



COLORADO BUFFALOES

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Coach Linda Lappe believes the Buffs are as prepared as possible for Pac-12 play.

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Brooks: Lappe, Buffs Say They're Prepped For Pac-12

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BOULDER - OK, so the media doesn't think highly of Linda Lappe's third Colorado women's basketball team. Here's what's important: The Buffaloes think highly of themselves - and they've put together the non-conference resume to prove it.

In a Nov. 7 preseason poll of media who cover the Pac-12 Conference, CU was picked to finish ninth. But does this smack of a projected ninth-place finish? The Buffs rang in the New Year as the league's only undefeated (11-0) team. What's more, they celebrated the arrival of 2013 with an unexpected national ranking (No. 20).

Of course, that can change in the blink of an eye - or in this case, in the blink of two games in three days. CU opens Pac-12 play this week against a pair of Top Ten opponents. No. 4 Stanford, the media's choice to win its 21st conference championship under Tara VanDerveer, visits the Coors Events Center on Friday (8 p.m.), while No. 7 California comes in on Sunday (noon).

Lappe and her players say they are prepped for the Cardinal, the Golden Bears and all that follow. "We are prepared as we can be," Lappe said following the Buffs' 84-39 weekend cruise past New Mexico. "I can't think

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of very many things we aren't prepared for."

Her players share her confidence. Redshirt freshman Arielle Roberson, the most significant addition to Lappe's lineup (Roberson is averaging 15.7 points and 6.1 rebounds), says she and her teammates are "very confident" to open Pac-12 play.

"We're happy with where we are right now," said Roberson, who set a school record Saturday against the Lobos by scoring in double figures (18 points) for the 11th consecutive game to open her career. "I think we can only go up from here . . . We have come together more as a team and think that's only going to help us down the road."

Lappe calls the Pac-12 "tough this year . . . much improved from previous years. There's four ranked teams (UCLA is No. 16) and two teams in the top ten. There's a lot of exciting things going into the Pac-12 that we didn't have last year."

That applies directly to the Buffs. Along with the athletic Roberson, Lappe's revived low-post corps includes freshman Jamee Swan, sophomore Jen Reese and junior Rachel Hargis. Of the latter two, Lappe says both "have gotten so much better . . . we've been pretty dominant down there thus far. But the best post play we're going to see is to come. I'm excited to see that and how we stack up. Stanford and Cal probably have two of the better low post games in the country. That's going to be exciting."

Meanwhile, Jeffery has been Jeffery - still multi-talented but more comfortable in her point guard role now that the scoring burden doesn't fall directly to her. Jeffery is averaging 12.2 points and a team-best 8.2 rebounds, but there's more stat sharing on a game-by-game basis.

If the Buffs have to sharpen any part of their game entering their Pac-12 schedule, they know where to look first: turnovers. They are averaging 15.5 a game, but they've been below in their two most recent outings (six against Utah Valley, 13 against New Mexico). And in their most significant non-conference win - 70-66 against then-No. 8 Louisville - they survived 25 turnovers.

"We've got to get our turnovers down and communicate better," said Reese, who is averaging 10.5 points and 5.9 rebounds. "We've been working on that a lot. Our passes need to be crisper and sharper. Then, winning the box out wars is big - rebounding better. I think we'll do OK."

Somewhere far north of ninth is what they have in mind.

Previewing the Pac-12 (schools listed in predicted order of finish):

•1. Stanford

Coach: Tara VanDerveer (26 seasons at Stanford, 710-150 record)

2011-12 record: 35-2 overall, 18-0 Pac-12 (first)

2012-13 non-conference record: 11-1

Best non-conference win: 71-69 against then-No. 1 Baylor

Leading scorer: Chiney Ogumike, 21.5

Leading rebounder: Chiney Ogumike, 12.8

Pac-12 outlook: Overall balance, talent, VanDerveer's coaching experience make Stanford the league's team to beat. So what else is new? Don't be fooled by last weekend's 61-35 home loss to No. 2 Connecticut, the Cardinal is the cream of the Pac-12 and Ogumike is arguably the conference's best player.

•2. California

Coach: Lindsay Gottlieb (2nd season at Cal, 35-11 record)

2011-12 record: 25-10 overall, 13-5 Pac-12 (second)

2012-13 non-conference record: 10-1

Best non-conference win: 88-79 against then-No. 19 Kansas

Leading scorer: Gennifer Brandon, 13.8

Leading rebounder: Gennifer Brandon, 10.8

Pac-12 outlook: The Golden Bears are big and physical (see: Layshia Clarendon), with three of their top five scorers grouped at 13-plus points a game. They're outrebounding opponents by a plus-14.5 margin and are averaging a league-best 78.0 points a game.

•3. Colorado

Coach: Linda Lappe (3rd season at CU, 50-30 record)

2011-12 record: 21-14 overall, 6-12 Pac-12 (10th)

2012-13 non-conference record: 11-0

Best non-conference win: 70-66 against then-No. 8 Louisville

Leading scorer: Arielle Roberson, 15.7

Leading rebounder: Chucky Jeffery, 8.2

Pac-12 outlook: The addition of Roberson and Jamee Swan, coupled with improved play from Rachel Hargis and Jen Reese, has put the Buffs' post play a level above that of recent seasons. Finally, Jeffery isn't being counted on to do it all - or most of it.

•4. UCLA

Coach: Cori Close (2nd season at UCLA, 21-18 record)

2011-12 record: 14-16 overall, 9-9 Pac-12 (T-5th)

2012-13 non-conference record: 7-2

Best non-conference win: 86-80 at then-No. 11 Oklahoma

Leading scorer: Markel Walker, 14.4

Leading rebounder: Alyssia Brewer, 9.3

Pac-12 outlook: The Bruins are talented and experienced. Walker, an all-Pac-12 performer, is part of a four-member senior class that was the nation's No. 1 recruiting class four years ago. Redshirt senior Jasmine Dixon, a member of that class who was injured last season, returns.

•5. Utah

Coach: Anthony Levrets (3rd season at Utah, 43-35 record)

2011-12 record: 16-16 overall, 8-10 Pac-12 (T-7th)

2012-13 non-conference record: 9-2

Best non-conference win: 59-40 against Michigan

Leading scorer: Taryn Wicijowski, 16.8

Leading rebounder: Taryn Wicijowski, 8.0

Pac-12 outlook: Wicijowski and Michelle Plouffe (16.4 ppg, 7.6 rpg) are neck-and-neck atop the stat sheet and form a solid 1-2 punch. The Utes went to sleep (or simply went cold) in their final non-conference game, losing 62-56 at home to North Dakota (5-6).

•6. Southern California

Coach: Michael Cooper (4th season at USC, 64-45 record)

2011-12 record: 18-12 overall, 12-6 Pac-12 (third)

2012-13 non-conference record: 3-8

Best non-conference win: 62-51 at UC-Santa Barbara

Leading scorer: Cassie Harberts, 16.7

Leading rebounder: Cassie Harberts, 7.5

Pac-12 outlook: The Trojans might not be in disarray, but they surely can see it from where they stand. They closed non-conference play with six straight losses, the longest skid since the 2000-01 season. USC is hoping Pac-12 play brings some relief.

•7. Washington

Coach: Kevin McGuff (2nd season at UW, 28-17 record)

2011-12 record: 20-14 overall, 8-10 Pac-12 (T-7th)

2012-13 non-conference record: 8-3

Best non-conference win: 60-55 at Wisconsin

Leading scorer: Talia Walton, 12.5

Leading rebounder: Aminah Williams, 11.5

Pac-12 outlook: The Huskies finished seventh in the conference last season and that looks about right this season. Their 2012-13 non-conference schedule wasn't exactly a murderer's row, although they did score a season-best 54 second-half points to rally and defeat UC-Davis (81-56) in their final Pac-12 tune-up.

•8. Arizona State

Coach: Charli Turner Thorne (16th season at ASU, 297-183 record)

2011-12 record: 20-12 overall, 10-8 Pac-12 (fourth)

2012-13 non-conference record: 8-4

Best non-conference win: 68-59 at Boston College

Leading scorer: Janae Fulcher, 11.1

Leading rebounder: Joy Burke, 6.8

Pac-12 outlook: Thorne stands behind only VanDerVeer in Pac-10/12 coaching experience and has had a successful run in Tempe. Her team this season was picked by the media to finish sixth, but it might struggle to

get there. The Sun Devils' non-conference schedule wasn't that rugged and they still dropped four games.

•9. Oregon State

Coach: Scott Rueck (3rd season at OSU, 35-40 record)

2011-12 record: 20-13 overall, 9-9 Pac-12 (T-5th)

2012-13 non-conference record: 6-6

Best non-conference win: 49-46 against UC-Santa Barbara

Leading scorer: Jamie Weisner, 10.4

Leading rebounder: Deven Hunter, 7.7

Pac-12 outlook: The Beavers were a surprise 20-game winner last season, coming off a nine-win campaign in 2010-11. If they encore with 20 wins this season, count it as a bigger surprise. They've played only one true road game in what was a not-so-challenging non-conference schedule - and they lost six times.

•10. Washington State

Coach: June Daugherty (6th season at WSU, 49-116 record)

2011-12 record: 13-20 overall, 5-13 Pac-12 (11th)

2012-13 non-conference record: 4-7

Best non-conference win: 62-55 against Ohio State

Leading scorer: Lia Galdiera, 14.5

Leading rebounder: Lia Galdiera, 5.3

Pac-12 outlook: The Cougars are No. 11 in the league in scoring (60.2) and last in the league in rebounding margin (-5.5). Surprisingly, one of their four wins was against the Buckeyes, not a bad team that must have been stunned by its long trip to the Palouse. So how else to explain it?

•11. Arizona

Coach: Niya Butts (5th season at UA, 64-52 record)

2011-12 record: 15-17 overall, 3-15 Pac-12 (12th)

2012-13 non-conference record: 8-3

Best non-conference win: 83-82 at UNLV

Leading scorer: Davellyn Whyte, 16.6

Leading rebounder: Erica Barnes, 6.4

Pac-12 outlook: The media picked the Wildcats to finish last in the conference, but we'll go with next-to-last. To their credit, they finished non-conference play with a surge, winning five of six. They're undoubtedly counting on that momentum meaning something this week when league play opens.

•12. Oregon

Coach: Paul Westhead (4th season at UO, 48-58 record)

2011-12 record: 15-16 overall, 7-11 Pac-12 (9th)

2012-13 non-conference record: 2-10

Best non-conference win: 65-64 against Fresno State

Leading scorer: Jillian Alleyne, 15.3

Leading rebounder: Jillian Alleyne, 14.5

Pac-12 outlook: Not good. The media saw the Ducks as next-to-last in its preseason poll, but the view from here doesn't match that. It's still bad, though. Westhead's fourth Oregon team looks to be in for a long winter, although he has a player to watch in the 6-3 Alleyne, a freshman from Fontana, Calif.

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