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Off to 11-0 start, CU steadily gaining recognition

(Eds: Adds details, quotes. With AP Photos.)

BOULDER, Colo. (AP) - The command came from the person behind the camera who was snapping photo after photo at midcourt for a team poster - act goofy.

And so they did.

The players on the Colorado women's basketball team made funny faces, leaned on one another to the point of tipping over and even did pushups in the front row.

Off to an 11-0 start, the Buffaloes are definitely a cheerful and chipper bunch these days. Only, it's now time to turn serious as No. 20 Colorado hosts fourth-ranked Stanford on Friday night in the Pac-12 Conference opener.

Or is it?

The reason for the Buffaloes' success on the court may be as simple as this: They just don't take themselves too seriously.

Others are, of course. Or at least beginning to, anyway.

Once a formidable power in the ranks of women's hoops, the Buffaloes had fallen off the radar in recent seasons. But that's starting to change.

With former CU standout Linda Lappe now leading the squad, the Buffs are ever so steadily gaining recognition. They're back in the rankings for the first time in five years and have their sights set on making the NCAA tournament field, which they haven't done since 2004.

"I feel like people are talking about Colorado basketball again," said Lappe, whose team faces quite an opening week of league play as they follow up Stanford with seventh-ranked California two days later. "We've started to turn some heads.

"Obviously, though, the more teams that you can beat that are quality teams, the more ingrained you become in the chat about women's basketball."

Make no mistake: Colorado will definitely have the full attention of Stanford (11-1), a squad smarting after a 61-35 loss to Connecticut last week that not only snapped the Cardinal's nation-leading home winning streak but also dropped them from

the top spot in the poll.

"Are they going to be really mad? Yes, they're going to be upset," said Lappe, who's in her third season of reviving her alma mater. "But at the same time, I feel like we just have to worry about us."

There was a time when the Buffs had to be creative to even think about keeping up with an elite team such as Stanford. CU would rely on trick defenses or any other ploy just to stay relatively close.

Now, that's hardly an issue.

"It's not necessarily who we play anymore, it's more, 'Are we going to do the things we do well as a team?'" said Lappe, who's one of eight Division I women's head coaches to have played for an AP-ranked team and then returned to lead the program into the AP poll. "We understand what our identity is and who we are."

And just what is that identity?

"We play tough defense and we love to rebound the basketball," she said. "We've become a pretty physical team. This year, we're not in survivor mode. We hope to be in attack mode."

The Buffs are brimming with confidence, especially after knocking off a Louisville squad earlier in the season that was ranked in the top 10.

They drew even more inspiration by watching film of UConn beating Stanford because the Buffs, much like the Huskies, base everything around stifling defense.

And stopping Stanford all starts with this: Finding a way to bottle up star Chiney Ogwumike.

"She's just a great player," Lappe said as she sat on the bench Wednesday after watching her team act zany for the team photo.

The Buffs may have a player on the cusp of becoming the next Ogwumike - or so they hope. Redshirt freshman Arielle Roberson plays a lot like Ogwumike, who was named to the preseason All-America team.

"Granted, I'm not as big or as athletic as Chiney," Roberson said.

Like her counterpart, Roberson's a vital part of the offense, averaging 15.7 points a game.

Maybe not that long ago, the Buffaloes wouldn't have attracted an athlete such as Roberson, who was a highly decorated forward out of San Antonio.

Sure, her brother, Andre, plays for the men's team and that was a drawing card to lure her to Boulder. But she also gave thought to attending North Carolina State, maybe even more so after dropping in on one of Lappe's early practices a few seasons ago as Roberson evaluated schools.

"It wasn't the best practice I've seen by a college team," Roberson said, laughing.

Later that year, Roberson returned for another visit when the Buffs made the WNIT.

"So much better," said Roberson, who sat out last season after undergoing surgery to fix a torn labrum in her left hip. "That was a big jump in such a short amount of time. To see that kind of growth, I thought that was a really good thing on coach Lappe's part."

They've been heading forward ever since.

For the second straight season, Colorado went undefeated in the nonconference portion of its schedule. Only, the Buffs don't want a repeat of last year when they subsequently struggled in league play and missed the NCAA tournament.

That could be why recognition has been slow to arrive this season, despite some impressive wins.

"I think people will still question us and that's OK," Lappe said. "They're like, 'How are they really? Yeah, they won their nonconference games. But what are they going to do in the conference?'"

"But this is a completely different feel than it ever has been. We're going to focus on the things we can control. We can't control what others are saying. We know what we have to do when we get on the floor."

Roberson couldn't agree more.

"Handling our business in the conference is the next step for us," Roberson said. "With beating (Stanford), or even hanging anywhere close with them, other teams will start to take us a little more serious. If they don't know about us, they will."

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Women's basketball: CU Buffs focused, not fearful

By Brian Howell Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

There are a few women's basketball teams that, by name alone, could intimidate opponents.

Connecticut and Baylor would be at the top of the list, with Duke, Notre Dame and possibly Tennessee in that group, too. Right there with them is Stanford.

The fourth-ranked Cardinal (11-1) might intimidate a lot of opponents, but No. 20 Colorado (11-0) doesn't sound like one of them.

"It's different than last year, knowing we have a great shot at beating them and we're all in this together," redshirt freshman Arielle Roberson said. "We're all very confident this year that we can get a win against them, so I think that's where the excitement stems from."

CU hosts the Cardinal on Friday night at Coors Events Center in the Pac-12 opener for both teams (8 p.m., Pac-12 Network).

Stanford comes into the game with a Hall of Fame head coach, Tara VanDerveer, who has piled up nearly 900 career wins (872-201). The Cardinal have won 78 straight conference games, 12 straight conference titles and have been to 25 consecutive NCAA Tournaments. Stanford is currently seeking its sixth consecutive 33-plus win season and was ranked No. 1 until a loss to current No. 1 Connecticut last week.

Colorado features a head coach, Linda Lappe, fresh off her 100th career win. The Buffs were 6-12 in conference play last year and haven't been to the NCAA Tournament in nine years.

CU also comes in as one of the only three undefeated teams in the country (along with Connecticut and Duke) and has to this point displayed a remarkable ability to play with focus.

"We've had perspective in every game," Lappe said. "We had perspective in the Louisville game, we had great perspective against New Mexico. We didn't really care who we were playing; we wanted to get better as players and as a team.

"(Beating Stanford) is part of an overall goal of where we want to be at the end of the year, but it's not the end-all, be-all. It's not where we stop, regardless. I think it's important to look at every game with the right mentality and that mentality is: we have goals at the end of year. We only have one shot with this team."

That's why the Buffs aren't worried about any kind of streak Stanford brings to Boulder, and they aren't concerned with how great Stanford's tradition has been over the years.

"If you put the game in the right perspective, you don't care about names and you don't care about numbers," Lappe said.

A year ago, Stanford was the only ranked team the Buffs played all season and they got blown out by 26 points in Boulder and by 22 points in Stanford, Calif.

This season, the Buffs have already defeated then-No. 8 Louisville; a San Diego State team that has a great

shot of returning to the NCAA Tournament; and an Illinois team that stunned No. 6 Georgia last week and nearly upset No. 14 Purdue on Wednesday.

"That is probably the biggest difference from last year to this year, knowing that we can hang with a top 25 team, top 10 or whatever it may be," Roberson said. "We feel a lot more prepared than we did last year."

That preparation has been on display in every game to this point. Aside from a nail-biter against Idaho in the season opener, CU has taken care of business against everybody it has faced. The Buffs have blown out teams they're supposed to blow out and they never looked rattled against Louisville or San Diego State.

"We don't want to be sky-high on the emotion side so that it affects our performance," Lappe said. "We just have to make sure we come into the game like we've come into every other game. If we do that, I think we have enough different weapons to be able to compete."

Sophomore forward Jen Reese said it also helps that the Buffs have seen Stanford twice in the recent past.

"We've played them already and we know them," she said. "I think we're ready to go and everyone is really excited. I think it's going to be a great game and down to the wire."

"It's a great way to start the (conference) season."

Follow Brian on Twitter: @BrianHowell33.

CU women's hoops preview

FRIDAY: The No. 20 Colorado Buffaloes (11-0) host the No. 4 Stanford Cardinal (11-1) in an 8 p.m. game at Coors Events Center in Boulder.

BROADCAST: TV -- Pac-12 Network, with Anne Marie Anderson on play by play and Rosalyn Gold-Onwude with color commentary. Radio -- KKZN (760 AM), with Mike Rice on play-by-play and Carol Callan providing color commentary.

STORYLINES: Colorado opens its second season of Pac-12 play Friday. ... The Buffs went 6-12 in Pac-12 play last year. ... Stanford has won 12 consecutive conference titles. ... The Cardinal have won 78 consecutive games against Pac-12 teams (including postseason). They last lost to a Pac-12 foe on Jan. 18, 2009, at California. ... Stanford is No. 3 in the USA Today/ESPN coaches poll, while CU is No. 25. ... CU ranks second in the Pac-12 in scoring (74.3 points per game), while Stanford is third (72.3). ... Stanford leads the conference in scoring defense (52.4 per game) and Colorado is third (54.6). ... Both teams rank among the top 10 nationally in rebounding margin. CU is sixth, at plus 14.3. Stanford is ninth, at plus 12.2. ... CU's Chucky Jeffery leads all current Pac-12 players in career assists (405) and steals (242) and she's third in points (1,340). ... Jeffery leads the Pac-12 in assist-to-turnover ratio, at 1.7 (47 assists, 28 turnovers). ... CU enters the game as one of just three undefeated teams in the country, joining No. 1 Connecticut and No. 3 Duke. ... CU is 2-18 all-time against teams ranked in the top 4. The Buffs' wins came against No. 2 Louisiana Tech on Jan. 3, 1989, and No. 4 Iowa on Jan. 3, 1993.

KEY STAT: Stanford has held 10 of 12 opponents under 40 percent shooting (and five under 30 percent) and Cardinal foes are shooting 31.8 percent on the season. Colorado is shooting 44.5 percent on the season and has been above 40 percent in 10 of 11 games.

COACHES: Linda Lappe is 50-30 in her third season at CU and 100-66 overall. Tara VanDerveer is 720-150 in her 27th year at Stanford and 827-201 in her career.

PROBABLE STARTERS: Colorado -- G Chucky Jeffery, 5-10, Sr. (12.2 ppg, 8.2 rpg, 4.7 apg); G Brittany Wilson, 5-7, Jr. (9.5 ppg, 3.2 rpg, 2.6 apg); G Lexy Kresl, 5-11, So. (6.3 ppg, 2.0 rpg); F Arielle Roberson, 6-1, Fr. (15.7 ppg, 6.1 rpg); C Rachel Hargis, 6-4, Jr. (6.3 ppg, 2.9 rpg). Stanford -- F Mikaela Ruef, 6-3, Jr. (2.6 ppg, 6.7 rpg); F Chiney Ogwumike, 6-4, Jr. (21.5 ppg, 12.8 rpg); G Toni Kokenis, 5-11, Jr. (8.7 ppg, 1.5 rpg); G Amber Orrange, 5-7, So. (10.0 ppg, 3.6 rpg, 4.9 apg); F Joslyn Tinkle, 6-3, Sr. (12.9 ppg, 5.5 rpg, 2.0 bpg).

SERIES: Stanford leads 7-4, including 2-0 against the Buffs last year. The Buffs are 2-2 against the Cardinal in Boulder.

UP NEXT: CU hosts No. 7 California on Sunday.

CU Buffs women face 1-2 punch in Pac-12 start

By Nick Groke The Denver Post The Denver Post

Posted:

DenverPost.com

If there existed a scale to measure ideal situations to face the monster that is Stanford women's basketball, Friday's matchup in Boulder would be about as far away from ideal as possible.

Stanford (a 12-time defending Pac-12 regular-season champion with five consecutive Final Four appearances) was ranked No. 1 in the nation since the season started — until last week. Amazingly, the Cardinal got blown out, at home no less, losing 61-35 to Connecticut.

Stanford's next game is against Colorado — and that hornet's nest is still buzzing. Colorado faces Stanford at the Coors Events Center at 8 p.m.

"Are they going to be really mad? Yes, they're going to be upset," Colorado coach Linda Lappe told The Associated Press on Thursday. "But at the same time, I feel like we just have to worry about us."

The Buffaloes, though, are rolling. They're 11-0 for just the fourth time in team history. And after an upset victory over No. 8 Louisville last month, CU entered the Top 25 poll.

Colorado enters Friday's game ranked No. 20 in the AP poll. Stanford (11-1) comes in ranked No. 4.

"I feel like people are talking about Colorado basketball again," said Lappe, now in her third season as Buffs coach. "We've started to turn some heads."

In most years, CU might sneak into a game against Stanford under the radar. But the Buffs are suddenly among teams contending in the Pac-12.

Friday's game opens the conference schedule for both teams. And Colorado on Sunday hosts No. 7 California.

It's a brutal two-game start to the Pac-12 slate.

"Handling our business in the conference is the next step for us," CU freshman forward Arielle Roberson told AP. "If they don't know about us, they will."

Roberson enters averaging a team-high 15.7 points along with 6.1 rebounds.

And Roberson may match up directly against Stanford's all-everything Chiney Ogwumike (21.5 points, 12.8 rebounds).

Colorado swept its nonconference schedule by scoring in bunches. The Buffs are averaging 74.3 points — second-best among Pac-12 teams, better even than Stanford.

But now is when the games ramp up in importance.

"This is a completely different feel than it ever has been," Lappe said. "We're going to focus on the things we can control. ... We know what we have to do when we get on the floor."

Weekend warriors

The No. 20-ranked Colorado women's basketball team (11-0) starts its Pac-12 schedule this weekend with two games in Boulder:

Friday: No. 4 Stanford (11-1) at Colorado, 8 p.m. TV: Pac-12

Sunday: No. 7 California (10-1) at Colorado, noon TV: Pac-12