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Coach Anne Kelly has CU golf team on the rise

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

Posted: 05/05/2011 01:00:00 AM MDT

Updated: 05/05/2011 07:46:53 AM MDT

LONGMONT — With her women's golf team finally rated among the nation's top 40, Colorado coach Anne Kelly has gone from 13 years of grinding to an overnight success.

The Buffaloes, who qualified for today's NCAA regionals for only the second time in the program's history, are ranked No. 34 by Golfweek magazine. Before this season, the Buffs never were higher than No. 58.

"Building a program here has been difficult," Kelly said during a recent team practice at Fox Hill Country Club in Longmont. "We're always fighting the conception of the weather in Colorado.

"When you talk to somebody out of state (during recruiting), they think we have snow on the ground six months a year. That's a challenge. It never fails that when a Broncos game is on TV, it's snowing."

A former high school standout in Arizona and then a top player on TCU's 1983 NCAA championship team, Kelly would not have hung around for the past 14 years if she didn't believe Colorado could produce a consistent winner.

CU now has two designated practice facilities:

Colorado National Golf Club (Erie) and Fox Hill (Longmont). And this year's squad has rewritten almost every record in the program's history, which dates to the 1994-95 inaugural season.

All five starters will return next season, including stalwarts Jessica Wallace (72.56 scoring average) and Emily Talley (73.53). The rock-steady juniors already are considered the most talented women's players to ever carry a Buffs golf bag.

Wallace, a native of British Columbia and in her first year as a transfer from Pepperdine, is ranked No. 43 nationally by Golfweek. Talley, a three-year Buffs starter from Napa, Calif., is ranked No. 85.

Colorado is seeded 11th in the 24-team East Regional at Daytona Beach, Fla.

"I think we push each other," said Wallace, who last week was named the Big 12 newcomer of the year. "It's not something that we try to do (consciously). She's a real competitive person, and I want to help the team out as well as I can. Between the two of us, if somebody is struggling, we just want to carry the load if we have to."

Wallace had taken an unofficial recruiting visit to CU while playing in a junior golf championship tournament at Hiwan Golf Club in Evergreen. She

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picked Pepperdine instead, but after two years in Malibu she gave Kelly a call. It helped that CU assistant coach Brent Franklin, a former Western Athletic Conference player of the year at BYU, hails from Canada and is a highly acclaimed golf instructor.

"Pepperdine didn't really suit me as far as the academics or the golf program, in a way," Wallace said. "We were a highly ranked team. But I didn't feel like I was personally getting better. I thought Anne and Brent could help me do that."

As for Talley, Kelly deserves props for projecting the potential of the Northern Californian. Talley is still relatively new to golf, but last week she was named first-team all-Big 12. She concentrated on tennis until her sophomore year of high school.

"I was under the radar in junior golf," Talley recalled. "When I came here, I knew that I could come in and play and make a difference. I love it here."

Colorado's lineup also includes freshman twins Kristin (76.0) and Jenny (76.56) Coleman of Rolling Hills Estates, Calif., and sophomore Taylor Doyle (77.89) of San Diego.

At this weekend's regionals in Daytona Beach, the best four scores out of five are counted toward the team total each round. The top eight finishers will advance to the NCAA Championships, hosted by Texas A&M at College Station on May 18-21.

Colorado comes off a disappointing ninth-place finish at the Big 12 Championship Tournament. The bright spot was Wallace placing fourth individually.

"That was probably our worst tournament of the year," Kelly said. "We can play a lot better. We're looking forward to going to Florida."

A glance at the records

A sampling of CU women's golf team's 2010-11 school records:

- Team stroke average (76.23)
- Team top-five finishes (five)
- Nine top-five individual finishes (Wallace 6, Talley 3)
- 19 top-10 finishes (Wallace 10, Talley 7, K. Coleman 2)
- Six rounds in the 60s (three apiece by Wallace, Talley)
- 16 even-par rounds (led by Wallace 8, K. Coleman 3, Talley 2)
- Individual season stroke average by a junior: Wallace (72.56) and Talley (73.53) are both shattering the former mark of Erin Kerr (76.14 in 2001-02).

University of Colorado

Regional destinations

The NCAA women's golf regionals are this



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weekend. The NCAA championships are May 18-21. A look at where the locals will be:

Colorado: The Buffs' entire team is playing at the 24-team East Regional in Daytona Beach, Fla. The Buffs are seeded 11th.

Denver: The Pioneers' team is making its 10th consecutive regional appearance and will play out West at the Washington National Golf Club in Auburn, Wash. DU is seeded 15th.

Colorado State: Only junior Brianna Espinoza qualified for the regionals. She will play as an individual at the West Regional.



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