

CU women to host Northern Colorado in WNIT

Bufs face Bears at 7 p.m. Wednesday at Coors

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Ultimately, the Colorado women's basketball would like to be in the NCAA Tournament.

For a rebuilding program, the Women's National Invitational Tournament isn't a bad consolation.

On Monday night, the Buffs received an invitation to the WNIT for the second consecutive season. CU (18-13) will host Northern Colorado (20-11) at 7 p.m. Wednesday in the first round at Coors Events Center.

"This is a big deal," CU head coach Linda Lappe said. "We want to get in the habit of playing at this time of the year. Obviously the NCAA Tournament is our ultimate goal but there are always stepping stones to get to that point. This is just one more stepping stone to get to that point. It's a great opportunity and we're really starting to build a foundation of our program and what's to come in the future."

It wasn't much of a surprise that CU got the invitation. The WNIT requires a .500 record for teams to be eligible. Since the tournament adopted a 64-team format in 2010, every eligible team from the six major conferences that did not get selected for the NCAA Tournament has received a WNIT bid.

It also wasn't a surprise that CU got a home game. The WNIT has a habit of rewarding home games to teams with strong attendance.

CU finished second in the Pac-12 in attendance this year and has been good to the WNIT. In three previous WNIT appearances -- 1999, 2008 and 2011 -- CU has played a total of 10 games, with nine of them being at home because the Buffs draw fans to those games.

"It's great that we can play at Coors," senior Julie Seabrook said. "We love having our fans there."

CU is 7-3 in its WNIT history, reaching the quarterfinals last year.

"We want to play as many games as we can play in it and we have goals, definitely, but like any postseason tournament you have to take it a game at a time," Lappe said.

First up is UNC, which fell just short of the NCAA Tournament, losing by three to Idaho State in the Big Sky championship. The Bears, coached by Jamie White, will be making their first WNIT appearance.

"They were our very first scrimmage; we scrimmaged them back in the end of October," Lappe said. "Obviously it's been a long time since then. We've both changed a great deal, but, Jamie knows our system and we kind of know their system. They had a great year this year and we know they're going to be well coached. Their players play really hard. They're not a team at all that you can look past."

If the Buffs beat UNC, they would take on the winner of Thursday's Drake at South Dakota game.

"I'm really excited. It's only the second time I've been in the postseason," said Seabrook, who is the first senior to go to the postseason twice since the 2003-04 class. "It's going to be fun. I can't wait."

"We're definitely happy to still get a chance to play and hopefully go far in this tournament and do well."

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