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Linda Lappe is set to begin her fourth season as CU women's coach.

Brooks: Lappe Eyes Balance From Post-Chucky Buffs

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By: B.G. Brooks, Contributing Editor

BOULDER – LAC (that's Life After Chucky) begins this season for the Colorado women's basketball team. It's not the only issue to be addressed by Linda Lappe as she starts her fourth season as the Buffs' head coach, but it's a good place to start.

For the past four seasons, Chucky Jeffery was the CU women's hoops program's Ms. Utility – and more. She scored, rebounded, assisted and was the Buffs' crunch time go-to girl more often than not.

Now that she's gone, Lappe is looking to someone – actually, everyone – to take up the slack as CU tries to build on last season's fourth-place finish in the Pac-12 Conference and a final ranking of No. 19 in the AP Top 25.

"When you lose somebody like Chucky, not one person replaces the things that she was able to bring," Lappe said Wednesday during her portion of CU basketball media day. "I think we have to have a lot of people step up."

Naming names, Lappe mentioned senior guard Brittany Wilson, who played point guard as a freshman and served as Jeffery's backup for the last couple of seasons. "Her being able to get a lot more time at the point guard position and just her ability to create for her teammates and get to the rim I think is something that she's going to be bringing more of this year, and she knows she has to bring more of," Lappe said.

Then there's Lexy Kresl, a three-point sharpshooter whom Lappe said needs to sharpen her ball-handling in her junior season. Beyond that duo, "I think our wings have to do a better job of handling the ball," Lappe said. "I think everybody can create and I think our team changes a little bit. Instead of becoming one dimensional, I think we have to screen better. I think we've got to get the ball moving on offense a little bit better. What Chucky brought defensively, I think we can definitely play team defense like we have been, and I'm not sure we'll have much of a drop in terms of that regard."

Lappe wants the Buffs to be recognized for their defense and physical play, and on the second count she's counting on 6-4 senior post Rachel Hargis to be the "banger" that sets the bar for CU's toughness.

"When Rachel is tough, our whole team is tough," Lappe said. "When Rachel isn't, our whole team isn't. I think she really sets the tone in terms of that because she is the middle. If a guard drives by a guard she has to be there and she has to be a presence. I think the one thing she has to do a little better job of this year is rebounding the basketball. A lot of times, we would box out and then Chucky would fly in and get the rebound . . . now, it's going to be a matter of who wants that ball. A lot of those (rebounds) have to be Rachel's.

"Rather than growing into her "enforcer" role at CU, she grew up with it. Reared in Robinson, Texas, Hargis says she has "always been more of a physical post player. Maybe it's because I grew up with three brothers. We always fought when we played together, so I'm used to that. I like getting mad and

showing people what I can do . . . I think that kind of resonates for the rest of the team. A lot of people don't like a lot of contact and a lot of physicality, but I'm one who's there pushing and shoving."

In practice, Hargis says she frequently goads junior forward Jen Reese into hitting her. "Every day I push these people," Hargis said. "I told Bri (Watts, freshman forward) the other day, 'I'm going to make you mad. I want to see how you are when you fight back.' I was pushing on her and pulling on her and grabbing, and finally she said, 'Thank you . . . do that more often.'"

Increased physicality for Pac-12 play was what Lappe had in mind when she recruited the 6-2 Watts and 6-2 forward Zoe Beard-Fails to play in a front line with Hargis, 6-2 sophomore Jamee Swan and the 6-2 Reese. At 6-1, sophomore Arielle Roberson brings more finesse than pure physicality.

Plus, she's coming off a second hip surgery in two seasons and "is just now starting to get back," according to Lappe. "She's been in practices, but hasn't really been able to improve her game in the offseason. We kind of did that (off-season labrum surgery on the other hip) on purpose so she can now have three more years to really build instead of having to get better and then have a setback and get better. We decided to go ahead and get that done this summer. We maybe understand that her skillset might not be as good as it is going to get over next summer and the next summer after that.

The freshman that caught Lappe's eye the earliest and most often is 6-1 guard/forward Haley Smith. In truth, Smith has stood out because Lappe hasn't noticed her. Confused? Let Lappe explain:

"I've told her this, and I've told other people, I don't notice her. When you can say you don't notice a freshman on the floor, that's always a good thing. She just fits in and she just flows in, and your vision goes to some other players that maybe need your coaching a little bit more or need your motivation or things like that.

"But she comes in and she knows what she's doing. She watches the person in front of her when she's in the lines. She emulates it. She's a very bright person in general, but also a very bright basketball player and I think that will go a long way for her."

Smith, of Sammamish, Wash., arrived in Boulder over the summer prepared to play because she spent last spring preparing. "I knew it would be a big transition," she said. "I wanted to be the best I could be. I think a lot of it has to do with confidence, just going out there and obviously you don't want to look like a freshman on the court. You want to play like you belong and can contribute."

Her game's strength lies in "consistency and being someone (Lappe) can count on, I guess," she said. "Maybe it's not all-star numbers, but consistent play." Lappe will take that from any of her players, and Smith will score more points with her coach because of her commitment to defense.

Lappe's third Buffs team finished 25-7 last season (13-5 in the Pac-12) and made the program's first NCAA Tournament appearance since 2004. CU made a surprising and disappointing first-round NCAA Tournament exit, losing at home to Kansas (67-52). But the silver lining, said Lappe, was recognizing the hard work and mind-set needed to reach the NCAAs.

Also, getting to "The Big Dance" reflected the culture change in CU women's hoops. Asked Wednesday if her program was where she thought it might be entering her fourth season, she answered, "Just really in terms of building our culture, and where we're at, yes, it's kind of where we've expected to be. One of my sayings is that you get what you expect.

"So if we didn't expect to be here today, then we probably wouldn't be here today. At the same time, I think as you go forward, the expectations get even better. If we stop working, if we stop expecting better things, then I think we're going to be a standstill. I think you can only be at a standstill for so long. You're either getting better or you're getting worse. We just want to make sure that we keep getting better."

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Colorado Buffaloes Women's Basketball

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Colorado women's basketball: Front and center

By Brian Howell Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

In recent years, the CU women's team has been guard-oriented, with Brittany Spears and then Chucky Jeffery being the Buffs' top players. They are gone now, though, and the Buffs might rely on their talented front court more than ever.

In particular, the trio of junior Jen Reese and sophomores Arielle Roberson and Jamee Swan could be lethal for opponents. Together, they averaged about 26 points and 16 rebounds per game. Those numbers could skyrocket this year.

"I think it might be really good," Swan said. "I think Jen is getting a lot better on the outside and she has a great outside game and so does Arielle. And, we all can rebound and we all can post and we all can shoot. We can all bounce off each other and help each other out."

Stepping up

Another key player for the women's team figures to be senior center Rachel Hargis. She has always had modest numbers -- she posted 4.3 points and 3.1 rebounds per game last year -- but realizes those numbers will have to increase.

"I would say I'm a pretty big factor," Hargis said. "I have to get those rebounds; and finishing (shots on offense), as well. Everybody's role is stepping up because we have to fill Chucky's shoes."

Notable

The women's team has four true freshmen this year. So far, head coach Linda Lappe said that Haley Smith, a 6-foot-1 guard, has been "very consistent" and probably the most ready to contribute. ... The CU women's team will host Colorado School of Mines in an exhibition game on Nov. 2. They officially tip-off on Nov. 12 at Colorado State.

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Colorado women's basketball: Buffs want more than just NCAA Tournament spot

By Brian Howell Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera
Posted:

Buffzone.com

Twenty years ago, Los del Rio came up with one of the most memorable songs of all time, Macarena.

Twenty years -- and several forgettable albums later -- that's still the only song anybody remembers from the Spanish duo.

Heading into her fourth year as the head coach of the Colorado women's basketball team, Linda Lappe would love to avoid being thrown into Los del Rio territory.

"We have to make sure we're not a one-hit wonder," Lappe said.

Last season, the Buffaloes went 25-7 and reached the NCAA Tournament for the first time in nine years. The goal is to build upon that, rather than having that as their peak.

"I feel like it sets where we want to be again this year and pushes us further," senior center Rachel Hargis said. "I want to get further than just the first round and I feel like everybody wants to do the same thing. It just kind of sets a standard for us. That's where we want to be and that's where we should be."

Of course, the biggest challenge ahead of the Buffs is replacing All-Pac-12 guard Chucky Jeffery. The do-everything star graduated in the spring after a sensational career.

The Buffs will certainly miss Jeffery, but Lappe said they simply need to band together and figure out some different roles.

"When you lose somebody like Chucky, not one person replaces the things she was able to bring," Lappe said. "We have to have a lot of different people step up."

In particular, senior guard Brittany Wilson will be asked to take over at point guard and she will be counted on to limit turnovers and lead the offense. Others, including the talented front-court trio of Jen Reese, Arielle Roberson and Jamee Swan, will be looked at to pick up some of Jeffery's scoring punch and rebounding.

While nearly the entire roster from last year is back, the Buffs do add a good group of four freshmen. Point guard Desiree Harris could be a pivotal player by the end of the year. Guard/forward Haley Smith has looked polished in practice. And, Zoe Beard-Fails and Bri Watts give the Buffs depth in the paint.

On paper, it appears to be the most-talented roster Lappe has had during her time at CU.

"We feel really good with where we are right now and the potential that this team has," Lappe said. "While we definitely still have to keep improving every single day and become

more consistent, we like a lot of the things that we're seeing in practice and we like our future potential of this team."

That's why the goals are so high.

CU went to the Women's NIT in 2011 and 2012 before making last year's NCAA Tournament run. The Buffs lost to Kansas in the first round.

"I think it's a great start," Lappe said. "We want to keep building on that, just like we were building on the WNIT appearances. Now we've got to be as hungry, or hungrier, than we were last year at this time.

"Once you get it in your blood, you don't want it to go away. That's a really positive feeling to have."

National prognosticators believe in the Buffs. College basketball magazines have them ranked in the preseason top 20, and many pundits believe they'll get back to the NCAA Tournament. The Buffs would love to live up to that potential.

"That's a goal for all of us," Hargis said, "just to prove that we should be here and we're here to stay."

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