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fan mail

Fan Mail: New CU coach Lappe talks intensity and Barry's influence

By The Denver Post

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Ever wanted to ask a sports personality a question? Now's your chance. They will answer readers' questions in The Denver Post's "Fan Mail" feature.

In this edition, new Colorado women's basketball coach Linda Lappe dishes out answers about her plans to turn up the Buffs' intensity, Ceal Barry's influence on her career and how a 5-foot-2 point guard can make the grade in college basketball.

Keep an eye out for next week's installment. Suggest a subject and send your Qs in an email to fanmail@denverpost.com.

I was wondering what style of play we can expect to see out of the team, and also, what kind of role has Coach (Ceal) Barry had in

your playing and professional career. Go Buffs!

— Matt, Spokane, Wash.

Linda Lappe: Matt, you can expect to see us play a better game, and month-to-month, as the season goes along, we will improve. We will play up-tempo, at times, but we will also spread the court and utilize a set offense when the time calls for it.

I can promise you that you'll see us play a lot of aggressive, man-to-man defense. Of course, we want to utilize the skills of our players, but we want them to understand the team game and work as a team. So we've been working hard to make sure our players know about spacing and angles and seeing the court.

As for Coach Barry, she's had a profound impact on my life as a player, a person and a coach. She's been a great resource to have at CU, not just for me, but for a lot of people in the athletics department. She knows what coaches go through and she understands the ups and downs. She is someone to lean on.

(Editor's note: Barry served as Colorado women's basketball for 22 years, retiring after the 2004-05 season. She now serves as Colorado assistant athletic director for student services.)

As we make the transition to the

— Richard, Loveland

LL: Our goal in scheduling is to have balance and get us prepared for conference play. We will play



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high-level teams and lower-level teams. And we will always want to play against schools in our state and our area. But our overall goal is to enter our conference in the best shape possible.

One of the things we will continue to try to do is schedule games around where our players are from. If we have players from Texas

Sports Fan Mail

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or California, we want to have some games there.

For instance, (freshman center) Rachel Hargis is from near Waco (Robinson, Texas), so we want to make sure we get down to Texas at least once a year. That helps our recruiting base. But we also like to play in places our young women are from so their friends and family can come out and see them play. I think that's important for our

players, too.

I'm curious, are you planning to implement certain aspects of your coaching style from Metro State into the CU system? Or have you not thought about it yet?

— Matt Hollinshead, Denver

LL: First of all, I want to make sure and say that my time at Metro State really prepared me for my new job at CU. (Athletic director) Joan McDermott gave me a lot of support. I think my style will be the same, but it might look like it's changed a little bit. There is the addition of a lot of assistant coaches here at CU and I think there will be a lot of positives that will come out of that.

I'm 5-foot-2. A bit short, but I'm scrappy. What skills should I concentrate on developing to make a college basketball team?

— Nancy, Englewood

LL: I would say, first and foremost, that there are different levels of college athletics. This is what I tell kids all the time, that there are different levels you can compete on. You can have a great experience, maybe even a better college experience, at an NAIA school or a

Division II or Division III school. You can get an education and still play basketball at the next level. So I would encourage you and say not to limit yourself and think there is only one way to go.

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Linda Lappe, who is returning to Colorado as their seventh woman's head basketball coach, played for the Buffaloes from 1998-2003. (Joe Amon, The Denver Post)

As for your skills and your size, you need to become a great ball handler; be able to handle that ball like it's on a string. I'd also say you need to work on your passing and be able to see the whole floor. You must also be able to hit the outside shot.

Someone at 5-2 has to have tenacity on both offense and defense, and be a great leader. At 5-2, you have to be a vocal leader, because you are probably going to be a point guard.

Coach Lappe, my Dad always tells me, "games are either won or lost by a free throw." How much do you stress to your players to practice and perfect their free-throw shot?
— Julie, Denver

LL: Like every team, we stress free throws and we shoot a lot of them. But there is more to foul shooting than just free throws. This last Tuesday,

as a matter of fact, we were talking about boxing out on the free-throw lane and being aggressive trying to get rebounds on the offensive side. I have seen a lot of games I have seen a lot of games come down to that last few minutes and on whether you can box out or get that offensive rebound.

But you know, as important as free throws are at the end of the game, there are many other points in a game where the tide can turn. It might look like the game comes down to a missed foul shot or something late, but it's often other points in the game that make the difference.

But free throws are important, no question about that. We never start off practice shooting them. We always shoot when we are done running, when we are a little tired. We have something we call the free-throw ladder where we set up a competition on the team. We always want the free throws we shoot to mean something, so the competition is good for that.

I know Coach Barry had a big impact on you. What were the most valuable lessons you learned from here, on the court and off?
— Jillian, Greeley

LL: On the court, she taught me just how to work hard, how to be a good teammate and how to take care of myself both mentally and physically.

Off the court, she was really the one who said I might make a great coach. She understood that I loved that side of the game, she recognized that.

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I had a lot of injuries in college. I broke my kneecap and after that I had a lot of injuries throughout my career at CU. She was always very supportive. She let me cry on her shoulder when I got some news that I didn't necessarily like.

We would talk on the plane and on the bus a lot. She would talk to me about strategy and what to expect in a game. I think my strength was my knowledge of the game, the ability to see the floor and know what was going on. Coach Barry could see that in me.

Coach, what do you think of the talent level of high school basketball in Colorado. How does it compare to the rest of the country?

— Dale, Sterling

LL: It's very good, in most recruiting classes. We have had some down years, but it's usually very comparable to other states. And we some years are we had some of the best players in the country. I could list about 20 really good players I can think of, but I fear that I would forget No. 21.

Over the last five seasons or so, the Buffs have really struggled with turnovers, rebounding and playing with intensity. How are you approaching these problems with the team?

— Mark Weatherley, Boulder

LL: Those are three things we have really stressed so far.

I really believe if you are really intense, it takes care of some of the other problems.

Intensity is not something that just comes and goes. When they are out on the floor, they have to have it at all times. We've been stressing that in our drills from the very beginning.

Rebounding is not just about intensity, it's a two-fold problem. We have to be better about boxing out on the defensive boards, especially in our league with as many talented players as we face. We have to have the intensity to go get the rebound, but we have to make sure we aren't putting forth what we call "false effort." We can't be just rushing to the basket to get a rebound. If you are spending all of your effort but you aren't boxing out or are in the wrong position, it's false energy.

We are spending a lot of time on footwork. We had a lot of traveling calls (last season) because of bad footwork where we weren't holding down our pivot foot. So we are working on that.

Turnovers are always an ongoing issue and turnovers tend to be higher at the beginning of the season. As the season goes by and the players get more accustomed to the offense and the system, turnovers will do down.

Linda Lappe was a two-year captain and all-Big 12 Conference honorable mention selection when she played for the Colorado Buffaloes from 1998-2003. She helped CU to three consecutive NCAA appearances from 2001-03, including an Elite Eight appearance in 2002 and a spot in the Sweet 16 as a senior in 2003.

She was a coach on the floor, something former



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CU coach Ceal Barry noticed very quickly. Little wonder that Lappe quickly made coaching her chosen profession.

In April, at age 30, she was named head coach, becoming the second-youngest to be named head coach of the CU women's team. Barry was 28 when named on April 12, 1983, exactly 27 years to the date of Lappe's hiring.

Lappe, a native of Iowa, returned to Boulder after a three-year stint as head coach at Metropolitan State College. She was 50-36 at Metro State, guiding the Roadrunners to top-three finishes and winning records in the Eastern Division of the Rocky Mountain Athletic Conference in each of her three seasons.

Pac-12, will you continue to schedule 2-4 games per year with such schools as Texas, Baylor, Oklahoma, Kansas State, and Iowa State. It seems like those games would be excellent barometers of how the program is progressing, as well as good preparation for conference play.



During her playing days at Colorado, Linda Lappe was known for her intensity and all-around game. (The Denver Post | John Leyba)

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