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Fresh meat

Women's volleyball newcomers becoming successful

By Marlee Horn on October 9, 2010

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A team with only two returning starters can seem like a nightmare for many coaches.

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Consider volleyball head coach Liz Kritza excluded from this group.

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After only winning two conference games last season, Krtiza said she knew she had to do some regrouping, and it is working. The Buffs currently have a record of 5-8 overall (2-5 Big 12).

"One thing we knew coming in as a coaching staff was that we really wanted to be able to have the best possible student athletes in this program," Kritza said. "This group of players that we have, have been sort of taking it on and rebuilding as a program. It's a very extraordinary group."

Instead of being intimidated by these expectations, CU junior middle blocker Anicia Santos said she was ready from the very beginning.

"I came in January, and I know that all spring, I was just looking forward to everyone coming in and having just a completely fresh start," Santos said.

Despite the team's young age and lack of experience playing together, Kritza said she believes that their common love for being at CU and overall heart to work hard and be a successful team puts them at a high level of play.

"The culture is one that every single day, everyone is completely committed to improving from either the last practice or last match or even with their school work," she said.

Santos said she agrees and sees how her teammates are always striving for something better.

"Everything we've done has of course helped us to build up to our next match," she said. "But of course, we always like to focus forward and be preparing for the next game. We're never satisfied with what we've done so far – it's always what we're about to do."

This kind of mentality might seem like a daunting task for some of the younger players going up against their larger opponents, but Kritza said she refuses to make concessions for her freshmen.

"Someone like Megan Beckwith – she's a true freshman out on the court in one of the more demanding positions as a libero – you really have to have a good understanding of the game," she said. "That's [a] very complex position that's crucial to what we do in our offensive system."

Beckwith has her skills tested against some of the toughest players in the country during Big 12 games. She said she builds a commonality with her teammates on the court during scrimmages and off the court spending time together outside of practice.

“We’re all really supportive, and I think that’s a huge thing,” Beckwith said. “Especially being a freshman, just knowing that everyone has your back and we’re all willing to fight for each other.”

That bond will be important for the rest of the season. Kritza said she wants her team to keep the same level of play that brought them consecutive wins against Kansas and Kansas State.

The team believes that teamwork and the excitement to win will one-day make them a championship team, she said.

“They see a vision for a very successful program,” Kritza said. “At the same time, they have to understand how difficult and how hard it’s going to be every single day and continue to build until we get to that point.”

The Buffs hope to hone their skills against the Baylor Bears at the Coors Events Center at 6:30 p.m. on Saturday.

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