

Former Colorado basketball coach Ceal Barry to lead U.S. Pan Am team

Americans will go for gold in Mexico in October

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Ceal Barry has never applied for another college coaching job since she resigned in 2005 after 22 years leading the Colorado women's basketball team.

That doesn't mean she didn't consider it a couple of times when the excitement of the NCAA tournament would get her competitive juices flowing each March. But Barry, now associate athletic director and senior woman administrator at CU, loves what she's doing and said Thursday that she doubts she'll ever get back into coaching full time.

She will be on the sideline once again this fall, however.

USA Basketball on Thursday named the legendary former Buffs coach to lead Team USA at the Pan American Games in Guadalajara, Mexico, Oct. 21-25.

She will head a staff that includes a couple of the sport's other icons in former Virginia coach Debbie Ryan and former WNBA coach and USA Basketball star Jennifer Gillom.

"I'm excited about it," Barry said. "It's going to be a great experience.

"I enjoy coaching. I enjoy teaching. I enjoy the interaction with players. I enjoy the competition and the preparation."

While a full-time gig never reeled her in, Barry -- who oversees men's and women's basketball, women's golf, soccer and volleyball at CU -- said she figured she would get back into coaching in some capacity someday when the situation and timing were right.

She has always stayed in touch with the game, most recently serving as chair of the NCAA Division-I Women's Basketball Issues Committee and leading U16 clinics and tryouts at the Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs in May.

Her current opportunity began to unfold over the past few weeks as USA Basketball officials tried to decide how to deal with the Pan Am Games' move from their usual summer spot on the calendar to a fall slot. While the Americans will still send a roster of college players, asking one or more college coaches to devote two weeks just before their own seasons started would have been a tough pitch to make.

Both Barry and Ryan, who retired last spring after 34 years at UVA, have extensive experience coaching for USA Basketball. And Gillom has been part of the program both as a coach and as a player, winning Olympic gold in 1988.

"We didn't have to look far or long for who we wanted; it's a terrific staff," said USA women's national team director Carol Callan, who is well-acquainted with Barry as the long-time color commentator for CU women's radio broadcasts and through Barry's past stints with USA Basketball. "(Barry) is a teacher first and foremost, and if you want to have an athlete get better at the game of basketball you go to Ceal Barry."

Barry's 12-player roster will be named in the coming weeks. The group will head to Houston Oct. 15-18 for a training camp before moving on to Mexico.

Team USA will play in Group A against Argentina, Mexico and Puerto Rico, while Brazil, Canada, Colombia and Jamaica fill out Group B. Semifinals are Oct. 24, with the championship game in the pre-Olympic year event taking place Oct. 25.

For Barry, who coached CU to 427 victories, the Pan Am Games will mark her fifth head-coaching stint with USA Basketball, with her last assignment coming in 2004 when she led the U.S. Junior World Championship Qualifying team to an undefeated record. She has also served as an assistant on various occasions, most notably for the 1996 Olympic team

that won gold in Atlanta.

She said there's plenty to like about coaching internationally, including the different style of play and chance to experience other cultures.

And the camaraderie that is built among coaches and players from different programs around the country is something that lasts long after the games are over. Every year when she attends the NCAA Final Four, Barry said she bumps into former players or coaches she's worked with for various USA Basketball squads, and each time it provides a unique trip down memory lane.

"You give each other a hug and it takes you back," the legendary former CU coach said. "That's what's fun about USA Basketball."

Barry said CU chancellor Phil DiStefano and athletic director Mike Bohn both encouraged her to coach the Pan Am team.

"I would not jeopardize my current job," Barry said. "They had to be fully onboard before I agreed to do this."

Bohn applauded the leadership and values Barry would take with her to the team, and he said it's a positive any time one of CU's various coaches, athletes or employees is able to represent the school on an international level.

"It creates a wonderful platform to feature the people that we have at the University," Bohn said. "The university is committed to an international presence. And when athletics can be used to promote that initiative it's a win-win for everyone."

Barry said reconnecting with the issues a coach deals with on a daily basis would also help her in working with the programs she oversees at CU, not to mention the different perspectives she's always gained in the past with USA Basketball.

"There's a lot of pluses in bringing that experience back here," she said.

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