



## Building a winner

### Colorado playing some of its best basketball of the season.

By MATT LEVINS [mlevins@thehawkeye.com](mailto:mlevins@thehawkeye.com)

Linda Lappe knows all about overcoming obstacles.

As a player for the Colorado University women's basketball team a decade ago, Lappe overcame numerous injuries to earn All-Big 12 Conference honors and lead the Buffaloes to three straight NCAA Tournament appearances, including Elite Eight and Sweet 16 berths her final two years.

So it comes as no surprise that Lappe is once again clearing roadblocks and dodging obstacles in her first year as head women's basketball coach at Colorado. Despite having just eight or nine players most of the year, Lappe has the Buffaloes playing their best basketball of the year and poised to grab a postseason berth.

"Right now we just want to make sure the players we have now have a good experience. We want to make sure they get better at the games," said Lappe, a 1997 graduate of Winfield-Mount Union High School. "We just need more players. Having eight or nine players all year, it has been really tough to go through a whole season with that many players."

Colorado (15-13 overall, 6-9 Big 12) is playing as well as any team in the conference. The Buffaloes upset 15th-ranked Oklahoma a week ago and are coming off back-to-back road wins against Missouri and Nebraska, Colorado's first road victories this season. Those wins have the Buffaloes playing with confidence heading into the Big 12 Conference Tournament next week in Kansas City.

"We had a great win against Oklahoma. That was a big win for our program," said Lappe, who led W-MU to back-to-back state championships in 1995-96, including an 80-game winning streak. "Any time you can beat a Top 25 team, it's a tribute to your players coming together and working really, really hard. We've had a tough last couple two or three weeks with a lot of tough losses. But the players have done a great job of continuing to get better as a team and working hard."

One of the highlights of the season was beating Iowa State 66-60 in overtime on Jan. 15 in Boulder, Colo.

Lappe made her first return to Iowa since taking over the Colorado program last spring. While Colorado came out on the short end of a 71-45 loss to Iowa State on Feb. 19 in Ames, Lappe had plenty of family in friends in the stands at Hilton Coliseum cheering her on.

In fact, her mother's side of the family had their own family reunion in Ames planned around the game.

"It was a special night. It might be the last time we get back to Iowa for a while," Lappe said. "Hilton is a special place. I played a lot of games in there and coached there a couple times. We had a great first half, but we made some mistakes in the second half that hurt us. One of the things I liked about that game was that, even though we lost, we keep getting better and better as a team. We are executing our game plan and staying together, competing better. It was neat to be back in my home state."

Related Images:



Amy Vinchattle/Ames Tribune  
Colorado Buffaloes women's basketball coach Linda Lappe instructs her team during a game against Iowa State Feb. 19 at Hilton Coliseum in Ames. Lappe has overcome obstacles in her first season with the Buffaloes, and the team is playing well at the right time.



Amy Vinchattle/Ames Tribune  
Colorado coach Linda Lappe (center) instructs her team during a game against Iowa State Feb. 19 in Ames.

Lappe has faced numerous challenges in her first year of coaching at the NCAA Division I level. After spending the last three seasons as head coach at Metropolitan State College in Denver, Lappe is now relishing the challenge of recruiting and competing on a national level.

"Any time you take over a new program, there are always going to be things that you never thought of," Lappe said. "I have been pleasantly surprised at how the players have bought into the program. It's great to have that commitment when you are starting to build something. I didn't know any of the players when I got here, so I was getting to know them and they were getting used to a new coaching staff. It has taken a while for me to learn what motivates them. It's been a learning process.

"It's definitely a grind. You have to make sure you take care of yourself. You have to learn to pace yourself, make sure you're fresh. We spend a lot of hours watching film and flying all over the country recruiting. There are a lot of late nights and quick turnarounds."

Lappe has several advantages. She knows the Colorado program and its history. She is familiar with the Big 12 Conference and all the arenas. And she still has Ceal Berry around to consult with. Berry, who is now associated athletics director, was Colorado's coach when Lappe played.

"She has been a huge help. She knows what it takes to build a winning program," Lappe said of Berry. "But her and I are not the same person. We have different ideas on building a successful team. I have worked for different people. You kind of take a little bit of everything you have learned and try to fit it all together. It's not an exact science. It's got to be a feel.

"I love teaching the game of basketball, teaching footwork, defensive positioning, shooting, ball positioning, ways to go off screens. I love that part of it."

The landscape will change dramatically for Lappe and the Buffaloes next season. Starting with the 2011-12 season, Colorado will compete in the Pac-10 Conference. That will change the way Colorado travels and the way they recruit.

"We still want to be able to recruit the Midwest and Texas, especially Minnesota and some in Iowa," Lappe said. "We will definitely go West, California and the northwest. Most of the players on the west coast want to stay in the Pac-10 because that's all they know."

In the meantime, Lappe wants Colorado to finish on a strong note. The Buffaloes wrap up the regular season Saturday with a home game against Baylor. Then comes the Big 12 Conference Tournament, where Colorado will play Kansas in the first round. If they win a game or two in the tournament, the Buffaloes could sneak into the NCAA Tournament. At worst, they should qualify for the WNIT.

"I want to continue teaching our players how to compete and working on their skills," Lappe said. "I want us to go into every game prepared, believing we can win. I want to change the culture and expectations here. I want to get the players to be able to realize their goals and their dreams."

# Lappe challenges Buffaloes fans

## CU coach wants big home crowd Saturday for No. 3 Baylor

**By Joshua Linden** Camera Sports Writer  
Boulder Daily Camera

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By most player accounts, first-year Colorado women's basketball coach Linda Lappe has challenged the Buffaloes more than they'd ever experienced in their time on campus.

The program still has a long road to travel before the Buffaloes are hanging banners at the Coors Events Center. But in a season where Big 12 coaches picked them to finish last in the league, the players have responded by beating a pair of ranked foes and playing their way into postseason eligibility down the stretch.

Now Lappe has a challenge for CU fans: Pack the Coors Events Center for Saturday's game against Baylor. And she's not afraid to state her case.

The Buffs (15-13, 6-9 Big 12) host the third-ranked Bears (27-2, 14-1) at 2 p.m. in the first part of a doubleheader with the 7 p.m. men's game against Nebraska. The men's game is sold out, and Lappe is hoping plenty of those folks and others will decide to make a day of it at Coors.

Lappe called the game with the Bears somewhat of a perfect storm after practice on Thursday.

"We're playing the No. 3 team in the nation," the coach said. "The No. 1 most recognizable women's basketball player (BU 6-foot-8 dunking sophomore center Brittney Griner) is going to be in our building. We've won three in a row. We've beat two ranked teams so far this year. Our players are playing well. And it's senior night, and having the chance to watch one of the best players that will ever play in this building (CU forward Brittany Spears) in maybe her last game in this building, I think it's a special night.

"I think this team has definitely deserved a full arena and for people to come out and see them."

CU is offering \$3 general admission tickets for Saturday's game.

The Buffs have averaged just 1,757 fans at home this season, 11th-best in the Big 12. But Lappe knows the fans are out there. During the Buffs' heydays, they averaged as many as 5,538 per game and even sold the arena out (11,199) for a game against UNLV in 1989. Lappe, herself, played in front of some sizable crowds as a CU player in the early 2000s.

"It's a huge boost having a crowd," Lappe said. "We go into a lot of other places in the conference that have had that. And it's tough as an opposing team. So we want Baylor to feel that same sort of feeling when we're making a run and the fans are getting up and they're loud.

"When there's 5,000 fans here and they're Colorado fans, it seems like 10,000."

Baylor has been the team most pegged from the start of the season as having the best shot to knock No. 1 and defending champion Connecticut from its perch.

With Griner -- a Youtube sensation before she ever stepped on campus in Waco -- and her 22.3 points, 7.7 rebounds and 4.5 blocks per game leading the way, the Bears have clinched the Big 12 title. And they won 21 games in a row at one point against a schedule rated the nation's fifth-toughest.

The Bears are no doubt heavy favorites on Saturday. But the Buffs are riding their biggest wave of the season after upsetting No. 18 Oklahoma and winning two straight road games.

The Buffs' 15 wins are their most since going 19-15 in 2007-08. And their six league wins equal the most they ever achieved in five years under former head coach Kathy McConnell-Miller.

For a group of seniors that endured two dismal years following some freshman success, being in position for a likely WNIT invitation is making all of the blood, sweat and tears worthwhile.

"There`s people who have left here, and a lot of us could have been like, 'We should leave, too.'" senior guard Britney Blythe said. "But we haven`t left, Spears and Chelsea (Dale) and I. We stayed here through coach Miller and that coaching staff and now here. So we see both sides of the story. And I think that`s the greatest thing for all three of us. We really appreciate what this program has done (this season)."

In addition to sending the seniors out on a high note, Lappe said reaching the postseason will have positive affects on the program down the road as well.

"Hopefully in future years we`ll be at this point talking about an NCAA tournament bid," Lappe said. "But I think this is a great start and an important start. Anytime you can have that sort of feeling of postseason, it makes you want more."

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## Bye-bye Brittany

Women's basketball says farewell to seniors

*By Marlee Horn on March 4, 2011*

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Brittany Spears is making her final records and playing for the last time in Colorado. The University of Colorado women's basketball player ends her regular season career Saturday against the Baylor Bears.

The California transplant has an almost innumerable amount of accolades.

With 2,031 points, she is just 37 points behind Lisa Van Goor on CU's all-time scoring list. She is only the second player in team history to reach the 2,000 mark and to score 400 points in four consecutive seasons.



Senior Brittany Spears will be playing her final regular season game for the Buffs on Saturday against the Baylor Bears. (CU Independent/Patrick Ghidossi)

**Will Brittany Spears score 20 or more points in her final game as a Buffalo in the Coors Events Center?**

**Was resolved as: Yes at 50%**



She has scored in the double-digits in 105-of-121 career games. She has started all 121 games of her career and holds the school title for most consecutive starts.

Spears ranks second in scoring and minutes, as well as in field-goals made and attempted on CU's career list. She also ranks second in the Big 12 in defensive rebounds.

Spears would be justified in having a big ego with all her accomplishments, but as head coach Linda Lappe points out, she has always put the team before herself.

"It feels good to be breaking records I guess," Spears said. "It's even better just to be winning and making it into the post-season."

Spears' career with CU wasn't easy. A coaching change and never having a post-season berth would discourage many athletes, but she stuck with the program, saying it's because of her team.

"We weren't having the best years, and it's easy to walk away and go to a different school," Spears said. "Staying shows how tough you are and how you believe in the program. If you stay, it shows you believe in your coaches and your team."

Lappe said that during her four years, Spears has really come into her own, gaining confidence and getting more versatile in all areas of play.

"Nothing's come easy for her," Lappe said. "Even basketball – I don't know that it came easy for her. She's had to work at it. She's had to shoot a lot of shots. Obviously she's very talented. She's got a physical, athletic body, but at the same time, she's had to work for what she has."

Spears said that she joked around a lot when she first came to CU, but has since found a balance between having fun and being serious.

"As you mature, you have to say certain things and carry yourself a certain way and just make smarter decisions," Spears said.

Spears has always been a silent leader, but in her senior year, her team has seen her really learn to say the right things at the right time.

"I feel like she's stepped up in the leadership role," Lappe said. "I see her talking in huddles now and telling her teammates kind of what to do, what we need to happen. When she talks, everybody listens because she has a lot of good things to say."

Fellow senior Britney Blythe said she wonders why Spears hasn't been speaking up all along.

"When we got here freshman year, she didn't say much, but did a lot of talking basketball wise, leading on the court," Blythe said. "I think off the court is where she's really stepped up. She's now giving speeches to our team, giving us quotes and really important feedback on the court too."

Blythe said Spears' feedback is constructive and helps lead the team.

"She's not afraid to say what she has to say, and I think that's the biggest thing," Blythe said. "When you have a leader that can show us on the court and also tell us, it really elevates everyone else's game."

Spears says that she hopes to leave behind a "good" name for herself at CU and will really miss her teammates as her time as a college hoopster comes to an end.

Lappe said she hopes to fill the Coors Events Center with loud Colorado fans as Spears and her teammates face Brittney Griner and the Bears.

"We're playing the No. 3 team in the nation," Lappe said. "The No. 1 most recognizable women's basketball player is going to be in our building. We've won three in a row. We've beat two ranked teams so far this year. Our players are playing well, and it's senior night. You couldn't ask for anything better than that."

Contact CU Independent Staff Writer Marlee Horn at [Marlee.horn@colorado.edu](mailto:Marlee.horn@colorado.edu).