

Women's soccer: CU Buffs seniors hope to go out in style

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There is talk of reaching the NCAA Tournament coming from the Colorado soccer team.

Following a four-win season, that may seem a bit far-fetched, but the Buffs don't believe so.

"Just because we didn't have the best season last year, it doesn't mean the expectation is any lower this season," senior Amy Barczuk said. "If anything, it's higher with the new coaching staff and everything."

CU (4-13-2 last season, 1-9-1 in Pac-12) opens the 2012 season today at Northern Colorado. With new head coach Danny Sanchez and a roster nearly half full with freshmen, the Buffs are eager to put last year's disappointment behind them.

"I think our goal is to have a winning season, to go out on a good note," senior Lauren Shaner said. "We want to start building the program and being successful in the Pac-12. We were in last place last year, so there's only one place to go and that's up."

The Buffs tied Arizona for last place in the Pac-12 and those two are picked to finish at the bottom again this year. CU, however, doesn't believe it is that far away from contending for an NCAA Tournament spot. As recently as 2008, CU won 14 games and played in the NCAA tourney.

"The difference between a top-25 team and not is just minor details, so we're just really trying to focus on those details on and off the field," Barczuk said.

One of those details is finding the net. The Buffs scored just 21 goals all of last season, and eight of those game in the first two games. They were shut out eight times and held to one goal on five other occasions. Yet, it wasn't as if the Buffs got blown out. Of their 13 losses, eight came by just a single goal. They had five 1-0 losses.

The Buffs, who were outscored 38-21, struggled on set pieces all season and connected on just 8.1 percent of their shots (21 of 259) overall.

On the plus side, CU has a lot of experience coming back. Barczuk and Shaner were both regular starters, along with Anne Stuller, Hayley Hughes, Carly Bolyard, Shaye Marshall, Bianca Jones, Quinn Krier and goalie Annie Brunner.

That's a hungry group.

"The returners, we don't want to have another losing season," Barczuk said. "If anything, that's a huge motivation."

The Buffs will also rely on a huge freshman class. Of the 27 players on the roster, 12 are freshmen.

"It's half the team, so we need at least of them to contribute," Sanchez said.

Sanchez led Metro State to a pair of Division II national titles before coaching Wyoming the past four years. He led the Cowgirls to the best record in school history last year, going 12-6-4, including a win against the Buffs. With a 267-60-23 career mark, he's been around a lot of good teams and believes he has one here.

"There's more talent here, there's more work, there's more commitment than a four-win team," he said. "It just didn't happen last year."

The quest to make it happen this year begins today, as they begin a nine-game set of non-conference games. The goal is to build some momentum before heading into the always-tough Pac-12, which is headed by defending national champ and top-ranked Stanford.

"Those 11 games (in Pac-12 play) are all going to be brutal," Sanchez said. "We know it's important to get off to a good start, to build some momentum and build some confidence because we know the challenges ahead."

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