

Women's basketball: Briana Watts brings more muscle to CU Buffs

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For some girls, being called "big" is an insult.

Briana Watts isn't one of those girls. The 6-foot-2 Colorado freshman is sure to be one of the thickest women's basketball players in the Pac-12 this year, and that puts a smile on her face.

"I love being tall and big," she said. "I love being the way I am because my whole family is big. It doesn't faze me at all. I feel like I have an advantage because I am bigger. I'm more intimidating, I'm stronger, so I feel like it helps me.

"I'm very comfortable with who I am."

Watts comes from a family of big, strong athletes.

Her father, Walter, played basketball at the University of Utah, helping the Utes reach the Sweet 16 in 1991. He then played in the Continental Basketball Association. He also briefly played minor league baseball for the Minnesota Twins' rookie league team in Elizabethton, Tenn., after being drafted by them in the 30th round in 1987.

In 1992, after being cut by the NBA's Utah Jazz, he signed a contract with the NFL's Los Angeles Raiders -- on a recommendation from Hall of Famer Ronnie Lott -- but didn't make the team.

Her brother, also named Walter, was offensive lineman at Utah from 2006-10.

Now, Watts gets her turn to push people around. Leaning on CU assistant coach Jonas Chatterton and senior center Rachel Hargis, Watts said she is hoping to become "a dominant post player -- so rebounding and staying under the basket a lot."

CU head coach Linda Lappe has worked hard in recent years to toughen up the Buffs. Recent recruiting classes have included Jen Reese, Arielle Roberson and Jamee Swan -- three big girls who can muscle up with Pac-12 opponents. This year, Watts and fellow freshman Zoe Beard-Fails, a 6-2 forward, enter the mix.

"That's one of the things we really wanted to focus on," Lappe said of getting tougher. "Those guys are going to go at it pretty good. That's going to make us better."

Lappe loves Watts' size because of how she can use it.

"Bri is very long," Lappe said. "She's only about 6-2, but probably a 6-4, 6-5 wingspan.

"She's somebody that has a tough mindset. Her biggest challenge is going to be getting into shape where she can really get up and down the floor like our team gets up and down the floor."

Watts said that continues to be a work in progress, as she develops as a player. Her biggest

adjustment so far has been living away from family. She's only been in Colorado about two weeks, but that's longer than she's used to being away from family.

"We've been Skyping every night," she said.

"It was really hard for me to get settled because I'm very family oriented person, but it's great out here. I love it."

The family-type atmosphere on the team has helped Watts adjust and she can't wait to get on the court with her teammates on a regular basis.

"I'm excited," she said.

More than anything, she's excited to start using her size to prove she belongs in the Pac-12.

"I feel like I wouldn't be here if I wasn't as big as I am," she said.

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