

Hempen's Buffs break into top-25 polls

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Bill Hempen isn't surprised the Colorado soccer team is 5-4-1.

Of course, before the season started the veteran head coach figured CU might be able to beat Denver, UNLV and Purdue and would perhaps lose to Washington State, UCLA and Texas A&M.

Instead, the Buffs went through an early-season slump while coming up short against the rival Pioneers and struggling against the Rebels and Boilermakers. Hempen's squad suddenly has everyone's attention in the Big 12 after beating the Cougars of the Pac-10 at a tournament in Spokane, Wash., and upsetting the No. 10 Bruins and No. 6 Aggies.

CU entered the polls for the first time this season on Monday at No. 22 in the Soccer America poll and No. 24 in the Soccer Times poll.

"Several months ago if you said, 'What's your record going to be against these teams?' I would have thought we might still be here, but not in the same manner at 5-4-1," Hempen said.

The coach wouldn't change the path if he could. Beating future Pac-12 measuring sticks and recording the program's first win in College Station gives the young Buffs a lot of confidence entering this weekend's difficult road trip to Texas Tech and Baylor.

"It's funny because we're beating really good teams and losing to teams we shouldn't be losing to," junior midfielder Kate Russell said. "But knowing that you can beat the better teams gives you that toughness and momentum to keep pushing going forward."

CU freshman keeper Annie Brunner was named the Big 12's Defender of the Week after holding Texas A&M to one goal and shutting out Texas for 110 minutes in a scoreless tie on Sunday. Lizzy Herzl, who followed up her golden goal against UCLA with another overtime game-winner against Texas A&M, is the conference's Newcomer of the Week.

"We've had so many conflicts with A&M. My freshman year we beat them and that was the first time we've ever beaten them. This year we beat them at their place for the first time in history," said defender Kelly Ross, a fifth-year senior. "It's so great and I'm so proud of our freshmen. I don't think they knew how important it was, but they do now."

The Buffs are currently second in the conference standings behind Oklahoma State. Texas Tech is 1-1 but will be playing its first Big 12 home game on Friday when CU visits the fast, artificial surface in Lubbock.

"I can't believe they can't grow grass in Texas," Hempen said. "It's going to be a challenge down there. Tommy Stone has built a really good following and it's going to be a similar type of situation to how Texas A&M was. We just have to go out and be up for the task."

Three-pack at Coors?

Liz Kritza's volleyball team, which finished 2-18 in the Big 12 last season, will seek its third consecutive conference win tonight when the Buffs wrap up a three-game home stand against Texas A&M at the Coors Events Center.

"There is an identity that this team is forming and a sense of real pride in defending their home court," Kritza said after CU came up with back-to-back five-set wins over Kansas State and Kansas last week. "It is good to see those facets developing for a young squad as we work to climb that Big 12 ladder. As we build this program, the persistence to training hard and commitment to excellence will pay huge dividends."

The Buffs (5-5, 2-2) enter the match in a three-way tie for sixth in the balanced Big 12. The Aggies (8-5, 2-1) are in a three-way tie for third. Nebraska (12-1, 4-0) is the only team that hasn't lost a Big 12 match.

CU sophomore Kerra Schroeder is currently third in the conference in kills per set (3.79).

Rocky Mountain Shootout

CU's cross country teams will host the 25th Rocky Mountain Shootout on Saturday on the Buffalo Ranch Course in Boulder. The men's 8K begins at 9 a.m. with the women's 5.8K to follow at 9:45 a.m.

The Buffs are ranked No. 4 on the men's side and 13th on the women's side in the latest USTFCCA coaches' poll.

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