

Soccer: CU Buffs fall short in upset bid of No. 2 Stanford

By Brian Howell Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

Colorado junior Anne Stuller said on Friday she felt the Buffs soccer team was going to do something special on Sunday.

She was almost right.

Seeking an upset of defending national champion Stanford, which is ranked No. 2 this year, the Buffaloes took a lead late into the second half, but Stanford scored two goals 37 seconds apart to steal a 2-1 victory at Prentup Field on Sunday afternoon.

"We played with a lot of heart. I'm just really proud of our team," Stuller said, with disappointment thick in her voice. "The ball didn't bounce our way today again, and hopefully it starts bouncing our way soon because we're a good team.

"We deserve to beat teams like Stanford and we deserve to beat teams like Washington State (which defeated the Buffs 1-0 a week earlier)."

CU (6-5-3, 0-4-1 Pac-12) led 1-0 until Mariah Nogueira scored for the Cardinal with 11:53 to play. Alina Garciamendez scored the back-breaker with 11:16 to go and Stanford (11-1-1, 5-0) won its 36th consecutive conference match and its ninth straight overall.

"(Stanford) moved Mariah, up to center forward and she's just a handful," CU head coach Danny Sanchez said. "That was just a good turn and a good finish. Before we could really make any adjustments, they sent their center back up, who is an All-American as well. She's a handful, as well, and she got that shot off."

Up to that point, the Buffs seemed poised for the upset. For the game, CU compiled much better scoring chances than Stanford did, holding a 5-3 advantage in shots on goal and a 7-3 advantage in corner kicks.

"If you really look at the big picture of the whole match, they have two great opportunities and they scored them both," Sanchez said. "Stanford is one of the top two or three teams in the country and we played pretty well today I feel."

CU was rewarded for its strong play late in the first half. Freshman Emily Paxton scored with 19 seconds to play before intermission, giving the Buffs a 1-0 halftime lead.

"It was a great ball in by Shaye," Paxton said. "We did good at working to get the ball in there. We were real confident, real excited (at halftime). We knew we had to go 45 (more) minutes and go as hard we could; it's unfortunate we didn't get it."

It was just the fourth deficit Stanford has faced all year and just the second time it has gone into halftime trailing. The first time was on Aug. 17 in the season opener; in that game Stanford scored six second-half goals and waxed Santa Clara 6-1.

The Colorado defense didn't suffer that type of meltdown. In fact, the Buffs played very well on defense in trying to preserve the lead.

"Hats off to our defense," Stuller said. "Stanford's opportunities were few and far between. We didn't let them get very many shots off. We didn't give them great opportunities."

Stuller said she wasn't surprised the Buffs played this well against the Cardinal.

"To be honest, no I'm not," she said. "I think we're a good team and I think we can play with teams like Stanford."

The next step is beating those teams, which has been an issue, as CU's conference winless streak stretched to nine games (0-8-1). This season, the Buffs have had four one-goal losses, two of those in overtime, in Pac-12 play.

This season's conference results perhaps are an indication that the Buffs are improving, but Sanchez said his team is tired of the moral wins.

"I'm not in for moral victories," he said. "I'd rather play bad, get lucky and win a game. Having said that, yeah, I don't know that we're as far away as maybe we thought."

Notable

Stanford has not lost a conference game since Oct. 31, 2008, at UCLA. ... Stanford is 136-0-6 when scoring at least one goal, dating back to 2006. ... CU had been 6-0 this season when scoring first, but has now lost two in a row when taking the early lead. The Buffs lost a 2-0 lead on Friday in a 3-2 overtime loss to California. ... Stuller had three solid shots on goal.