



New CU basketball coaches Tad Boyle, left, and Linda Lappe.  
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## Brooks: Lappe, Boyle Hoping For Good First Looks

**BOULDER** - April is a long, long way in the rearview mirror. Much has changed. The plaza where both of their introductory press conferences were conducted now is a construction zone; the steel beams, rebar and concrete that will surround a new practice facility have sprouted.

Change can be good, and for men's and women's basketball at Colorado it can be exceptionally good. For too long, CU hoops have been something close to an afterthought, both administratively and in how the ticket-buying public perceives what's going on between the backboards in Boulder.

But apathy appears on the way out; proof can be found in the fenced-off hard-hat area flanking the Coors Events Center and in the expectations wafting inside and outside the building.

Two new Buffs basketball coaches, hired within two weeks of one another last spring, debut Friday night in a season-opening doubleheader. Linda Lappe's women's team plays Regis at 5:30 p.m., Tad Boyle's men's team plays Idaho State at 8 p.m.

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It's early enough in the season - on second thought, it can't get any earlier, can it? - that Lappe and Boyle aren't interested so much in the opposition as they are their teams. At the end of Thursday morning's practice, Boyle huddled his players around him and told them that opening night wasn't about Idaho State, it was about CU - about the Buffs establishing an identity that will hold up from mid-November through early March.

Of course, over the course of 41/2 months, there will be individual and team evolution. But what Lappe and Boyle want as a bedrock foundation from first whistle to last are energy, defensive intensity, rebounding by committee, up-tempo offense, more intensity and more energy. See where they're headed?

"We're talking about us a lot and what we need to do to get better - how we need to play defensively, the effort and the intensity that we should be expecting out of ourselves," said Lappe, who debuts on the same court where she played when the CU program was flourishing.

"We're obviously preparing for Regis, but we're focusing on ourselves," she continued. "We have to play our principles, both offensively and defensively - especially at this time of year when you don't have true scouting reports because you don't have film from this year, so you're going on last year's film. You have to be ready to think on the fly, so it's all about your stuff."

A Greeley guy who went to Kansas before coming full circle for his first head coaching job (UNC), Boyle laughed after Thursday's practice and said, "Our players are ready, I don't know if I'm ready . . . they're excited, there was definitely a pep in their step - just because the grind of the preseason is over and the first game's upon us. There's still a lot of things we have to get better at. It's going to be a work in progress, but that's why you don't jump into the conference season on Nov. 12."

Boyle's team features something that none of his CU predecessors could claim - a pair of preseason Wooden Award list candidates. Senior Cory Higgins and sophomore Alec Burks should be two of the Big 12 Conference's top wing players. Burks, the league's 2009-10 freshman-of-the-year (CU's first), had initial reservations about the coaching change from Jeff Bzdelik to Boyle.

Burks needed to be won over. Boyle worked hard and got the 'W.'

Said Burks: "He's real, I respect that. I grew up like that; my mom is like that. She'll tell you the truth whether you like it or not. I respect that."

While high expectations surround Boyle's entire team, they are particularly lofty around redshirt freshman point guard Shannon Sharpe. A preseason knee injury and subsequent surgery knocked him out of last season, but he's rehabbed and ready to run in Boyle's up-tempo style.

"That fits me more than the slowdown," Sharpe said. "I'm more of an up-tempo type guy."

Maybe CU's student body favors a faster pace, too. Sharpe said there's been a bit of a buzz on campus about Friday night's openers: "I hear about it on campus, a little talk here and there. I do think people are excited to see what we've got this year.

"It's exciting that people are excited about us, so we're going to try to keep them excited . . . you might hear a little of it on campus, people walking around talking about going out and seeing what Cory, Alec and the basketball team are going to do."

Sharpe adds athleticism to Boyle's team, and Lappe's will feature more overall athleticism than in seasons past. Freshman Shae Kelley, who's closing in on membership in the women's dunking club, joins senior Brittany Spears and sophomore Chucky Jeffery.

After a lopsided exhibition win (93-62) a week ago against Western State, Lappe had seen enough from her players on that night and in previous practices to know what to expect from them. To her, there's no such thing as a "gamer."

"I'm not just interested in game-time players; I want to see players do what they're going to do in games in practice,"

she said. "I feel like I know our team really well from what they do in practice. We didn't see a whole lot last Friday night that we haven't seen in practice . . . I just want them to keep it consistent and do it all the time."

Ditto for Boyle, who opens minus 6-foot-11 Shane Harris-Tunks (knee) and will have to compensate with four players crashing the boards and the point guard - Sharpe and/or Nate Tomlinson - getting back to defend against the break. But Sharpe believes that's something that will be noticeable early on: "Fans are going to notice that we're going to run more and how much more intense we are on defense, how much harder we're going to crash the boards."

Not many coaches would turn down another week or two of prep time before opening, but all things considered, Lappe believes her opener comes at a good time.

"Yeah, with a new coaching staff and where I thought we would be, we're right on target to be able to do what we should at this point of the season," she said. "We might be even a little further ahead in a couple of areas than I thought we might be, and we might be a little behind in some areas. Overall, I think we're right on pace."

"But we're coming into a stretch where we're playing four games in about nine days, so we're also going to have to get better in games - not just in practice."

To be honest, not as much is expected of Lappe's first team as it is of Boyle's. In Spears, Lappe has a preseason Naismith Trophy candidate, but the young players surrounding Spears will have to improve on the fly for the Buffs to avoid finishing in the lower half of the conference.

Boyle, on the other hand, came to work with an inheritance - and found expectations to match.

"I think there's no question that people here are thirsty for something they can grab onto in terms of getting excited about," he said. "So, that's a great opportunity for our basketball program. But I don't worry about the expectations that are placed on this program from the outside."

"I worry about the internal expectations that our players have of each other and our coaches have of the players - and those that players should have of the coaches. They have to expect us to be ready, too - and we will be."

Ready or not, added Lappe, the wait is over: "It's been a long time since last April . . . anytime there's a coaching change, there are a lot of changes to be made. To actually see it out on the floor will be fun and exciting."

It's a Friday night "two-fer," a fine opportunity to check out both teams' IDs and see what the buzz is all about.

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# Patience pays off for Blythe

**After diminished playing time last year, guard to start for new coach Lappe**

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

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Britney Blythe admits she was a little surprised at first with how diminished her role was last season for the Colorado women's basketball team.

Just one season earlier, her career with the Buffaloes seemed to be taking off. A starter in half of the team's games, she averaged 19 minutes per outing in sharing time at point guard.

But a combination of Whitney Houston returning from an injury that kept her out in 2008-09 and the arrival of star freshman Chucky Jeffery bumped Blythe out of the mix in 2009-10 at a position that also featured Alyssa Fressle and Kelly Jo Mullaney at times. Blythe saw action in just 10 games and played a grand total of 26 minutes. Her stat line was 0-for-1 from the field with two rebounds, two assists, three turnovers and two fouls.

So with the forecast for this season including significantly more playing time, Blythe is relishing the opportunity to be a contributor once again.

The 5-foot-9 San Mateo, Calif., product started in the Buffs' exhibition victory over Western State last week. And she figures to be on the floor for the opening tip again tonight when CU officially opens the regular season and the Linda Lappe coaching era with a 5:30 p.m. game against Regis at the Coors Events Center.

On an young squad that currently suits up just nine players, including four freshmen, Blythe's experience has helped steady the Buffs in the preseason as the group also gets used to a new coaching staff.

"It's a good feeling," Blythe said Thursday. "I love CU. I love this team. Whether my contribution was once again on the bench or on the court I was going to give 110 percent.

"I'm just excited to get out there again and help out."

To her credit, Blythe doesn't express any sour grapes about her lack of action last season.

Growing up with a coach as a father, she knew how to see things from the other side of the whistle.

"As long as we won, I was good," Blythe said. "I was like, 'This is (former coach Kathy McConnell-Miller's) lineup. This is who she thinks is going to win. I'm good. Let's do it.' That was my mindset. I'm there for the team. It's not about me."

Blythe credits her father, Donovan, for helping her keep that positive outlook and staying focused. His main message always was "to be prepared in case your number is called."

So Blythe studied the game, watching film and the players on the court at her position. And she did her best to work as hard in practice as anyone.

"I didn't just sit there and pout," Blythe said.

The perseverance has paid off.

With Fressle transferring to Boston College, and Houston (UTEP) and Mullaney (San Francisco) opting to play out their final year of eligibility elsewhere after graduating last spring, there are once again more minutes to go around on the perimeter.

Lappe has drawn on Blythe and her point-guard-like communication and leadership abilities to be one of her liaisons on

the floor. In Blythe, Lappe also has another player who knows what to expect when the team gets to Big 12 Conference play.

"Her teammates know when she talks, a lot of times she's saying the right things," Lappe said. "She's doing a good job filling that role."

But Blythe's role has also changed some from what the coaches originally intended, which was to share time with Jeffery at her natural position of point guard.

With sharp-shooting guard Bianca Smith gone to graduation, the Buffs were also in need of somebody who could hit the 3-pointer opposite of leading scorer Brittany Spears. So Blythe has moved over to the wing.

"We need somebody at that wing that can hit that 3 if teams zone us especially," Lappe said.

After playing with her shooting wrist heavily wrapped the last two seasons due to a torn tendon, Blythe is completely healthy and showed that she can put the ball in the basket as well as distribute it.

In the exhibition win over Western, Blythe hit 3-of-5 from beyond the arc for nine points -- one-10th of her career total.

"It felt good," Blythe said. "I think my stroke's back a little bit. I'm excited to shoot the ball more."

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