

Howell blog: CU Buffs' Lappe pleased with rule changes in women's hoops

By Brian Howell, Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

Early in the season, Colorado women's basketball coach Linda Lappe expects a lot more fouls and a lot more free throws.

Eventually, however, she thinks the changes to the NCAA rule book will make the game better. Just like in the men's game, the women's game will enforce stricter rules on defenders using hand checks, as well as on blocks and charges.

"You should see a lot of free throws at the beginning," Lappe said. "Then you've just got to figure it out, don't foul out and the officials have to foul people out if that's what it takes.

"Fans just have to stay patient and everyone has to stay patient, because when you start fouling out your kids, you're going to figure out real fast to not put your hands on somebody and to move your feet."

Coaches around the country have mixed reactions to the rules, but Lappe likes them.

"I do, because I think that's the way it should be played," Lappe said. "I think that's the way players like to play, and I think that's the way coaches like to coach, what fans like to see and that's the game of basketball."

In addition, the women's game is adding a 10-second backcourt rule and a 5-second closely guarded rule. Those rules have been in place for high school girls basketball for years, so it makes sense to adopt them for the college game.

"It gives you the potential to press a little bit more and be more aggressive and to speed up the game," Lappe said. "(On offense) you've got to have better ball handlers to break presses."

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Colorado women's basketball: Roberson ready to take the next step for CU Buffs

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During her first two years at Colorado, Arielle Roberson could always rely on older brother Andre off the court and Buffaloes point guard Chucky Jeffery on the court.

With Andre, a former star for the CU men's basketball team now in the NBA, and Jeffery, one of the most dynamic players CU women's basketball history having graduated, more eyes will turn to Arielle.

Colorado (25-7 a year ago) will need a big year out of Roberson, and her surgically-repaired hips, to get back to the Women's NCAA Tournament for a second year in a row.

"I like where she's at, I like her mentality," CU head coach Linda Lappe said. "She's a winner. People like to follow her. She sets the tone for us.

"I think she's a player that can make everybody around her better, not necessarily by what she says but how she plays and the fact that she competes on every possession."

A year ago, Roberson turned heads with a fantastic freshman season. A 6-foot-1 redshirt sophomore forward from San Antonio, she is blessed with natural athleticism and a knack for making big plays for the Buffs. She finished with 12.1 points and 6.2 rebounds per game last year.

Along the way, she put her versatility on display. She can hit 3-pointers (connecting on 41.2 percent of her shots beyond the arc) and score in the paint. She can out-muscle opponents for a rebound, yet out-quick them for a loose ball or a steal. She can shine on offense and lock down a defender on defense.

"It was a good year," she said. "I met a lot of my personal goals, we met a lot of our team goals, so that was really awesome. We went to the NCAA Tournament. Granted, we lost and that wasn't ideal, but it was a stepping stone and I think we can build off of that going forward."

It was a huge stepping stone for Roberson, who missed the previous season because of a hip injury. During preseason workouts two years ago, she tore the labrum in her left hip and opted for season-ending surgery to repair the tear.

Healthy again, she proved to be worth the wait last year. She scored 16 points and grabbed six rebounds in her collegiate debut and then followed that up with 23 points and six boards in the next game.

Roberson went on to score in double figures in each of her first 13 games, the longest streak to start a career in program history.

Adversity hit again, though, when the Buffs got into Pac-12 Conference play. Going up against bigger and better players, Roberson went through a lull for about a month in the middle of the season.

"(Non-conference), I won't say it was easy for me, but it wasn't as challenging as playing against Stanford and Cal and bigger people," she said. "I think I've learned to adjust to that."

Roberson said she expected the tougher challenge in Pac-12 play, but when that challenge arrived, "I'm like 'Whoa!' I got taken back, because I wasn't used to that. Now, I know."

She actually adjusted during the season and played exceptional basketball during the final 10-12 games.

Roberson was unable to take that momentum into a strong offseason, though. In April, she underwent labrum surgery on her right hip. She didn't have the same injury as she had two years ago, but it was the same procedure in an effort to make her healthier for the long-term. She only recently began practicing again.

"We did that on purpose, so she could have three more years to really build, instead of having to get better and have a set-back and get better," Lappe said. "We decided to go ahead and get that done this summer, maybe understanding that her skill set might not be as good as it is going to get over next summer and the next summer after that."

That doesn't mean Roberson or the Buffs are expecting any kind of step back. Quite the opposite, in fact. She was able to work on her shot and ball-handling skills this summer. And, she's still got the same mindset as ever before.

"I think I'm going to be better defensively," she said. "I think I did pretty good and was solid last year, but I want to definitely be better, on the boards, locking (opponents) down. I think that will do a lot for my offense. I can get a lot of scoring off of easy buckets in transition."

This will be a different type of year for Roberson. Jeffery is gone. Andre is gone. She's going to be the target of opposing defenses like never before. And, she's got another injury to rebound from.

But, if she's learned anything from playing college basketball, it's that excuses don't go over well. She's happy and she's eager to take her game -- and the Buffs -- to the next level.

"You've got to be really strong -- mentally, physically," she said of playing college basketball. "It demands a lot of you, especially practice. You have to have an open mind about everything and definitely be mentally tough to push through fatigue, push through whatever adversity hits."

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