

2011 OUTLOOK

Preseason Question and Answer session with CU coach Liz Kritza

Question: *The Buffs left the Big 12 Conference in 2011 to join the Pac-10 Conference, now the Pac-12 Conference, which is the best volleyball conference in the country. What are the biggest positives in joining this prestigious league?*

Answer: From top to bottom, the Pac-12 is the most competitive league in the college volleyball. There is stronger volleyball tradition amongst the league's schools and more NCAA Championships won and Final Four appearances than any other league. Also, the areas where we are playing in the Pac-12 are volleyball friendly areas; I would expect there to be a greater interest in the sport overall.

Q: *What will be the toughest part about being a member of this conference?*

A: The strengths of the conference are also what make it tough to compete in. The competitive level of the conference is unparalleled and rarely can a team face two top 10 teams in a 48 hour period. The playing schedule is also a tough part of this league- playing Friday night, then again Saturday can present a challenge, especially when combined with travel. Getting acclimated to the new league is an exciting challenge that we are ready to undertake, but it will be very difficult to break in to the top part of this tough conference because this is the best of the best as far as NCAA volleyball is concerned.

Q: *The conference schedule is different with matches Friday, Saturday or Friday, Sunday unlike the Big 12 schedule of Wednesday, Saturday matches. How will this affect the way the team prepares for each match?*

A: The back-to-back matches call for a focused and prepared training and recovery plan for the team to ensure that we have our strongest squad for two matches at a time, instead of having days in between matches.

Q: *Kerra Schroeder is the only returning outside hitter for the Buffs this year. She has been a starter since her freshman year and has gained valuable experience playing in the Big 12 Conference. How does her experience help CU transition to the Pac-12?*

A: As the program has been going through the transition period since my hire, Kerra has been a mainstay on the court. This experience is a very valuable commodity for her as she will be called on time and time again and she will be ready to answer that call.

Q: *Alyssa Valentine ran the CU offense with some help from Michelle Miller. How important is it to the team to have that continuity this season?*

A: The return of both setters is a key component for stability as we progress forward into the new league. Setters are the quarterbacks of the team and to have continuity in this position is important because we will be able to progress the level of the offense we are capable of running. The longer that setters work with each individual hitter, the better the connection gets and that is crucial for our points production and for the ability to implement proper strategies in game competition.

Q: *Anicia Santos and Nikki Lindow were the starting middle blockers in 2010. Who will be their strongest competition for the starting roles?*

A: Having both starting middle blockers back is a positive as well as the addition of Lydia Blaha and Kelsey English to the middle blocker position. Lydia will challenge for a spot on the court as she was the lone middle training this past spring due to post season surgery/injury recovery for both Anicia and Nikki. She got plenty of repetition and has a strong desire to compete, so it will be good to see what she can do this season. Kelsey will be a freshman this year, but has very promising athletic ability to make a strong contribution to this position this year.

Q: *Megan Beckwith was the starting libero for CU as a freshman and set several freshman records for digs in a match, digs in a season and digs per set in a season. Who will look to give her competition or help the Buffs with their ball control?*

A: We need to see great improvement in our ball control this season, as it the crucial platform for all other components of the game. We look for Megan to progress with a year of experience under her belt, but she will have plenty of strong competition from other returners, Elysse Richardson, Jess Aschenbrenner, and Hannah Walker. Newcomer Nicki Brown will provide even more competition in this very important position for us.

Q: *All in all the Buffs return four of the six starters as well as the libero to their 2011 line-up. How does this help you as you rebuild the CU program?*

A: To build a successful program you have to have the right players in place and those players need to be well trained and have game experience. That takes time, but we are well on our way to fulfilling these elements this team. We will still be young, by any measure, and with the added challenge of transitioning to the new league, we will have a very challenging season. However, it is those challenges that will battle test these young women and have them prepared for our continual building process that I am certain will happen here at CU.

Q: *Another notable addition to this year's roster isn't an athlete, but a coach. Leonid Yelin joined your staff after 15 years as a head coach at Louisville. What will he be able to add to your staff?*

A: Leonid Yelin is a very exciting addition to our program. Not only does he bring his many years of successful coaching experience, but also his post season coaching savvy, ability to identify and develop young athletes into high level players, and uncanny knowledge of how to help players become champions in every respect is invaluable. He is an extremely intelligent and well respected member of the coaching world, and his experience with playing and coaching on the international level is another positive that he brings to the table for this building program.

Q: *The schedule is always loaded with top-25 teams, especially now that CU is in the Pac-12 Conference. How do you prepare your team for that level of play?*

A: We approach the strength of the schedule with great respect, enthusiasm and confidence in our preparation. To be one of the best, we have to play and beat the best. This conference slate affords that opportunity night in and night out, and we have to approach it as such, an opportunity. We have a shot at a top team and we will continue working diligently until we beat those teams, because it is only then that our goals for this program will be realized.