



*CU coach Linda Lappe likes how her team has dealt with adversity.
Photo Courtesy: US Press Wire*



Brooks: Two Straight 'W's Offer Buffs Signs Of Life

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BOULDER - Linda Lappe watched her Colorado women's basketball team win 13 of its first 14 games and ease into its first Pac-12 Conference home game feeling exceptionally good about itself and the way things were going.

But as Lappe and the Buffaloes learned the hard way, falling into the hole - even if it's done in slow motion over a seven-day span - always is easier than climbing out. Fortunately, the ascent is underway - but here's why it was necessary:

In the second half of their Pac-12 home debut against California on Jan. 12, CU lost a 12-point second half lead and was beaten 68-55. It was only natural that there would be a series of emotional aftershocks following that kind of collapse, but it didn't help that the next visitor to the Coors Events Center two days later would be No. 4 Stanford.

That the Buffs' confidence had been ravaged meant nothing to the Cardinal, which breezed to an 80-54 win. CU pointed toward Tempe, Ariz., for a Jan. 19 game with Arizona State as its day for redemption. But by halftime, the only thing the Buffs had accomplished was bottoming out. Their slow-motion freefall was done. CU trailed ASU by the grade-schoolish score of 42-9.

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Bracketed by the second-half home collapse against Cal and the first-half meltdown in the desert, the Buffs were mired in a three-game losing streak. And unless it's maybe reliving the injuries that plagued her CU playing career, Lappe can't remember feeling much lower.

"It was probably the worst basketball we'd played all season," Lappe said of that stretch. "I give the opposition credit, but it wasn't just the teams we were playing - a lot of it was us. I was seeing things I hadn't seen all season - heads hanging, players not playing full possessions . . .

"I didn't feel like we were prepared for (the ASU) game. At halftime, I knew we were better than how we were playing. The players talked with each other afterwards, the coaches talked with each other. We all went back and dug deep; we started to make a commitment to get better and play harder."

Among the things that concerned Lappe the most was her team backsliding at a time when it should begin peaking. "Before you head into February and March, you want to be playing your best basketball," she said. "The postseason is something everyone wants to take part in. We had hit that really bad stretch, but what it did was create an opportunity for all of us to step back and look at things differently.

"We've always heard that through adversity comes triumph, and adversity makes you better unless you let it beat you. Well, we didn't let it beat us. We've come a long way since then."

Indeed, the Buffs pulled out of their tailspin with a two-point win at Arizona two days after the first-half debacle at ASU. They followed the victory in Tucson with their first Pac-12 home win Thursday night against Southern California - another two-pointer secured by a pair of Chucky Jeffery free throws in the final 1.2 seconds.

Realistically, there's too much season left to say this one has had a turning point. But if the Buffs continue their recovery, the bounce back after ASU will be high on the list.

"We had a real tough time after Arizona State game," Jeffery said. "We sat in the locker room for a while without the coaches and had a talk amongst ourselves. The way we ended the second half at Arizona State (final score: 64-43) is the way we started the game at Arizona and how we started (Thursday against USC).

"We know our aggression is what's going to win us games. You can't turn it on and off when you want. We have to have it for a full 40 minutes . . . we're going to start winning a lot more games when we do that."

For CU, the Pac-12 season's halfway point arrives Sunday when UCLA visits the Coors Events Center (2 p.m., FSN/ROOT Sports). The Buffs and Bruins are tied for fourth place in the conference with 4-4 records. CU is 15-4 overall, UCLA 9-10. Stanford remains unbeaten (8-0) and atop the league, followed by Cal (6-2) alone in second and ASU and USC (each 5-3) tied for third.

While the Buffs were engaged in payback Thursday night against the Trojans - USC defeated CU twice last season - the Bruins were rallying from nine points down in the final 5:34 to defeat Utah 65-60. The Bruins outscored the Utes 19-5 down the stretch, including 9-0 in the final 2:07. (CU debuted in the Pac-12 on New Year's Eve with a 58-52 come-from-behind win in Salt Lake City.)

UCLA's coaching staff includes former CU standout Jenny Roulrier Huth, who was a graduate assistant from 2005-07 at Florida State while first-year Bruins coach Cori Close was there. At CU, Roulrier was a three-time All-Big 12 selection, and her final Buffs team (2002) advanced to the NCAA Tournament's Elite Eight.

UCLA's roster has been reduced by injuries, and Close used only seven players at Utah. In the previous game against Oregon, an 83-62 loss, she played eight.

"They don't have many players, but they all play hard," Lappe said. "They're well-coached; they'll throw a lot of things at us, try to change it up defensively . . . offensively, they like to run in transition, and we'll probably see a lot of the same sort of screens we saw against USC."

Against the Trojans, the Buffs continued to work their way out of the offensive funk they settled into in the second half of the Cal loss. Lappe had been telling them that offensive confidence is contagious, that shooters give shooters confidence by hitting their shots, and it finally began to register as CU started fast for the second straight game.

After playing below her capabilities during the three-game losing streak, Jeffery also appears to be coming back. Her 19 points against USC were two below teammate Brittany Wilson's game-high 21. Jeffery had shot only two free throws in the previous four games, a sure sign of her becoming tentative going to the rim.

But against the Trojans, she stayed conscious of getting inside and either taking a shot or getting fouled. She wound up shooting 10 free throws, making seven - including the winning pair.

Once Pac-12 play began, Lappe knew things might change for Jeffery. "Sometimes it takes time to get used to what you're going to see," Lappe said. "She's drawing everyone's best defender . . . and we have to help her find other ways to score. She's been stopping herself sometimes by getting a little tentative, but now that she's getting used to what's coming at her I think she's going to have a great rest of the season. We're doing our best to put her into positions to be more successful."

That's what the Buffs as a whole are trying to do. Their three-game losing streak has been replaced by a two-game winning streak. A win Sunday will put them alone in fourth place, with half the conference season ahead.

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SHOW MENU



Linda Lappe's CU Buffs have regained confidence

CU boasts two-game win streak heading into Sunday's game

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

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Whether or not the Colorado women's basketball team needed to hit rock bottom is debatable.

But, there's no question the Buffs have been a different team since reaching that point and they've got a little bit of their swagger back as they host UCLA on Sunday at 2 p.m.

The low point came on Jan. 19 at Arizona State. Having already lost three of four games, the Buffs (15-4, 4-4 Pac-12) scored a team record-low nine points in the first half and trailed by 33 at the break.

"That, in a way, made us be like, 'Enough is enough. We really have to do this,'" senior Julie Seabrook.

A heart-to-heart talk at halftime began the transformation. The Buffs still lost the game, but outscored the Sun Devils by 12 in the second half. They've followed that up with back-to-back wins, including Thursday's 69-67 win against Southern Cal in what was their best performance of the year.

"After (the Arizona State game), I think everybody realized they had a lot to work on, whether they did or not before," junior Meagan Malcolm-Peck said.

CU began the season with just the third 12-0 start in program history, but the 1-4 stretch, culminating in the ASU defeat, forced the Buffs to make some adjustments.

"We've just been able to regroup," head coach Linda Lappe said. "Teams have that at different parts of the season every year. We hadn't had that yet.

"It was a time where we could really step back after that game and as a staff think about what we needed to do and as players think about what they needed to do."

CU has been a different team since then, for a variety of reasons.

For one, Lappe inserted freshman forward Jen Reese and sophomore guard Brittany Wilson into the starting lineup. Lappe and the Buffs have always downplayed the significance of the starting lineup, but the current five -- Reese, Wilson, Seabrook, Malcolm-Peck and Chucky Jeffery -- has given CU energy from the opening tip.

"We've definitely put together a lineup that's coming out fired up and ready to go with our defensive pressure," Seabrook said.

Since halftime at Arizona State, Reese has 31 points and 21 rebounds in 67 minutes of play, which translates to 18.5 points and 12.5 boards per 40 minutes. Wilson has 43 points in 87 minutes since the ASU intermission, or 19.8 points per 40 minutes.

Most importantly, both are playing exceptional defense of late.

"Certain people have a lot more confidence," Malcolm-Peck said. "B-Will is stepping up and getting back to how she was last year."

Jeffery has broken out of a slump, as well, and Malcolm-Peck added that the Buffs are getting better contributions off the bench, from players such as Jasmine Sborov, Lexy Kresl and Ashley Wilson.

The Buffs also attribute their turnaround to a basic return to fundamentals. During their 12-0 start, they were aggressive on

defense and let that flow into the offense. Their first loss, at Washington on Jan. 5, threw them out of whack.

"We just didn't know how to react to that and we just got away from doing the things that we know put us in position to be successful," Seabrook said. "Now that we're kind of on a roll, we are beginning to get more confident a little bit and it's definitely going to continue to help us."

The key is avoiding another drop to the bottom, but the Buffs are confident they can stay on the upswing down the stretch.

"Everybody just really believes in what we can do," Malcolm-Peck said. "USC was a key win for us to keep pushing in that second half and finish out strong. I think that was really good for us."

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