dale has a teaching/coaching career in mind, but her options are open; she's also developed an interest in broadcasting and has "made connections" with FSN Rocky Mountain's Alanna Rizzo.

"I could give you the 'parental friendly' version," she said with a laugh when I asked her what's next. "I'm hoping to stay in school and work towards either my masters or teaching certificate. I'll be coaching over the summer (in Colorado). But when fall hits, I'm not quite sure. It's pretty open . . .

"My coaches ask me that and I tell them, 'Right now I'm focusing on making sure I'm not messing up for you during the Big 12 season.' I've told them when stuff starts winding down, that's when I'll look into job offers, interviews and other stuff."

For now, the "job offers, interviews and other stuff" are on hold. There's the more pressing matter of advancing in the Big 12 standings and Dale putting a fitting punctuation mark on her final season.

"I just still think I'm lucky to be here," she said. "So I go into every game thankful that I have the opportunity to play a sport I love and be in an environment that's so awesome. You just can't get much better than this. I just enjoy where I am now. If there's anything more I could do, I would do it.

"If there is, my coaches will tell me and that's what I go for. I'm not really a person who's all about me; I would love to see my teammates go to the NCAA Tournament - that's all we've been working for. It's a step we haven't taken yet, especially the three seniors. We haven't been there, and it would be a great way to close out the year."

A year, a half a year . . . who's counting? Chelsea Dale could have allowed the dubious start of her final season to define her finish. She didn't - and that's been very good for her and her team.

Contact: BG.Brooks@Colorado.EDU

SHOW MENU



Lappe's Buffs focus on their own execution

Without mid-week game, Lappe's squad looked inward

By Joshua Lindenstein Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

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Coach Linda Lappe's Colorado Buffaloes know they won't surprise any foes this time of year with their approach. Nobody is going to shock the Buffs either.

The Buffs have played everyone in the Big 12 North Division at least once. And there's plenty of film to study for the South teams they have yet to play.

"At this point in the season, you're not really adding a whole lot," Lappe said after Friday's practice as her squad prepares to host Texas Tech at 4 p.m. Saturday. "You're just sort of refining everything. Everybody knows our offense. Everybody knows our defense. And we know everybody else's offense and defense."

The Buffs took advantage of their open date in the Big 12 schedule this week by spending a good deal of time focusing on what they can do to better themselves rather than out-fox foes. When everyone knows each other inside and out, superior execution down the stretch can mean the difference between earning a postseason berth or not.

So after a couple of days off to refresh, the Buffs got refresher courses on their own schemes and other fundamental details that are often overlooked when there's a game to play every three days.

"It comes down to execution, focus and playing together," point guard Chucky Jeffery said. "So that's what we're really focusing on right now."

The Buffs (12-10, 3-6) and Lady Raiders (16-7, 3-6) are both teams that have little margin for error when it comes to postseason play.

Colorado needs at least three more wins to become eligible for a WNIT berth. Texas Tech, meanwhile, was ranked in the coaches poll just three weeks ago but would likely find themselves on the outside looking in if NCAA tourney berths were handed out today thanks to their current six-game losing streak.

The Raiders bring a formidable front line to Boulder in 6-foot-3 post players Kierra Mallard (13.0 ppg, 7.4 rpg) and Teena Wickett (10-6 ppg, 6.5 rpg). And the Buffs know stopping that duo will go a long way toward beating Texas Tech.

But Lappe has also tried to impress upon her players the importance of executing their own strengths well in addition to countering the opponent.

"We have to know where we're strong, and we have to make sure we're strong in those areas every single game," Lappe said. "We have to play defense and we have to rebound every single game. And we also have to run the floor."

The transition offense has been a heavy emphasis the last three weeks for the Buffs, who struggle at times in half-court sets because they're often out-manned inside.

Even CU 6-3 forward Julie Seabrook noted the importance Wednesday of everyone running the floor and getting baskets early in the shot clock as opposed to being too deliberate on O.

The proof came in the win over Nebraska on Sunday in which the Buffs increased their tempo and put 70 points on the board after failing to hit 60 during regulation of any previous Big 12 game this season.

"Transition offense for us is something we can get quick scores out of and something we can be really good at because we're a little smaller and we're quick up and down the floor," Seabrook said.

SATURDAY: The Colorado Buffaloes (12-10, 3-6 Big 12) host the Texas Tech Lady Raiders (16-7, 3-6) in a 4 p.m. game at the Coors Events Center.

BROADCAST: No television. Radio on KKZN (760 AM) with Mike Rice (play-by-play) and Carol Callan (color).

STORY LINES: Colorado returns to action after five days off following Sunday's 70-45 win over Nebraska. ... The Buffs have just two home games remaining after today. ... Today's game is CU's annual Pink Zone game to aid in raising awareness for the fight against breast cancer. Fans wearing pink can get general admission seats for \$1. ... Texas Tech enters the game on a six-game skid that includes a 62-52 loss at Oklahoma State on Wednesday.

KEY STAT: The Buffs have lost 17 in a row to Big 12 South Division foes. Their last win came Feb. 16, 2008 at home against Texas.

COACHES: Linda Lappe is 12-10 in her first season at CU and 62-46 overall. Kristy Curry is 82-69 in her fifth season at TTU and 261-120 overall.

PROBABLE STARTERS: **Colorado** -- G Brittany Wilson, 5-8, Fr., 8.6 ppg, 4.0 rpg, 2.0 apg; G Britney Blythe, 5-9, Sr., 3.5 ppg, 1.6 rpg, 1.4 apg; F Chelsea Dale, 6-1, Sr., 4.8 ppg, 1.7 rpg, 0.8 apg; F Brittany Spears, 6-1, Sr., 18.0 ppg, 8.0 rpg, 1.7 spg; F Julie Seabrook, 6-3, Jr., 5.8 ppg, 5.8 rpg. **Texas Tech** -- G Monique Smalls, 5-6, So., 5.0 ppg, 3.1 rpg, 3.4 apg; G Casey Morris, 5-9, So., 9.4 ppg, 3.0 rpg, 2.4 apg; F Jordan Barncastle, 6-2, Jr., 5.0 ppg, 3.3 rpg, 0.6 spg; F/C Kierra Mallard, 6-3, Jr., 13.0 ppg, 7.4 rpg, 1.9 bpg; F/C Teena Wickett, 6-3, Sr., 10.6 ppg, 6.5 rpg, 3.2 apg.

SERIES: Tech has won three straight and leads 16-5 all-time, including a 6-2 advantage in Boulder.

UP NEXT: The Buffs play at Kansas State at 6 p.m. Wednesday.

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