

Volleyball: CU Buffs drops final two games of Colorado Classic

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Colorado junior Nikki Lindow did not have a lot of room for error when she came to the Buffs.

That has now become the case for a number of young Buffs, who are having to help Lindow pick up the slack from losing their anchor Kerra Schroeder for the season.

The Buffs opened the season 4-0, the team's best start since 2008. But Schroeder's absence became more apparent Saturday when the Buffs lost to Northern Arizona (24-26, 25-21, 25-22, 25-19) and Fresno State (28-26, 25-21, 25-20) on the final day of the Omni Hotels Colorado Volleyball Classic.

"I held her to high standards and with Alexis Austin and (Neira Riuz) Ortiz on the outside, we hold them to a high level," Lindow said. "Now, I have to work with them on a different level. I want to support them and encourage them to have the confidence and swag the need to have to play in the Pac-12."

Doing her part to fill in for Schroeder, Lindow led the Buffs with nine kills and five blocks against Fresno State. She also led the Buffs with 15 kills and nine blocks against tournament champion Northern Arizona. Her effort throughout the tournament earned her all-tournament honors.

Though it was the first all-tournament selection of her volleyball career, Lindow doesn't feel she has much time for personal accolades. She has been forced to focus on solidifying her team presence on and off the court.

"As a player, I show a lot of emotion. I still kind of do," Lindow said. "But I need to trigger my emotion into my game instead of letting the younger players understand that I'm frustrated but let them know that I'm confident."

Without their passing senior captain, the Buffs struggled with uncertainty in passing and had seven serve-reception errors against Fresno State.

The Buffs led 9-3 in the first set but lost the lead only to come back and force four game-point tries from Fresno State. Between the second and third sets, there were 17 ties and 18 lead changes.

Buffs head coach Liz Kritza said Saturday's losses were the difficult times they expected when fielding young lineups against veteran rosters.

"A lot of our young players are just going through their learning curve, which, unfortunately, they don't necessarily have that time," Kritza said. "A lot of times when freshmen get to campus they can have maybe a few weeks before we get them out on the court. Well, our whole lineup flipped upside down last weekend and there's no time like the present. It's kind of a baptism by fire."

Against Fresno State, Austin had eight kills, Kelsey English had seven and Ortiz Cruz had six. Against Northern Arizona, Austin had 13 kills, English had eight and Emily Alexis had seven.

With multiple new players and lineups on the court, the Buffs will focus on finding balance to replace Schroeder's production before they hit their Pac-12 Conference schedule.

"It's time," Kritza said. "And that's really what I told them in a few of those timeouts."

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