



Freshman Jen Reese (34) made her first college start at Arizona.
Photo Courtesy: CUBuffs.com



Brooks: Reese Delivering After Recruiting Disconnect

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BOULDER - Recruiters get used to dealing with bumps in the road during their pursuit of high-profile prospects. Sometimes the obstacles are bigger than bumps, occasionally looming like washed out bridges. But even those can be rebuilt and everything works out to everyone's satisfaction.

Consider Colorado's recruitment of Jen Reese, a Parade All-American from the Portland suburb of Clackamas, Ore. To be sure, the Buffaloes weren't the only school chasing Reese, a 6-2 forward who also was Oregon's Gatorade Player of the Year in back-to-back seasons (2010-11).

But when CU assistant coach Jennie Baranczyk and other staffers finally caught up with Reese for their home visit, Reese bolted . . . just took off for the airport and left the CU contingent to court Reese's parents and grandma over sushi.

All parties involved laugh about it now because Reese is a Buff and fresh off her first college start last weekend in CU's 56-54 win at Arizona.

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Reese explains her untimely exit like this: "After school, we went to my brother's football game. We drove there, like a 30-minute drive. When we got there, I realized I had totally forgot about a (recruiting) trip I had scheduled to Santa Barbara. So, I left to go to the airport to go on my visit. (CU coaches) were kind of mad about that, but my parents and my grandma took them out to a sushi restaurant and they had a good time. I was sorry about leaving them there, but they did come back . . ."

Baranczyk laughed, rolled her eyes and called Reese "an interesting kid to recruit" when recalling that botched home visit. "We got to hang out with some of her friends, her parents and her grandma. Yeah, we gave her a hard time . . . but we told her if she'd spend the next four years with us we'd call it even."

Even it is, and the Buffs and Reese are glad to finally be on the same page. Her final choices of colleges came down to CU and Kansas State, with the Oregon schools really not on the radar because she wanted to leave her home state. "I'd lived there my whole life," she said. "I just wanted a new experience."

Despite her glitzy high school resume, the unflappable Reese isn't a finished product. But there's enough raw talent and hoops IQ present to allow her to do what the CU coaching staff envisioned: Improve enough from November to late January to be a solid contributor down the stretch in Year One.

"She's got a good head on her shoulders and very good hands," said Baranczyk, who coaches the Buffs' post players. "She stays at an even keel (and) she's understanding more now what the team needs from her. She's one of those players who has a tremendous feel for the game and what we need at that moment. She's now seeing herself in that role. Her court awareness is good and she's a good teammate; she's probably one of the most unselfish players I think I've ever coached."

"Success seems to find her, whether it was in high school or AAU. Her high school team went farther than it ever had, although her senior year didn't end like she wanted (second place in state). She helped give a really good name for Clackamas High School. That community is definitely very supportive of Jen Reese. People tend to want to be around her; she's very well liked."

Reese averages 8.2 points and 6.0 rebounds, but she's scored in double figures in three of the past five games and collected 15 rebounds in the past two games. At Arizona, in her first start, she scored 12 points, including the first two of the game for a CU team that nearly had slipped to the far side of desperate in its search for offense. At their previous Pac-12 Conference stop - Arizona State last Thursday - the Buffs trailed 42-9 at halftime before eventually falling, 64-43, and losing their third consecutive game.

Reese was surprised at her start in Tucson, but also "really happy." After their first-half flop in Tempe, she said, the Buffs' sense of urgency was palpable. "The ASU loss, that hurt us a lot," she said. "We had a lot of determination and wanted to come out ready to go - and I think we did from the beginning to the end. I was really proud of my teammates and coaches."

Reese's shooting percentage from the field (6-of-14) wasn't what she had hoped for in her first start, but her confidence wasn't shaken - at least not to the point of her passing up her shots. "In the beginning, I wasn't timid (shooting), but as I missed a couple in a row it was like, 'I missed two, I don't want to shoot anymore,'" she said. "But Brittany (Wilson) was like, 'Shoot it, I don't care if you miss it, just shoot it if you're open.' And (ASU's defender) was not on me at all."

Reese averaged 25 points, 20 rebounds, six blocks and five assists as a high school senior, but there's always a learning curve when the competition stiffens. But Reese, with the help of strength and conditioning coach James Hardy, has worked herself into what she calls "the best shape of my life" and she isn't eager to backslide. "Yeah, especially when I've worked this hard, I don't want to slack off and start all over. It wouldn't be worth it."

She believes adding another "five or 10 pounds of muscle" might make her more effective in post defense and rebounding as well as in the eventual inside role that Baranczyk and coach Linda Lappe want her to assume. Lappe wants Reese to improve facing the basket. "She usually gets mad at me when I don't post up," Reese said. "I like to shoot outside more, in the 16-17 foot range instead of posting up. But I will post up if needed. But she

wants me to be in there a lot more and I'm working on it."

Reese's father (Jeff) told her she began dribbling a basketball when she was 2 years old, but no one has pinned down when she took her first shot. "Probably the fifth or sixth grade," she said. "My dad pretty much helped he get started (in basketball), and since then I've had many coaches over the years. Probably my best was Michael Abraham (Oregon Team Concept, AAU). He helped me lot; he was always there for me and still is. We still talk every now and then. I'm grateful for him."

Playing better defense is a goal for Reese, but there probably aren't over a handful of freshmen in women's college basketball whose defense satisfies their coaches. "We just have to get her to be a little bit more aggressive," Baranczyk said. "When she's guarding someone else's key player, she's got to know to focus on that person and stop that person - things like that. But she's understanding it all a little bit more, she watches film and she works hard. All of that stuff will come."

Ditto for her second college start, which likely will be Thursday night against Southern California (7 p.m., Coors Events Center; tickets are available at CUBuffs.com/tickets or by calling 303-49-BUFFS). Reese said she has "no idea about starting," but based on her performance at Arizona and the Buffs breaking that three-game Pac-12 losing streak, Lappe probably won't tinker with success.

"We changed our offense up a lot (for Arizona), but you never know," Reese said. "I could have knocked down some more shots, but overall I think I did pretty well."

Her hoops future looks solid. That early disconnect with the CU staff still is good for a laugh, but nobody's holding it against her.

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SHOW MENU



CU women want revenge vs. USC

By **Brian Howell** Buffzone.com
Boulder Daily Camera

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Tonight's opponent, USC, is the one team in the Pac-12 that the Colorado women's basketball team is actually familiar with.

CU (14-4, 3-4 Pac-12) played the Trojans (10-7, 5-2) twice last season.

Nobody on the CU squad knows USC's roster better than twin sisters Ashley and Brittany Wilson, however.

"I'll be looking at girls that guarded me (in high school) and that we played against and was the best player at their high school," Brittany said.

The Wilson sisters grew up in Long Beach, Calif., and attended Long Beach Poly High School. That gives them a little extra energy this weekend, as the Buffs welcome not only USC but UCLA (on Sunday) to Boulder.

"We played with those girls," Brittany said. "A lot of them are SoCal girls ... and we played almost every school in SoCal."

USC's roster includes two former teammates of the Wilson sisters -- freshmen Ariya Crook and Thaddesia Southall, who is out for the year with an injury.

UCLA (8-10, 3-4) doesn't have any Long Beach Poly players but, like USC, has a roster full of Southern California products.

"They know we're from (Los Angeles), so they know we want to have a good game and show them what they're missing," Ashley said.

Both Wilson sisters had a chance to stay home and play, as they entertained thoughts of playing for USC.

At the urging of their mother, who went to UCLA, the girls wound up in Boulder.

"My mom wanted us to get an experience outside of being home, get a chance to grow up and see what the real life is like," Ashley said.

Ashley and Brittany are both pleased with their decision to come to Colorado. And now that CU is in the Pac-12, it gives them a chance to face their hometown schools each year.

"It's always good to play against people from home," Brittany said. "I would love to play them at their house, but playing here in our facility and with our fans, it's a great thing."

If they can't play USC and UCLA in Southern California, the next best thing is to send them home with defeats.

"There's a lot of pride on the line, because when we go home we'll have to hear it from them when we go to open gym or when we go work out," Ashley said. "When we go back home, we all work out together and we all do open gyms together."

Sunday's game against UCLA will be on national television, giving their families and friends back home a chance to watch. Yet both Wilson sisters are more eager for tonight's contest, considering USC beat the Buffs twice last year, including in the quarterfinals of the WNIT.

"We owe USC one," Ashley said with a smile.

"Third time is the charm," Brittany added.

CU head coach Linda Lappe sure hopes so, because her team could use a win. The Buffs won on Sunday at Arizona, but have a 2-4 record in their six games, including 0-2 at home in that stretch.

"We want to try to get on a roll here as we go into the middle part of our conference," Lappe said. "We probably just finished our toughest seven games, with five of them on the road. Now we get to come back and we get to be at home. From here on out, it doesn't necessarily get easy, by any means, but it's an opportunity for us to play two games against two teams -- one that we're tied with and one that's a couple games ahead of us.

"This is a big weekend for us."

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