



*Senior Emily Talley no longer shoulders the CU women's team.  
Photo Courtesy: CUBuffs.com*



## Brooks: Help's Here And Talley Couldn't Be Happier

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**BOULDER** - There haven't been too many times when Emily Talley considered herself to be overly burdened. And the way her college golf career has unfolded, that's a very good thing because like it or not, she had her team on her shoulders during her first two seasons at Colorado.

But as a rich and rewarding CU career approaches the 18th green, things have changed for the better. Talley, a vivacious Californian who is a relative newcomer to her sport, now has a better-than-credible supporting cast - although she will debate who has supported whom during her most entertaining and enjoyable year in golf.

As a freshman and sophomore, Talley's individual rounds and tournament finishes more often than not were the Buffaloes' best. On more than one occasion since those early years, veteran CU coach Anne Kelly has wished Talley could have had more help and reflected on how things might have been had Talley not been, well, the load bearer.

The selfless Talley didn't see it that way.

"Golf is still very much an individual sport; you're going out there and playing for yourself," she said. "But at the end of the day, when you come in at the end of three rounds and you see your team in the middle or at the bottom of that leader board, it's not a great feeling. And that was even when I played well; I might have been top 10 or top 20 individually, but my team might not have been right there."

"Now, it doesn't matter whether I play bad or good, we're still going to be in contention. My scores are going to count or not count. It's exciting sometimes . . . like, shooting a couple over par, my freshman year that would have been a good score. Now we're throwing it out. That's awesome; it's a different feeling from my freshman and sophomore years."

It's different for a very simple reason: Kelly and her staff have recruited well and assembled a team that is ranked No. 11 nationally heading into next week's NCAA West Regional at the Colorado National Golf Club in Erie (Thursday-Saturday). The field is saw-grass tough. Ten of the Pac-12 Conference's teams are included in the 72-team NCAA field, with the West's Pac-12 entries including No. 1 seed UCLA, No. 4 CU, No. 5 California, No. 14 Stanford and No. 18 Oregon State.

Talley and the Buffs are hoping to dismiss the final round of last week's Pac-12 tournament and emulate their performances of the first two rounds. Entering the final round, they trailed Cal by three strokes. But the eventual champion Bears held steady while the Buffs took a final-day tumble, finishing seven strokes back and in sixth place.

"It just wasn't our day, but it was so awesome to see us all on (in the previous round)," Talley said. "We were throwing out mid-70s score. Compared to my freshman year, it was like, 'We're throwing that out? Are you kidding me? Please, get more of those.' That was awesome, a great day. It was fun to be a part of it, have your score count and have the low round (her 69 was the lowest in CU postseason history). I really felt I had a big part in that . . . that's a good feeling that you never really forget. You want that more often."

Kelly's top five have been Talley and Alex Stewart, who tied for ninth at the Pac-12s; twins Kristin and Jenny Coleman; and Jess Wallace. Talley calls the group "serious competitors, serious fighters, amazing athletes, amazing golfers. The work ethic is out of this world on this team. They all want it so bad."

In Talley's case, part of the drive comes from wanting to succeed for Kelly's sake. "I want to do it for myself, but more for my coach especially," Talley said. "She's done so much for us and me especially. She gave me the opportunity in college. I was kind of a no-name golfer out there. She gave me the opportunity and I came in and worked my butt off. I couldn't have asked for a better coach; she's like a second mother to us. That's the least I could do - try to get us to nationals for her."

Talley didn't begin seriously competing in golf until her final two years at two different schools - Justin-Siena High School in Napa, Calif., as a junior and R.L. Stevenson School in Pebble Beach as a senior. In her previous two years she had a different athletic focus: tennis. But she slowly came to the realization that her temperament was better suited for the course rather than court.

Make no mistake, Talley is a tireless worker and competitor. Even now she misses tennis. But she believed that sport was demanding a side she didn't have - an ugly side.

"I was hitting a point in high school where I was getting tired of the over-aggressiveness you find with your competitors," she recalled. "I remember being cussed at, kind of verbally assaulted by your competitors, even your competitors' parents. It's not pretty."

In her high school tennis circles, Talley said she sometimes was called "the cheerleader." If an opponent hit a good shot, a winner, she offered congratulations. Opponents, she said, "would get so annoyed with that; you could tell they couldn't handle that."

Not so in the golfing world. "It's you against the course in a college setting," she said. Besides, why undergo a personality change for 3 1/2 or 4 hours during competition? "I can be my happy, out-going, friendly self and it's not going to affect anything at all in the competition."

"I'm not that person to cuss back . . . I think that's why I wasn't going to make it in that world (tennis). I'm competitive, but I'm sure as hell not going to be mean about it. That's different, and that's where golf is going to benefit me, I think."

As you might be detecting right about now, Talley is nothing if not introspective. Earlier this week she did a good bit of thinking aloud with her boyfriend, CU Nordic skier Andreas Hoyer. She pondered a complete about-face, what would have amounted to a personality transplant. before next week's West Regional. In attendance will be her parents, her older sister, Hoyer and other classmates and friends.

For their sake, should she be more serious, more intense? Should she seethe and stalk about if she hits a bad shot? Should she dispense with the "cheerleader" dynamic she was so often accused of displaying in tennis?

In the end, common sense took the lead by a healthy margin and has held on. Don't expect any slippage, either.

"My coaches have been saying for years, 'Be yourself,'" she said. "You can't try to change who you are. My attitude and how I go about things is so different, but it works for me. I can't go out and change that, especially with these huge tournaments coming up . . . I'm more positive and I think that really helps in the long run. I think it's helping that I'm coming to terms with this. At least I'm not in denial of it."

But between now and when she steps to the first tee next week, there's no doubt what part of her game Talley will be trying to improve. Putting. Heretofore, she's been consistently good on the greens. Prior to the Pac-12 tourney, she concentrated on upgrading her long game and during that competition in Pullman, Wash., it was "on fire, incredibly on fire . . . I just couldn't make a darn put. It was all in my head because I know I'm a great putter. I shot a 69 in the second round with my nerves at an all-time high."

They stayed that way. Entering the final round, she couldn't shake this thought: "I can't make a putt outside of five feet so if I want to birdie this hole I'd better stick it." So she almost holed out on No. 18, leaving herself a tap-in birdie because she was "so confident with my long game that it was possible."

But here's what Talley can fall back on: In her freshman season, she says she couldn't hit a green and it was her putting that saved her (and par) on so many occasions. The situation has flipped, but it comforts her to know that through practice and focus she can flip it back. She's always been willing to put in the time to make corrections and improve, but she's also arrived at this realization: "Every day is not going to be perfect; I have to get used to that."

According to Talley, each of CU's top five golfers wants to compete professionally and she is convinced she can. She doesn't think her game is close to peaking and - here's that introspective side again - sometimes questions whether she's "deserving" of a top finish when other competitors might have started the sport before she did and put in more time on the practice tee.

But, she adds, "The idea of no school, all golf, all working out and in great weather somewhere in the south . . . I honestly I think I can do it. Getting myself in more situations, giving myself more opportunities, I honestly think I can do it."

She will graduate next week (history and communications major) but is more focused on the West Regional and what lies beyond than the approaching cap-and-gown festivities. Five top five tournament finishes as a junior have been followed by two this spring. She jokes that she's "probably the only college golfer at my level to have not won a tournament. You can see how I'm trying to grab those last moments, but who knows? Maybe I'm saving it for the big ones."

The Big Ones are fast approaching, and these Buffs are infinitely better equipped to approach them than they were earlier in Talley's career. Help has arrived, making her final season something special.

"We've been on a gradual incline since my freshman year, and it's made some pretty steep changes in the last couple of years - which has been phenomenal," she said. "Right now, I'd have to say this is the high point of the semester, the season, the year . . . I really couldn't be coming to a better end of college."

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