

Women's basketball: CU Buffs' Rachel Hargis finding her way again

By Brian Howell Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

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Colorado women's basketball coach Linda Lappe has made no secret about the fact that the Buffaloes need a better presence in the paint.

Throughout the 2011-12 season, the Buffs were routinely out-muscled by teams in the post.

Rachel Hargis heard that message loud and clear and the junior has worked hard to do something about it.

"I feel like I'm shaking off the past two years and taking the good out of it and I'm just going to build from there," Hargis said. "I'm a junior now and it's time for me to step up. I'm definitely feeling a lot better."

At Robinson (Texas) High School, the 6-foot-4 Hargis was a dominant player, posting 14.4 points, 7.1 rebounds and 3.5 blocks per game as a senior.

Since coming to CU, Hargis has struggled a bit in finding her way on the court. She has averaged 3.2 points and 3.0 rebounds in 69 career games and lost her starting job midway through last season.

After a strong summer, it appears Hargis is ready to change that. Last week, Lappe said Hargis has been the team's most improved player since last year.

"Rachel Hargis has stepped up and started to be more available on the block," Lappe said. "The game has started to slow down for Rachel, which is a good thing for a post player. I feel like in her first two years when she got the ball on the block, the game was going a million miles an hour and she didn't know exactly what to do with the ball -- whether to shoot it, whether to pass it, where to pass it.

"I really feel like she probably, more than anybody, has kind of risen to the occasion because we need her to be a post presence down there."

Hargis turned to family in helping her get more comfortable on the court.

"I have a younger brother who is 6-5 and I worked against him a lot this summer, just getting the ball and taking my time and doing my post moves and reading the wings on the outside and looking for them," she said. "We're really trying to work on getting the ball inside and out to improve our offense."

The eyes of point guard Chucky Jeffery lit up when asked about Hargis. Jeffery talked about a recent play in practice where Hargis got the ball at the top of the key drove the lane and scored with her left hand.

"We got really excited about that," Jeffery said. "Rachel is coming along really well; she's going to be really good for us in the post."

Senior captain Meagan Malcolm-Peck said the rest of the team has noticed Hargis' improved ability to make passes from the inside-out and that her decision making with the ball has been solid so far.

"I think everyone has been real excited with how Rachel is playing," Malcolm-Peck said.

Perhaps nobody is as excited as Hargis, who was frustrated with herself last season.

"Now I just feel so much more comfortable in the post and I feel like I've gotten that frustration out," she said.

"My teammates have better confidence in me when getting me the ball and I just feel really like the game is finally coming together.

"I knew if we wanted to accomplish the things that we want to this year that I was going to have to step up a lot."

Hargis doesn't expect to be a 20-point scorer, but reaching her current career best of 12 on a consistent basis isn't out of the question.

"I want to be where when I get the ball and I feel comfortable scoring I'm going to make it, and when I'm not I can kick the ball out to the wings where they need to get it and we can do something off of that," she said.

If Hargis' hard work over the summer can pay off in the way she and the Buffs hope it will, she could be an integral part of CU's success -- and she may find herself on the floor more often than not, which is one of her goals.

"No seeing the bench as a junior," she said with a smile.

Follow Brian on Twitter: @BrianHowell33.

Women's basketball: CU Buffs picked to finish 9th in Pac-12

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Coming as no surprise, the Stanford women's basketball team was selected by Pac-12 coaches to win the conference title this year.

Colorado, in its second year in the Pac-12, was picked to finish ninth.

Head coach Tara VanDerveer has led Stanford to 12 consecutive conference championships. This is the 12th year in a row that the Cardinal have been selected as the preseason favorite. Stanford received the maximum number of first-place votes (11) and 121 points. Coaches are not allowed to vote for their own team.

Colorado earned 49 points in the voting. The Buffaloes were picked to finish 11th a year ago and wound up 10th, at 6-12 (21-14 overall). This year, Colorado has four returning starters and lost just one senior from last year's squad.

The preseason Pac-12 Women's basketball coaches poll:

Team (first place votes), Points

1. Stanford (11), 121
2. California (1), 109
3. UCLA, 100
4. USC, 91
- 5(tie). Arizona State, 67
- 5(tie). Oregon State, 67
7. Utah, 56
8. Washington, 54
9. Colorado, 49
10. Washington State, 40
11. Oregon, 20
12. Arizona, 18

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