

Colorado women's basketball: Buffs eager to build on last season

By Brian Howell Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

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At the time, it was a sudden and stunning end to a great season.

More than six months later, the Colorado women's basketball team realizes that its 67-52 loss to Kansas on March 23 in the first round of the NCAA Tournament was not an ending. It was, hopefully, a beginning.

"That game turned around into motivation the day after it happened for a lot of our returners," senior guard Brittany Wilson said. "We want to get further, we want to do more. It says a lot about our program and where we're headed. There's only up from here."

On Tuesday, the Buffaloes hit the court for their first official practice of the 2013-14 season. With nearly its entire roster back -- All-Pac-12 guard Chucky Jeffery is the only major contributor from last year that graduated -- CU was eager to get started again.

"I still get goose bumps on the first day," head coach Linda Lappe said. "We've done some full team activities, especially going to Italy this summer, but it's different when you have that first official day of practice."

CU went 25-7 last season and broke a nine-year NCAA Tournament drought. The Buffs are already getting preseason attention, as USA Today has ranked them No. 18 in its preseason preview magazine.

"Being ranked 18th going into preseason, it's an honor," junior forward Jen Reese said. "We don't talk much about last year, but we can bring out the positives and all of that. Being ranked now, we're really excited."

Part of the excitement stems from the fact that they have had an opportunity to play together already. In August, they spent 10 days in Italy, playing four games. Prior to leaving, they held 10 practices.

Already, the Buffs are seeing the benefit of that time together.

"I feel like we have good chemistry because those Italy practices really helped," Reese said. "I think (now) it's more playing as a whole, playing together and just getting better every day, because we've still got a ways to go."

With more than a month before the Nov. 12 opener at Colorado State, there is time to get better, but Lappe wants to see progress every day.

"The biggest challenge is to really just set the tone at the beginning of practice," Lappe said. "Whatever the tone is now, it's going to carry throughout the season. In every way, we set the tone of how we do things and how we want to do things."

More than anything, what the Buffs want it to keep winning. In three years under Lappe, they've made three trips to the postseason -- they went to the Women's NIT in 2011 and 2012 -- and Wilson would love nothing more than to make it four in a row.

"It's an exciting thing for it to be the last go-round," Wilson said. "It's kind of bittersweet, but I couldn't ask for a better team to go out with, and it's going to be real exciting."

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Per NCAA rules, the Buffs could have started practices last week, but Lappe purposely waited until this week.

"I just think it gets to be long (if practice starts early)," Lappe said. "I remember this time before our first game. It's really, really important. At the same time, you want to make sure it stays fresh, it stays fun.

"We've had great success in the non-conference, so (starting late) hasn't really hurt us to this point, so why change?"

The Buffs are 22-0 in non-conference play the past two seasons combined.

Notable

Wilson wore a walking boot at practice on Tuesday, but she should be back on the floor soon. ... Reese is going without goggles for now. She injured her eye on Feb. 23, 2012, at Stanford and wore protective goggles throughout the 2012-13 season. ... Alexis Atchley, a freshman walk-on last year, left CU and is now playing at Washington. The Buffs have had a walk-on in each of the past two seasons, but Lappe said they are not actively looking to add one this year.

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