

women's basketball

University of Colorado's Barry back in coaching with Team USA at Pan American Games

By Natalie Meisler
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BOULDER — Ceal Barry, Colorado athletic department administrator, rummaged through her desk for the most obvious prop from her previous career as one of the longest-tenured (22 years) and winningest (427 games) coaches in school history.

Barry is coming out of coaching retirement to guide the U.S. women's basketball team at the Pan American Games in Guadalajara, Mexico. Team USA's tournament opener is Friday against Argentina. The gold medal game will be played Tuesday. Barry didn't want to leave home without a whistle.

"I know I have one in here," she said during a futile search of a desk drawer. "I do need a whistle."

Barry has been busy meeting new Pac-12 colleagues and overseeing several CU sports that report directly to her. That means cheering soccer and volleyball teams that are struggling

much like the football team while being introduced to Pac-12 competition, as well as taking a phone call from women's golf coach Ann Kelly about a West Coast tournament victory for CU.

All that multi-tasking as a college administrator will help Barry take a U.S. roster of mostly unheralded players from mostly midmajor conferences and play five games in five days.

"One of the things I miss about coaching is that single-minded focus you have in a coaching environment," Barry said before leaving. "There's one mission and one mission alone."

The call to coach once again came from longtime friend Carol Callan, the U.S. women's national team director.

"Ceal is the best teacher in basketball," she said.

Barry is typically modest about why she was picked to guide Team USA. The Pan American Games' host city chooses the dates of the competition, and the NCAA calendar apparently wasn't a consideration in Guadalajara.

"Active coaches are too concerned about getting ready for their first exhibition game," Barry said. "There's also recruiting. In all seriousness, they



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are busy. It's not a good time (for them to be with Team USA)."

Barry has an impressive collection of memorabilia from international coaching, including the 1996 Olympics and 1994 world championships.

The diverse pool of talent makes this Pan Am Games tournament a special challenge.

Team USA's first plan was to select post-collegiate players in the WNBA offseason. But those players are overseas taking advantage of opportunities to make money. Meanwhile, many coaches in top collegiate programs didn't want their best players to leave.

So the midmajors came to the rescue.

"These kids from Eastern Michigan, Hofstra, Liberty and Gonzaga, they are thrilled," Barry said. "I think they are going to do cartwheels to put a jersey on that says 'USA.' If it wasn't scheduled for late October, maybe they wouldn't get a chance to play on a team of this caliber."

Barry said she won't be dusting off her old CU playbook while in Mexico, calling her tri-angle offense too complex to install during the Americans' five days of a hurry-up training camp.

"Of course," she said, "we will teach defense."

It would be an upset if Barry didn't teach defense. She virtually invented women's basketball practice in this state but joked about checking out CU coach Linda Lappe's practice before leaving. Lappe said she would be honored if Barry solicited notes on running practice.

"She's been out of it a few years (but) she knows how to coach and motivate," said Lappe, a former Barry-coached player with the Buffs.

Barry's coaching instinct is sure to take over.

"It's not that important to download 300 pages of offense," Barry said. "If someone makes a mistake, it's important that we're able to communicate."

Team USA will face an uneven distribution of talent at the Pan Am Games. Barry expects Brazil to bring its Olympic team, which includes several WNBA players. The Americans' best player might be UConn-bound, 6-foot-7 high school senior Breanna Stewart of North Syracuse, N.Y.

Yes, Barry has goals for Team USA. First, she wants to avoid injuries that could impact her players' seasons in the U.S. And she wants the Americans to advance to the gold medal game.

"You can take the coach out of the gym," Callan said, "but you can't take the gym out of the coach."

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Ceal Barry's resume

- CU coach, 1983-2005 (427-242 record)
- Players had 95 percent graduation rate
- Four-time Big Eight Conference coach of the



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year (1989, 1993, 1994, 1995)

- District V coach of the year (1993, 1995)
- Four Big Eight championship teams
- National coach of the year (1994)
- Inaugural Big 12 Tournament title (1997)
- Jones Cup coach (1988)
- U.S. Olympic team assistant (1996)
- U.S. junior world championships (2004)
- Colorado Sports Hall of Fame (2006)
- CU Athletic Hall of Fame (2010)
- Chaired the NCAA Division I women's basketball issues committee (2010-11)



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