

Bufs go after Omni title

Lappe wants her team to protect home court

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One of Linda Lappe's objectives when she returned to her alma mater to coach the Colorado women's basketball team was to bring back and instill in her players the pride and tradition of a Buffaloes program that has struggled in recent years.

There's no doubt Lappe will have some stories to relate as the Bufs get prepared to host the 24th annual Omni Hotels Classic today and Saturday at the Coors Events Center.

The Bufs won their own tournament -- formerly known as the Coors Classic -- four of the five seasons Lappe was on campus as a player, with the lone loss coming in the championship game to Villanova her senior year.

"This is the old Coors Classic, the new Omni Classic," Lappe said this week. "This is our tournament. We want to make sure we're in that championship game and feeling good on Saturday night."

Colorado begins tourney play by hosting Evansville at 7:30 p.m. today following the other semifinal matchup between Loyola-Chicago and Eastern Washington at 5 p.m. The third place game is at 5p.m. Saturday, with the title game at 7:30 p.m.

In all, CU has won this tournament 13 times, including 12 of the first 17, often against quality fields.

The Bufs have played in the championship game all but three times, never missing one until 2005. CU placed third that season, third in 2007 and fourth in 2008 before recapturing the crown last season with wins over Georgia Southern and Harvard. The 2006 version of the tournament didn't crown a champ because Colorado and Wyoming both played and beat Nevada and Charlotte in more of a showcase format.

"I think it's kind of a pride thing," said CU sophomore guard Chucky Jeffery, who made last year's all-tournament team. "We talk a lot about us having home-court advantage and never losing on our home floor. So for us to have a tournament at home, it's a big thing. We just hope to come in and win it again this year."

A couple of wins this weekend would go a long way in helping the Bufs achieve one of their overall goals of becoming a force at home.

Colorado is in the midst of a seven-game stretch at the Coors Events Center before a break for final exams and then a trip to USC's Women of Troy Tournament. The Bufs (3-1) are 3-0 at home and have the potential with their schedule to go undefeated at home during non-conference play.

Colorado went 9-1 at home in non-conference play last season but just 1-7 in Big 12 play.

Lappe said there is nothing she changes with regard to the way she coaches her team at home. She likes them to play the same way no matter where they are. But she did acknowledge that there is a swagger and confidence that a team needs -- regardless of the opponent -- to be dominant on its own court.

"We don't want anybody to come in here and try to take what's ours away from us," Lappe said.

The Bufs should be the favorite to win the Omni. The three teams coming to Boulder this weekend have a combined record of 5-5. Evansville and Loyola are both 2-1, while Eastern Washington is 1-3.

After the tournament, the Bufs host Texas State on Wednesday before the opponents gain strength with games against Illinois and Colorado State.

Aside from defending their home court, the Buffs know it's also important to use this stretch of winnable games to build some momentum and confidence to head into the USC tournament and Big 12 action on as much of a roll as possible.

"We can't let teams hang around with us when we know we can win," said Jeffery, who is averaging 16.5 points and a team-best 8.5 rebounds per game. "So we need to handle business and take care of those games so we can make it to the postseason."

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