

Colorado women's soccer: Buffs earn hard-fought win vs. Southern Cal

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Hosting a "Breast Cancer Awareness" game, the University of Colorado distributed hundreds of pink rally towels to fans attending Friday afternoon's game against Southern Cal at Prentup Field. Additionally, the nets in goal, the logos on the field, and even the Buffs jerseys bore the unfamiliar hue.

However, the pink accents present throughout the complex proved to be one of the few pretty sights on the day, as the Buffs fought off the Trojans in an intensely physical and foul-filled affair to escape with a 2-1 victory. Freshman Brie Hooks returned to the starting lineup and made an immediate impact for CU, netting the Buffs' first goal and later assisting on another.

In a game that saw a total of 34 fouls and five yellow cards from the two teams combined, scoring opportunities proved difficult to come by. While the Buffs had a couple of chances inside the 18-yard box in the first 45 minutes of play they were often crowded and hurried. Despite only producing three shots in the first half, USC had the best opportunity to score minutes before intermission. Freshman Tanya Samarzich subbed in late in the half and had a shot from 15 yards out ping off the post and out of play in the 44th minute, nearly giving the visitors the edge.

"I think the first half was sluggish," CU coach Danny Sanchez said. "I don't think we were sharp in the attack, (though) we defended fine. I think in the second half, as the game started to stretch, we created more opportunities."

Those opportunities were eventually capitalized on in the 66th minute when Hooks, who had been subbed back into the game minutes earlier, tracked down a long ball off a free kick from Alex Huynh that had skipped by the Trojans' back line. The striker then found herself 1-on-1 with the keeper and went low to the far post for a 1-0 lead.

The goal marks the freshman's eighth of the season, tying her for the team lead with senior Anne Stuller. Despite having sat out four games with her injury, Hooks has already placed in the school's top four all-time for goals and points in a freshman season.

"We definitely were holding me off, and then I came in and (Sanchez) just wanted me to go in with all the effort I had and just really get a good start to the second half," said Hooks, whose playing time has been limited of late due to a knee injury. "So when I went in all I was thinking about as the ball was going over was, 'I need to finish this and get the half going so we can hopefully get more goals after that'."

The goal seemed to deflate USC, as CU continued to find more open space as the game wore on. The Buffs struck again in the 72nd minute when Hooks slid a pass through the Trojans' defense, allowing fellow frosh Alyssa Herwatt to run in and take a hit from 25 yards

out. Her shot sailed over the fingers of keeper Caroline Stanley and hit the crossbar before dropping down into the net for the first goal of her CU career.

"I was definitely scared I was offside at first, that's why I kind of hesitated," Herwatt said. "I was just like, 'Why not take it?' I've had a couple of opportunities throughout the beginning of the season and haven't gotten one in so I was really excited this one went in. It felt great, for my first goal."

With the Buffs solidly in command the game began to become more chippy as USC attempted to battle back. After the Trojans earned a pair of yellow cards late in the match, the Buffs were whistled for a foul out near midfield with three minutes left in regulation. That one proved costly for CU, as Stanley sent a long ball into the box that was headed past keeper Annie Brunner by the Trojans' Marlee Carrillo.

That goal set off a frenzied finish, which saw another USC yellow card and several more stoppages of play as the visitors desperately tried to come up with the equalizer. But the Buffs were able to keep their composure, holding the ball in their offensive end of the pitch for the final minute to maintain the win.

"It was a competitive Pac-12 match," Sanchez said. "I don't think there was anything dirty, I think both teams were playing hard and competing. It was tough to get into a rhythm for both teams, and I think both teams were fighting for their lives at one level or the other."

The win moves the Buffs (12-3-1, 4-2-1) into second place in the Pac-12 standings for the moment, two points ahead of Washington with one more game played. CU will take on conference leader UCLA on Sunday in the Buffs' final home match of the season.

"It will be kind of surreal because it went by so fast for me," said Stuller, one of five seniors making their final appearance at home. "It's crazy. I'm just excited and want to leave this field on a good note."

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