

# Lappe's squad happy for WNIT opportunity

## Bufs hope bid is beginning of program's turnaround

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Britney Blythe had the WNIT website up on her computer on Monday night and couldn't stop hitting the refresh button, anxious for the bracket to be posted.

Most indications were that the 15-15 Colorado Buffaloes would be invited to the postseason basketball tournament. But having nearly a week to sit around after your last game -- especially when it was an ugly Big 12 Tournament loss to Kansas -- gives your mind plenty of time to ponder all scenarios.

"It was a little nerve-wracking because we really weren't over .500 and, knowing what our record was compared to some of the other teams, I'm happy we're in," Blythe said after Tuesday's practice, the Buffs' first since learning their postseason fate. "I think we're pretty excited to redeem ourselves. We didn't want to end the season like that at all."

The Buffs host UC Riverside (19-12) at 7 p.m. Thursday at the Coors Events Center.

Everyone was all-smiles coming off Sox Walseth Court Tuesday.

While the CU men's team was disappointed to be relegated to the NIT after expecting an NCAA tourney bid, the women's squad had to play its way into the WNIT down the stretch by winning three of its final four regular season games.

"It feels good because you know you worked hard for it," said CU senior forward Brittany Spears, who last made the postseason as a freshman when the Buffs reached the WNIT semifinals.

Given that the Buffs had missed the postseason two years in a row and were adjusting to a new coaching staff this season, the WNIT berth is a good first step to where they want to get the program eventually -- back to reaching the NAAs on a regular basis.

The Buffs qualified for the NCAA Tournament 12 times from 1988 to 2004 but have been shut out since then, with their only recent postseason appearance the WNIT run in 2008.

"For where we're at and where we've started, with the bumps that we've hit along the way, I think this is a perfect opportunity for us," coach Linda Lappe said.

The WNIT could become a revenge tour of sorts for the Buffs.

In their quadrant of the 64-team bracket alone, there are three teams CU lost to during the season -- Oklahoma State, Southern Cal and Denver.

The Buffs, of course, know they can't look past UC Riverside. The Highlanders finished third in the Big West Conference one year after reaching the NCAA Tournament.

But it's only human nature to peak at the intriguing matchups possible. Also in the Buffs' quadrant are three future Pac-12 Conference foes in Cal, Arizona and USC.

No matter what, the postseason bid gives the Buffs' seniors a chance to leave CU with their heads held high after a couple of trying years. If the Buffs are to return to their winning ways of old in coming seasons, Blythe, Spears and Chelsea Dale will have a tangible achievement to point toward and feel like they helped set the tone for the rebuilding process.

"I feel like it's a good way to go out," Blythe said. "Hopefully we'll get a taste of this and can make it into the NCAA Tournament next year."

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