



Junior Brittany Wilson (11) is eager for the Buffs to show what they're made of in 2012-13.

Photo Courtesy: Joel Broida



Brooks: Deep, Talented CU Women's Team Awaits Opener

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BOULDER - It might be a stretch for a college junior to be reflecting on how it was "back in the day," but [Brittany Wilson](#) vividly recalls how things were in Colorado women's basketball a mere three seasons ago.

"In my freshman year," "B-Wil" remembered the other day, "we got down to six players when we played Iowa State."

Technically, the Buffs were down to eight players, but first-year coach [Linda Lappe](#)'s primary rotation that day was six - with the five starters playing at least 33 minutes each in a game that pushed into overtime. But here's Wilson's point: Her first CU team didn't have a deep end; most of the time it flailed away in shallow water.

Things have changed. Big-time.

The CU team that opens its 2012-13 season Sunday afternoon against Idaho (2 p.m., Coors Events Center) has plenty of bodies that play plenty well. What's more, the daily competition goes from whistle to whistle and isn't for the gentle and meek.

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"Coaches have to stop practice sometimes to get people off the floor," Wilson said. "We haven't had the competition on the floor like this. You have to come out and compete for your spot every single day, because there's 13 girls that can play. If you don't come out ready to defend your position - if you are a starter - or to earn your playing time, either you're not going to start or you're not going to get that playing time."

That's exactly the way Lappe and her staff want it, although her priority as Sunday's opener approached was identifying enough consistency among those talented 13 players to pencil in a starting lineup. As of Tuesday, she had "no idea," but she will by Sunday morning.

It's a good problem to have, one that will sort itself out as Lappe's very balanced bunch advances. If her number of better players this season creates a different kind of dilemma, it's still one she relishes. She and her staff "take a lot of stock in who brings it every day in practice" and use that as a guide in determining how 40 minutes on game day is split.

"But day to day that changes with our team," Lappe said. "That's been the most unsettling thing as a coach - the consistency of our players and who we think can provide us major minutes during this first game. It's something that as the year goes along will change and fluctuate. That's probably been the hardest thing for me. But there's good in that because now you do have 10-12 players that all could start on any given day."

Lappe has a pretty good handle on two members of Sunday's starting five. That pair would be senior wing [Meagan Malcolm-Peck](#) and "B-Wil," who sees herself in the next layer of leadership below Malcolm-Peck and senior point guard [Chucky Jeffery](#).

Here's how Wilson perceives her game and her role: "Things have slowed down for me. I'm a junior now, I get the game. Although I played in two different conferences, now for me it's like I don't have to think so much. I can just go out and play . . . And now, I see myself as leader in helping (teammates) to follow. As Meagan and Chucky are leaders, I help others follow those two. If Meagan or Chucky is saying things that somebody might not be getting, then it's usually me or the next person to tweak it a little so it is understood."

That's a good position for now, but it probably will evolve into a full-blown take-charge role. And if not this season, then surely next, when she is a senior. Whichever of those scenarios occur, Lappe feels fortunate to be able to watch it happen.

Her first two CU teams have a combined 39-30 record and a pair of WNIT appearances. Showing further progress in year three is paramount, and Lappe believes it can happen because of leadership that hadn't fully developed in years one and two.

"This is the first year to have some junior-senior leadership that has played a lot for our first two or three years," Lappe said. "That's definitely a bonus; it allows us to take that next step. We've never had that (and) it differentiates this team from some of the others. We also have some good talented young players who are maybe further ahead than some of the other freshmen we've had at different times."

How far ahead? Last season, CU played Idaho at the CEC on Dec. 4, winning 68-59. Tape of that game, said Lappe, shows this team - young as it is - to be further along in early November than her 2011-12 squad was in early December.

"We look better now than at that point," said Lappe, adding that the loss of senior post [Julie Seabrook](#) and her court communication on screens and setting the defense might be a temporary setback. "But overall we're further ahead and much, much deeper."

Wilson agreed, noting that in this season's pair of exhibition games, the Buffs "got it going early . . . last year we struggled (early) to get it going. There were stretches where we didn't score for five or six minutes at a time, but this year the freshmen are catching onto the offense and we have a lot of upperclassmen now."

Although forward [Jen Reese](#) is entering her sophomore season, Lappe considers Reese well-seasoned. Reese does, too. She's been waiting for Sunday's opener longer than most; she missed last season's last six games with

an orbital eye socket injury and is wearing protective goggles now, although "it's a hassle," she said. Her vision slowly is returning to normal, but still can be a little fuzzy now when she gazes upward when under the rim. So she uses her neck more and tilts her head.

But Reese clearly sees this: "These players have more confidence and that brings out more confidence in the team. We have leaders in Meagan and Chucky, when she's the point guard. And I feel like we've been communicating better. The freshmen have been doing really well listening to us and improving every day in practice . . . I think we're just more prepared."

More focused on a daily basis, too. Every team has reaching the NCAA Tournament as a goal, and that includes the Buffs, who could wind up playing in NCAA first- and second-round games in their building. But the approach this season is different, said Reese: "Last year we had a main goal of going to the NAAs, but we weren't more concerned with how to get there . . . this year we're setting goals that we can reach (daily) to get to that level. That's what I like about this year."

Reese says she's among the Buffs whose confidence has skyrocketed, plus she's stronger and better conditioned.

And here's something else - aside from the depth, the talent and the confidence - that Wilson says sets this team apart from others: "We've got 13 girls with heart, 13 girls that will punch you back if you punch them . . . we're all competitors, that's what different and special about this team."

Lappe is hoping it all translates into a special year. It gets underway on Sunday afternoon.

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SHOW MENU



Women's basketball: Linda Lappe's CU Buffs staying calm heading into opener

By Brian Howell Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

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Sometimes, teams try to avoid thinking about what could be.

Coaches often feel that if they don't talk about the ultimate goal, their team will be more focused each game along the path to that goal.

The carrot dangling in front of the Colorado women's basketball team, however, is rather tough to ignore.

Colorado has not been to the NCAA Tournament since the 2003-04 season. Yet, with Coors Events Center -- the home court of the Buffaloes -- hosting the first two rounds of the Tournament this year, it won't be easy to avoid the expectations some have for the Buffs to get back.

So far, however, CU seems to be taking whatever pressure there is in stride.

"It's great. I don't think there's really any pressure coming along with it," sophomore guard Lexy Kresl said. "Nobody is too stressed out about it; everybody is just having fun so far."

The 2012-13 season opens Sunday with a home game against Idaho. Whether the Buffs keep an eye on the ultimate goal or not, this is, without question, a pivotal season for the program.

Head coach Linda Lappe enters her third season. She took over a team that had posted two straight losing seasons and five losing seasons in the previous six years.

Under her direction, the Buffs made a five-win improvement in Year 1 (18-16) and a three-win jump in Year 2 (21-14), despite playing in the Pac-12 for the first time last season. They've advanced to the WNIT quarterfinals both seasons.

"We have shown progress during the first two years," Lappe said. "Whenever you take over a program, you want to keep showing progress."

That's why the NCAA Tournament is such a tantalizing prospect for the Buffs and those who follow the team.

CU lost just one player from last year's team. It returns dynamic senior guard Chucky Jeffery. Last year's talented freshmen are improved. The Buffs are more comfortable in the Pac-12. Oh, and they added the 27th-ranked recruiting class.

"There's a lot of things at stake," Jeffery said. "We have a bigger, better team. We've got more bodies, we're competing in practice. I think this is going to be a pivotal year for the program."

"It's absolutely progression because it takes time for teams to build and become great and make those steps. But, I believe we have the tools to get to that step and there's no reason why we can't be that team this year."

It's an odd team, however, in that while there are expectations, the Buffs are also flying under the radar. In separate polls, Pac-12 coaches and media picked the Buffs to finish ninth.

"A lot of the teams in the Pac-12 are not going to take us seriously," senior forward Meagan Malcolm-Peck said.

Maybe they should. Although it was just an exhibition game, the Buffaloes displayed a great deal of firepower in a win over Western State on Nov. 2. And that was without Jeffery, who sat out for violating team rules. Six of CU's 14 losses last year came by nine points or less, so the Buffs competed well.

With a full complement of players, Lappe believes her team is already much better than it was going into last year.

"I think this team is a lot further ahead," she said.

Lappe admitted she's a bit unsettled about not knowing who will start. The Buffs have 10-12 players who seem to be on equal ground. She would like to see a handful of players step up and seize starting roles, but also likes the fact that she's got nearly a dozen players capable of starting.

Regardless of who starts, there's no denying the potential in this crew.

"It is definitely a pivotal year," Kresl said. "It's a year that we definitely need to prove ourselves, in my opinion. We're going to step up, though; I know we will."

CU enters the season today knowing full well that the NCAA Tournament is coming to Boulder. Will the Buffs finally get back to the dance? That's to be determined, but the Buffs are eager to prove they can live up to some of the expectations their fans have for them.

"I think finally we have some expectations for us, which you can either take as pressure or you can take with excitement," Malcolm-Peck said. "I think we're all taking it with excitement, knowing we have people that have confidence in us. We're just trying to get better every day and do what we can every day to prove people right. I think it's an exciting time."

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