



Chelsea Dale and her fellow seniors get another game at the Coors Events Center.
Photo Courtesy: CUBuffs.com



03/16/2011 B.G. Brooks, Contributing Editor

Brooks: Lappe Thinks Big 12 Got Buffs Postseason-Ready

BOULDER - Reaching the NCAA Tournament always is the goal, but in Year One at Colorado for Linda Lappe, simply reaching the postseason has been gratifying. Staying around awhile would make it that much better.

Lappe's first CU team plays a first-round WNIT game against UC-Riverside Thursday at the Coors Events Center (7 p.m.). If the Buffaloes win, they play the Cal Poly-California winner at a site and date (March 19, 20 or 21) to be determined.

"It's been too long since we've been in the postseason; it's just a different vibe, a different feel," Lappe said. "For where we're at, where we started and the bumps we hit along the way, I think this is the perfect opportunity for us. You know where you want to go; it's a good starting point. Our players have earned it; they've had some unbelievable games."

"It's big for any team . . . especially after last season for us," sophomore guard Chucky Jeffery said of

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CU's first postseason appearance since 2008. "It's big for our seniors; we just want to keep playing for them and for us as well. It's just good for our program. We weren't expecting to get a home game, so that's exciting, too."

Lappe and her players believe they've been sharpened for any opponent by competing in the Big 12 Conference. "That's the great thing about playing in the Big 12 - it gets you prepared for postseason," Lappe said. "As a coaching staff we look at playing in one of the best conferences in the nation, we take a lot of pride in that and become confident because of that."

"On the flip side we won six games in the conference while Riverside won 11. They know how to win, they have a good coach, a good program and they're used to doing some really good things."

The Buffs finished 15-15 overall, 6-10 in the Big 12 - the program's best league mark since 2007. CU won three of its final five games, counting an opening-round loss to Kansas in the conference tournament. UC-Riverside finished 19-12 overall and 11-5 (third) in the Big West Conference. The Highlanders closed the regular season with five consecutive wins and defeated Long Beach State 83-65 in the Big West quarterfinals before losing to UC-Davis 44-39 in the semifinals.

"I think we have an advantage coming in from the conference we played in," senior guard Chelsea Dale said. "Every game we've played in has been tough. We've got to take what we've taken from our conference into this game - just the energy in general."

Still, with opponents matched from different conferences, the postseason brings contrasting styles of play, which Lappe says will test the Buffs' flexibility. UC-Riverside features a guard-oriented, motion offense - offensive elements CU didn't confront that much in the Big 12.

"They have a couple of post players, but they run their offense extremely high, they look to penetrate and they move . . . they use a lot of motion, which we haven't seen," Lappe said. "A lot of Big 12 teams don't run a lot of motion . . . (the Highlanders) are constantly moving, cutting and setting screens. It's going to test our defensive principles."

The Highlanders had two players - sophomore guard Tre'Shonti Nottingham, senior guard Alyssa Morris - make first-team All-Big West. Nottingham (13.6 points a game) and Morris (12.3) are among four players averaging in double figures. UC-Riverside averages 64.2 points a game and has allowed 60.6.

While Lappe believes the Big 12 season left her team battle-tested, she said two keys to postseason success is players' level of confidence and how they cope with those different styles of play.

"You never know who has the advantage," Lappe said. "I think in terms of scouting, they have the advantage because we're on TV so many times. They probably have every TV game we've played."

"I heard somebody say that the first two rounds (in postseason) are all about the players, then it becomes the coaches. That's true because you can't watch a lot of film . . . it's going to be whoever shows up and does what they do a little bit better. We just have to make sure we execute better than UC-Riverside."

The Buffs were 13-5 at home this season, defeating a pair of ranked Big 12 teams (No. 17/16 Iowa State, No. 16/15 Oklahoma). They lost their final regular-season home game to third-ranked Baylor,

so Thursday night offers a chance for CU's three seniors - Dale, Brittany Spears, Britney Blythe - to finish at home on better terms.

"I get one more home game . . . and that's great," Dale said. "We're happy about that and we've got the altitude helping us. We know when we went to California (Women of Troy Tournament in December) we had lots of energy, although that tournament didn't turn out the way we wanted it to. But bringing them in here is good for us."

The Buffs are on the same side of the WNIT bracket as three teams that defeated them this season - Oklahoma State, Denver, KU - and three teams they will face next season when they begin Pac-12 Conference competition - Arizona, Southern California, Cal.

"You get excited looking at the bracket that's for sure," Lappe said. "You see teams you have faced or teams you will face . . . It's an exciting time. It's good that we get to be a part of March Madness. Now it's about staying alive as long as you possibly can."

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Lappe's squad preps for unexpected

Colorado opens WNIT against Big West opponent

By Joshua Lindenstein Camera Sports Writer
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There's an adage about the NCAA basketball tournament that Colorado coach Linda Lappe believes will ring just as true for her squad this week in the WNIT: The first two rounds are all about the players. Then it becomes the coaches.

There isn't much time, after all, to gather film and information on the unfamiliar foes that teams usually end up facing early in tournament play.

"It's going to be whoever shows up and does what they do better," Lappe said this week. "So we just have to make sure we execute and do what we do better than UC Riverside."

The Buffaloes host the Highlanders at 7 p.m. today at the Coors Events Center in the WNIT first round. Win and they'll face a quick turnaround in facing the California/Cal-Poly winner this weekend.

By contrast, programs can start doing some early legwork now on gathering film and such on potential opponents for future rounds.

CU guard Chucky Jeffery, for one, said it's somewhat intriguing as a player to go up against the unknown. Since early January, the Buffs have been facing conference foes whom they know inside and out -- and who also know CU.

Now the Buffs have to be flexible enough to adjust to various styles of play on the fly.

"We don't really have that much time to scout each other," Jeffery said. "You just come out and play. It's just go out, play together, play good defense, run in transition, the little things. So it's kind of fun to come out and not exactly know your opponent."

The Buffs take some comfort in the fact that they are coming out of arguably the toughest conference in the country in the physical Big 12. Seven Big 12 squads made the NCAA tournament and three more are in the WNIT. All 12 teams were among the top 110 in the country in RPI, and the Buffs feel like they're prepared for anything.

"That gives us a lot of confidence," Jeffery said.

The Buffs (15-15), who themselves aren't huge, should have a noticeable size advantage against the Highlanders (19-12), who employ a balanced scoring attack led by 5-foot-6 guard Tre'Shonti Nottingham's 13.6 points per game.

The Highlanders are always on the move and cutting to the basket, aspects that Lappe said will test the Buffs' defensive fundamentals.

The Highlanders, third in the Big West Conference this season, won't likely be too intimidated by the Buffs' Big 12 status either.

Since John Margaritis took over for the 2004-05 season, the Highlanders have won their conference tournament and reached the NCAA tourney three times, including last year when they were blown out by Pac-10 power Stanford.

The Highlanders played six major-conference schools this season, winning at Pac-10 strugglers Washington and Oregon and losing at Missouri by 3, among others.

Lappe does have some familiarity with the Highlanders from her days as an assistant at Drake. The Bulldogs beat UC Riverside in 2005-06, Lappe's last season at the Iowa school.

"He's done a great job and kind of turned that program around," Lappe said of Margaritis. "They're pretty hard-nosed and tough.

"They know how to win. They have a good coach and good program and are used to doing some really good things. So you never know who has the advantage."

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