

Women's basketball: CU Buffs face Oklahoma State in WNIT quarterfinals

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Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: 03/24/2012 11:39:47 PM MDT

CU women's basketball preview

SUNDAY: The Colorado Buffaloes (21-13) visit the Oklahoma State Cowgirls (19-12) in an 11:30 a.m. game at Gallagher-Iba Arena in Stillwater, Okla.

BROADCAST: Radio - KKZN (760 AM), with Mike Rice doing play-by-play.

STORYLINES: This is the quarterfinal round of the Women's NIT. ... CU is 10-3 all-time in the WNIT, including 2-0 on the road. OSU is 8-4 all-time in the WNIT, including 8-0 at home. OSU has been at home for all three WNIT games so far this season. ... The Buffs are 32-19 in postseason play. ... This is CU's second straight WNIT quarterfinal appearance; Oklahoma State's only other WNIT quarterfinal appearance came in 2001. OSU has never been to the semifinals; CU reached the semifinals in 2008. ... So far in the WNIT, CU has defeated Northern Colorado (54-42), South Dakota (64-55) and Villanova (48-47). The Cowgirls have defeated Central Arkansas (72-51), Wichita State (63-44) and Missouri State (70-57). ... Oklahoma State is 15-3 at home, needing just one win to break the single-season school record. ... CU is 9-7 away from Boulder this season. ... Freshmen and sophomores have accounted for 122 of Oklahoma State's 155 starts this year. ... As a player at CU, Buffs coach Linda Lappe went 3-0 in Stillwater.

KEY STAT: CU is 15-0 when shooting 40 percent or better

The path to the Women's NIT quarterfinals has been somewhat similar for Colorado and Oklahoma State.

Colorado (21-13) opened the season with a 12-0 start, sputtered in Pac-12 Conference play, including a 1-8 stretch, and has been stellar throughout the WNIT to this point.

Oklahoma State (19-12) opened the season with a 9-0 start, struggled through part of the Big 12 Conference, including a 1-7 stretch, and has played exceptional basketball in the WNIT.

"I think we're very similar in how we've progressed throughout the season," CU head coach Linda Lappe said.

Sunday at 11:30 a.m., the Buffs visit the Cowgirls in Stillwater, Okla. Regardless of what happened early and in the middle of the season, Lappe is focused on the most recent similarity between the clubs.

"Both of us probably wish our conference seasons had gone a little bit better, but at the same time we're both playing good basketball right now," she said. "To be playing good basketball at the end of the season is always the most important part."

Sunday's game will mark the first contest against a Big 12 school since the Buffs left the conference after last season.

"It's always a really great atmosphere," said CU senior Julie Seabrook, who has played twice in Stillwater. "They have a lot of fans."

Knowing a little about Oklahoma State could help CU. So far, the Buffs have faced Northern Colorado, South Dakota and Villanova -- three teams they weren't familiar with.

"We know kind of the style of play," Seabrook said. "Last year we didn't get a win against these guys and we didn't necessarily play as well as we wanted to, so we're definitely really excited to come down here and play at this time of year, playing our best basketball."

In their last visit, on Jan. 18, 2011, the Buffs trailed 47-46 with 7:22 to play, but wound up losing 58-49 as they went cold from the field.

Oklahoma State also killed the Buffs in the paint a year ago, mainly with 6-foot-6 Vicky McIntyre (14 points, eight rebounds, four blocks) and 6-foot-2 Toni Young (10 points, six rebounds). Add in freshman forward Liz Donohoe, whom the Buffs didn't see last year, and CU figures to be in for another battle down low. Donohoe leads the Cowgirls in scoring (12.6 per game) and rebounding (7.4).

"It's a good challenge and our coaches are definitely going to help us be prepared for it," said Seabrook, a 6-foot-3 forward.

from the floor, and has shot 39.6 percent on the season. Oklahoma State, however, ranked second in the Big 12 this season in field goal percentage defense, allowing opponents to shoot just 34.7 percent.

COACHES: Linda Lappe is 39-29 in her second season at CU and 89-65 overall. Jim Littell is 18-12 in his first season at Oklahoma State and overall.

PROBABLE STARTERS:

Colorado - Brittany Wilson, 5-7, So., 8.3 ppg, 3.1 rpg, 1.8 apg; ; G Chucky Jeffery, 5-10, Jr., 15.6 ppg, 7.9 rpg, 3.6 apg; G Jasmine Sborov, 6-1, Fr., 2.9 ppg, 2.9 rpg; G/F Meagan Malcolm-Peck, 6-2, Jr., 4.2 ppg, 4.2 rpg; F Julie Seabrook, 6-3, Sr., 7.0 ppg, 5.3 rpg. **Oklahoma State** - F Liz Donohoe, 6-0, Fr., 12.6 ppg, 7.4 rpg; F Toni Young, 6-2, Jr., 10.9 ppg, 6.9 rpg; F Lindsey Keller, 6-2, Jr., 7.5 ppg, 7.0 rpg; G Tiffany Bias, 5-6, So., 12.5 ppg, 6.6 apg; G Jordan Schultz, 5-10, Fr., 3.7 ppg, 1.4 rpg.

SERIES: CU leads 26-25, but Oklahoma State has won five in a row. In Stillwater, Oklahoma State leads 13-9 and has won four in a row there.

UP NEXT: : The winner will face the winner of today's San Diego at Washington game in the semifinals.

Lappe said Oklahoma State is doing many of the same things it did a year ago, although the Cowgirls are better in transition and play a lot more man-to-man defense.

Considering the variety of styles CU has seen already, Lappe feels her team will be ready for whatever Oklahoma State throws at the Buffs.

"At this point in the year, I feel like you've got to be ready for everything," she said. "We just faced a team that pretty much had all guards and now we've got to change gears and be ready to protect the paint and guard post players.

"I think it's a good opportunity to come down to Stillwater and play a very good basketball team on their home floor and it'll be a challenge, but it's going to be a fun challenge."

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Heartbroken Buffaloes: CU women's basketball team one win short of 1995 Final Four

By John Henderson *The Denver Post* *The Denver Post*

Posted:

DenverPost.com

BOULDER — The best college women's basketball team in this state's history never knew it at the time. When they hung out at each other's dorm rooms at Kitteridge West or gathered at junior Aleks Slokar's house off campus, the 1994-95 Colorado Buffaloes were merely tightening a bond that led them to the nation's elite.

In charging to a 30-3 record, a 25-game winning streak and a No. 2 national ranking, their bond never broke. But their hearts sure did.

As this year's NCAA women's Tournament enters the Elite Eight on Monday, all eight teams hope they don't wind up wallowing in the same abyss that engulfed the Buffs of 17 years ago: a pool of tears, cries in the locker room and utter disbelief as a dream season falls apart.

For those just hopping on the women's basketball bandwagon heading to the Pepsi Center for the Final Four on April 1-3, here's how close Colorado came to playing in one: (For those who do remember, please cover up the next paragraph):

On this day 17 years ago, Colorado led No. 12 Georgia by 10 points with 4½ minutes left in the Elite Eight. Two turnovers and Kedra Holland's three 3-pointers led to a shocking 82-79 loss.

"Probably the most disappointing loss I've ever had as a player and one of the most disappointing losses I've had involving this game," said Raegan Pebley, a sophomore reserve on that team who just finished her eighth year as head coach at Utah State.

The cruelty of sports is revealed when one loss overshadows one spectacular season. Yet, as history's shadow grows, the season grows in glory. Colorado's should.

Coach Ceal Barry's team had two major senior stars in colossal 6-foot-5 center Isabelle Fijal-kowski and Parade All-America point guard Shelley Sheetz. The Buffs had a bruising rebounder in sophomore Erin Scholz, a savvy defensive stopper in Jen Terry and a solid shooting guard in junior De Celle Thomas.

Pebley, then Raegan Scott, was a formidable backup center and junior Amy Palmer was a deadly sniper off the bench.

"Ceal did an amazing job to get us all to accept our strengths and we had the responsibility to bring those strengths," Pebley said. "We never felt like we were second-class citizens on the team."

Colorado's lineup was loaded

The Buffaloes crushed people. They beat teams by nearly 20 points a game and suffered only two regular-season losses: at fourth-ranked Louisiana Tech on Dec. 3 and two weeks later to top-ranked Tennessee.

Fijalkowski was a rare force in women's hoops. A seasoned veteran of international competition in her native France, she combined a professional approach with soft hands and big shoulders.

Sheetz earned Kodak All-America honors and was arguably the nation's best point guard. She was a fierce pass-first leader who combined with Palmer to hit 115 3-pointers.

"(Barry's) coaching style fit me along with Barb Smith, our guards coach," said Sheetz, now an assistant coach at the University of Denver. "Between the two of them, they were a huge part of my learning curve."

CU entered the NAAs at No. 2 in the country and kept on rolling. The Buffaloes blew out Holy Cross, Southwest Missouri State and George Washington. The Elite Eight in Des Moines, Iowa, was unfolding like a little Iowa girl's dream. Sheetz was about to lead her Buffs to their first Final Four in front of a hometown throng that drove the 115 miles from Cedar Rapids.

For Barry, who would turn 40 on April 1 that year, the players adopted a mantra in her honor: "Final Four by 40."

Then came Georgia.

The Buffaloes all know what happened, but they can't confirm it. No player contacted for this story has ever watched the game tape. Georgia had no one to stop Fijalkowski, and the Buffs slowed the game, feeding her all night. She poured in 35 points on 13-of-16 shooting.

Georgia trailed 70-60 with 4½ minutes left and was in foul trouble, but then slapped on a full-court press. It was Barry's biggest fear. In the Big Eight Tournament title victory over Kansas, Terry tore her ACL.

With her out, Sheetz was Colorado's lone ball handler.

"I do remember thinking three minutes into the championship game of the Big Eight Tournament, 'This could cost us a national championship,' " said Barry, now CU's associate athletic director. "That kid was a 4.0 engineering student. We wouldn't have turned the ball over against the press with Jen Terry in the lineup because she always knew what to do."

"Bitter taste from that game"

Even in practice in Des Moines, the Buffs struggled against a press. In attendance was Georgia coach Andy Landers.

"My regret, if I had to do it over again," Barry said, "there was no way I would've worked on a press offense in front of Andy Landers."

As Georgia rallied, Holland hit two treys and Sheetz, looking gassed from playing 38 minutes, charged Holland, whose two foul shots cut it to 75-74. Sheetz then turned it over on a triple-team. Tiffany Walker's bucket inside gave Georgia a lead the Bulldogs wouldn't lose with 2:29 left.

"I'm not going to talk up losing this game because of me being tired," Sheetz said. "If you want to say I lost the game? Yeah, because of my performance down the stretch. I have a little bitter taste from that game and my performance, sure."

The game's aftermath resembled a funeral. Scott slumped on the bench and fell over as if fainting from grief. Sheetz sobbed through an awkward news conference. Barry broke down after leaving the podium.

"Would I have liked to have gone to a Final Four and won a national championship? Absolutely," Barry said. "Does it keep me up at night? No. I think at the end of your life there are other things that are more important."

Such as this: Every player on that team graduated except Fijalkowski, who went home to play for the French Olympic team. Scott, Sheetz and Scholz went into coaching. Lauri Weathers became an Army psychologist.

They all got off that mat. For all of them, may this Elite Eight pass quickly.

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Where the players are now

CU had a powerhouse women's basketball team in the 1994-95 season with far-reaching results:

Isabelle Fijalkowski, Clermont-Ferrand, France

Erin Scholz, Fresno, Calif. Head coach, Fresno Pacific University

De Celle Thomas, Frisco, Texas. Buyer, J.C. Penney

Amy Palmer, Lake Charles, La. Science teacher, Suphur High School

Alexis Felts, San Francisco. Between jobs

Aleksandra (Slokar) Darrah, Denver. Director of business development, Avnet Inc.

La Shena Graham, Kansas City, Kan. Accountant, state of Kansas

Destination: Denver

A look at the schedule this week and next week for the Women's Final Four in Denver. Semifinal games are next Sunday and the national championship is April 3, all at the Pepsi Center.

FRIDAY

Mile High Magic Salute Premiere — The welcoming party is at the Buell Theatre on Friday from 6-7:30 p.m. The red carpet arrival of the four teams is open to the public, but tickets (\$20 general admission) are required to get into the event.

Tourney Town — Open every day at the Colorado Convention Center, Tourney Town is the center of weekend fun for fans and will host clinics, exhibits, interactive displays and concerts all weekend. It is free and open each day through the championship game. Open each day from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m.

SATURDAY

Practices and autograph sessions — Practices at the Pepsi Center for all four teams are open and free to the public to attend. Free posters will be given to fans, who can get them signed at autograph sessions after practices. 10:45 a.m. to 4 p.m.

4Kay Run — The 4Kay Run on Saturday starts at Civic Center Park, benefits breast cancer research and is in remembrance of the late North Carolina State coach Kay Yow. Prerace registration starts at 7:30 a.m. and the run begins at 9 a.m. Online registration is \$20. Onsite registration is \$25.

Youth clinics — The clinics for boys and girls ages 8-16 are at Denver South and ThunderRidge high schools and will focus on basketball skills, conditioning and life skills with women's basketball coaches and student athletes, as well as collegiate administrators. The clinics are free.

Battle of the Bands — Bands from all four schools will have their own competition after the teams' practice sessions. 3:45 p.m.

High School All-America Game — The Women's Basketball Coaches Association will host the annual game of the best high school girls in the country at the Pepsi Center. 4:30 p.m.

Jewel concert — Going on at Tourney Town, singer and songwriter Jewel will give a free concert. 5:30 p.m.

SUNDAY, APRIL 1

Semifinal games — The four teams finally get on the Pepsi Center court for the semi- finals, which are at 4:30 p.m. and 7 p.m.

Mile High Dribble — Thousands of kids are invited to dribble a basketball from Civic Center Park to Tourney Town on Sunday morning. Participants who preregister can check in at 10 a.m. Day-of registration starts at 11 and the dribble begins at 11:30 a.m.

TUESDAY, APRIL 3

Championship game — Winners from the semifinals will meet at the Pepsi Center at 6:30 p.m. for the NCAA championship.

More info: ncaa.com/finalfour



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OSU women host Colorado **(<http://muskogee phoenix.com/sports/x1437238695/OSU-women-host-Colorado>)**

By Nick Snow
CNHI (<http://muskogee phoenix.com>)

— STILLWATER — Before taking on Central Arkansas, Oklahoma state women's basketball coach Jim Littell seemed slightly frustrated with a tough draw in the first round of the WNIT.

That tough draw may end up being a blessing in disguise for the Cowgirls (19-12), as they face a familiar foe for the second straight game when Colorado visits Gallagher-Iba Arena at 12:30 p.m. today.

"It does help when you know a team or have played against them before," Littell said. "But as we saw (against Missouri State), just because you've played them before and had success, doesn't mean you're going to have success again."

Oklahoma State has won the last five — including a 58-49 win on Jan. 18, 2011 in Stillwater — over its former Big 12 opponent, but Colorado still holds a 26-25 series lead.

"It doesn't matter who we play, we just want to get a win," Oklahoma State junior Toni Young said. "We want to keep our season going for as long as we can because each game we play only makes us better for next year."

Like a lot of the teams Oklahoma State has faced in the WNIT, Colorado relies heavily on its guard play. Chucky Jeffery averages 15.6 points and 7.9 rebounds per game for the Buffaloes. Littell doesn't see the Cowgirls completely shutting Jeffery down, but with the way the defense is playing he hopes to limit the damage she is able to do.

"If someone gets hot we usually switch Tiffany (Bias) to cover that person and she cools them down," Littell said. "She's just a little water bug. A lot of the credit for how well our defense has played should go to her."