

Colorado women's basketball: Pac-12 peers pick Buffs third

By Stephanie Hammon For Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

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SAN FRANCISCO -- There's too much talent remaining in Boulder for Colorado women's basketball coach Linda Lappe to dwell on the departure of her star guard.

Chucky Jeffery led the Buffs in scoring and rebounding last season in their run to the NCAA Tournament, but the dynamic guard had plenty of help. Her supporting cast is all back and they're all ready to take on bigger roles.

Forward Arielle Roberson, center Rachel Hargis, and guards Brittany Wilson and Lexy Kresl return to the starting lineup, plus the Buffs have four more steady contributors back from off the bench.

"That's really what we get caught up with, we have a lot of returning starters," Lappe said. "Chucky is the only starter that we lost. We have four returning starters -- you can't discount that."

The league's coaches recognize Colorado's potential. The Buffs were picked to finish third in the Pac-12 in the preseason poll released at Thursday's media day, trailing Stanford and Cal, who shared the regular season title last year.

Washington and UCLA round out the top five.

"You look at what we do have and I'm really optimistic that we'll be just fine," Lappe said. "We're excited for the opportunities that we're going to have given the players that we do have."

Roberson, who averaged 12.1 points and 6.2 rebounds in earning Pac-12 Freshman of the Year honors, knows some of the responsibility falls to her with Jeffrey now gone.

"It's an expectation of myself and the rest of my team that we'll all pull our own weight," Roberson said.

Wilson shifts to point guard, but the transition should be fairly smooth. As a freshman, Wilson started at point guard about half the time and backed up Jeffrey last season.

Jen Reese is also back. The 6-foot-2 forward has been one of the team's top scorers during in her first two seasons in Colorado, despite coming off the bench for much of her career.

"She has a great knack for scoring the ball," Lappe said. "She's without the goggles this year so that's a good thing to get her shooting touch back."

Lappe called Hargis one of the best post defenders in the conference and expects Wilson to also play a major role on that side of the ball after earning All-Pac-12 defensive team honors last year.

Lappe singled out Haley Smith, a guard/forward from Washington, as the freshman most ready to contribute.

"Who really knows what you're going to see until you get on the court, but we're confident in the pieces that we have," Lappe said. "Now it's about building the team and using those pieces to make the best team that you can put on the court."

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Pac-12 coaches preseason poll

Team (1st place votes) Total

1. Stanford (11) 121
2. California (1) 111
3. Colorado 91
4. Washington 85
5. UCLA 80
6. USC 77
7. Utah 59
8. Oregon State 51
9. Washington State 50
10. Arizona State 29
11. Arizona 21
12. Oregon 17