

Women's basketball: CU Buffs aim to build off WNIT run again

CU made quarterfinals last year

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A year ago, the Colorado women's basketball team sneaked into the Women's NIT and then rode all the way to the quarterfinals.

Beginning with a first-round WNIT matchup Wednesday night against Northern Colorado, the Buffaloes are hoping for the same type of success this year.

"I think us going to the postseason last year, we got the experience and we know what we're capable of doing," junior guard Chucky Jeffery said. "We didn't get exactly where we want to be (this year), but postseason is better than no season. We're happy we got a chance to keep playing. It definitely gives us some confidence knowing we've been here before."

CU (18-13), of course, would rather be in the NCAA Tournament. So would Northern Colorado (20-11), for that matter. The Bears actually came closer to the NCAA Tourney than CU did, losing by just three in the Big Sky championship game; a win and they'd be in The Dance.

The Buffaloes understand what postseason success -- even in the WNIT -- can do for a program. Just 15-15 going into the WNIT a year ago, they won three in a row before losing to Southern Cal in the quarterfinals.

"It had a huge impact on this season," head coach Linda Lappe said. "We gained a lot of confidence through the WNIT last year, playing good teams like Cal and USC, beating Wyoming at Wyoming in a really tough environment. We learned a lot in the WNIT. It gave us postseason experience and it gave us a lot of confidence coming into this season."

CU took that confidence and turned it into a 12-0 start before stumbling a few times in Pac-12 play. The Buffs have played well of late, however, and really believe another good run through the WNIT will be crucial for the development of the program.

"It was good last year coming to the WNIT and this year definitely as well," sophomore guard Brittany Wilson said. "We get a lot more experience under our belt, with us being a young team with one senior. The more we get to play with this same team and the bulk of the team coming back next year, it's a really good advantage."

CU is planning on a tough challenge from the Bears, who play stingy defense and are led by an old rival of Jeffery's. Guard D'shara Strange is a sophomore from Fountain-Fort Carson High School and squared up against Jeffery, from Sierra High, a few times.

"I've known D for a while," Jeffery said. "We played against each other in high school. She's only a year younger than me, so we've been going at each other for a long time now."

Strange's game might look familiar to CU fans. Like Jeffery, she leads her team in scoring, rebounds, assists and steals. And, like Jeffery, she does it not as a post player but as a 5-foot-10, athletic guard.

"We're kind of like a mirror image," Jeffery said. "It'll be a good matchup for me and Brittany to guard her."

CU hopes it's the first of several good matchups. As they did a year ago, the Buffs have their sights set on a deep run into the WNIT.

"We're looking to win this thing," Wilson said.

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