

## Women's basketball: Finley, Benningfield round out CU Buffs' staff

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On the court, the Colorado women's basketball team has been working to develop five new freshmen players.

Off the court, the Buffs' have been adjusting to life with two new staff members.

While it may take a little while for the freshmen to feel comfortable with the college game, Kelly Rae Finley and Jenni Benningfield have made a fairly seamless transition to CU's staff.

"I think they've added a lot to our staff," head coach Linda Lappe said. "You want them to add something you don't have and I feel like they both do that. At the same time, being able to mesh with the rest of your staff is really important. In essence, we're our own team as a staff."

Finley became CU's newest assistant coach on May 18, replacing Jennie Baranczyk, who took the head coaching job at Drake in April. Benningfield was named the program's director of operations on Aug. 14. She replaced Tracy Tripp, who now works with facilities scheduling at CU.

"I think we brought in two amazing coaches and really elevated the level of practice," CU senior Meagan Malcolm-Peck said. "I feel like we're not missing anything and I just think we continue to get better with coaches as well as players."

Finley came to CU from Harvard, where she was an assistant coach and recruiting coordinator. As CU's recruiting coordinator, she hit the ground running and helped CU get four verbal commits for the class of 2013. Those recruits have all commented on the family atmosphere at CU and some have specifically mentioned connecting with Finley.

"Recruiting is a really big part of my job. It's something I really enjoy," Finley said. "A lot of our recruiting moving forward is going to be based on relationships with kids. Really getting to know the kids on an individual basis I think puts us in a better position in the long run. It's proved really successful for us where I was before."

Finley also works with the forwards and Malcolm-Peck credits Finley for helping to improve her shot and leadership ability.

As director of operations, Benningfield does not get involved with on-court coaching, but she handles traveling, scheduling, budgets, equipment, etc.

"Basically making sure everything is run smoothly, that's my job and that's my role," she said. "I have my hand in probably 20 different things, but it's going really smoothly."

Benningfield was a volunteer assistant coach for the CU volleyball team a year ago. She also was the head girls basketball coach at Nederland High School in 2011 and Pomona High School in 2012. As a player, she was an all-conference performer at Vanderbilt and then played professionally in the WNBA, Spain and Australia. It's Benningfield's master's degree in sports psychology that may have the biggest impact on the players, though.

"Being able to be there for the players and talk to them in a different sort of stance is something that I feel like I add differently to the team and to the coaching staff," she said. "For me, it's been fun."

It's been fun for Lappe, too, as she has seen her staff come together in a short period of time. Benningfield and Finley have already meshed well with Lappe, assistants Jonas Chatterton and LaTonya Watson and video coordinator Dan Doerflein.

"We all have different personalities, we all have different strengths and we all have different weakness, but I always knew when I was building the staff that I didn't want clones of myself," Lappe said. "I have plenty of weakness. You want people that those are their strengths. You kind of hire to get rid of your weaknesses."

Lappe appears to have done that, while strengthening the program as a whole. While the focus is often on the team that takes the court, Lappe and the Buffs have built quite a team of staff members, and even the two newcomers are feeling comfortable already.

"It almost feels like I've known them for a lot longer than I have actually," Benningfield said. "I enjoy going to work and that's something that I'm really happy I can say, and I enjoy the people I work with."

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