

PRESEASON Q&A WITH LIZ KRITZA

Question: The Buffs have now been a part of the Pac-12 Conference for a season. How different has it been for CU to play in the prestigious conference?

Answer: The Pac-12 is arguably the best conference in the country for women's volleyball, so it has been great for CU to compete in it. The tradition of the league clearly sets it apart from all others, with more NCAA Final Four appearances and championship titles than any other conference. The league encompasses many top-25 teams, many of the top coaches, players, and even recruiting classes in the country; so the level of play that exists in the league is top notch. The difference for CU is that the conference slate is more challenging from top to bottom in this league. There is less parity between the top teams in the conference and the bottom teams. To build a program in this league is a very exciting challenge. The strength of the league makes it an attractive one because it allows individual players to test their abilities against the best.

Q: The Pac-12 Networks will go live this season and CU will have over half of its conference matches broadcast either nationally or regionally. How will this affect your team since in the past the Buffs were on TV less than three times a season?

A: The dawn of the Pac-12 Networks and the media exposure it brings is a huge positive for our program. In this age of sports television, it is imperative to have television coverage in order for a sport to grow. The fact that the Pac-12 is televising over 80 live volleyball events, three times more than any other conference, is doing wonders for the sport of volleyball and for all the Pac-12 programs being featured. Our team will appear in 12 televised matches so far and we are excited about the increased visibility for the sport and for our program itself. The small nuances (an extra media timeout, or a slightly different pre-match warmup schedule) are easy accommodations to make in order to have the increased coverage.

Q: The conference schedule is different again this year, with matches spanning Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Although the team will only play two times a week, how hard will it be to adjust every week to a different schedule?

A: The conference schedule this year is a change for us, but again, it is in efforts to increase the visibility of the sport and the programs selected for TV matches. Some weeks we will play on a Friday/Saturday, and then turn around and play on a Wednesday/Friday, but what really is affected there is our training cycle. We have to shorten some cycles to ensure that our players are ready to compete with such a quick turnaround, but it should be manageable. As coaches, we have to be certain to manage the recovery of our players to be rested and able to perform in these different cycles. The other piece to make sure we are prepared for is the quick turnaround on scouting and match preparation; there will be some weeks when we have significantly less time to prep for the next set of opponents, but these challenges are worth the extra TV coverage in my opinion.

Q: The Buffs return four starters from last season's line-up. How big of a factor will this play since most of the core from the past season is intact?

A: Having a core group of multiple players with playing experience is definitely a plus for us. With a year under their belts in the Pac-12, these players will be able to help our new players to prepare better for the rigors of a Pac-12 season. We definitely have some talented young players on this year's squad, but it's the combination of the experience we have and the boost of talent that will be important to our overall success this season. How our older players work with our younger or new players is crucial to not just their own individual success, but our team's success as well.





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PLAYERS

Q: *The incoming recruiting class of Austin Alexis, Nicole Edelman and Chelsey Keoho was ranked 19th by PrepVolleyball.com; the best recruiting class for the Buffaloes since 2003. What does it mean to the program to be back in the top-20?*

A: We work very hard in recruiting and this class is an exciting one to add to the program. The recruiting class rankings are a positive recognition, but the real excitement is in the future of this program as we build these top recruits into the program and continue to bring high level players to compete in Colorado jerseys. To compete in the league in which we play, we have to win battles on the recruiting trail, and this class is an example of that. It is appropriate for teams in the top league to be attracting the top prep and club players that will want to compete amongst the best.

Q: *Kerra Schroeder enters her senior year and has been a part of your program since the beginning. She is a three-time captain and last season she became the 14th player in CU history to record 1,000 career kills. What does it mean to have a player of her caliber return to lead the program as it continues to head in the right direction?*

A: Kerra's presence in this program has been significant, as she has played for me since her freshman year. Early on, she indicated to me that she wanted to build this program here with me, knowing that we would have a tough climb ahead. She has been a mainstay in our lineup and has shouldered a large load at times for this team, but she welcomed that challenge and continues to want only the best for this program. Going into her senior season, we look for her to be a leader in every sense of the word. She will be one of two seniors on the roster and will be counted on for consistent all-around play, offensive production, and perhaps most importantly, to help meld our returning and incoming players into a cohesive group that will be able to do great things this season.

Q: *Kelsey English made the transition nicely from middle blocker to right side hitter during her freshman season. Who else will you look to fill in on the outside to join her and Schroeder (left side hitter)?*

A: Kelsey did a good job last year as a true freshman, and we expect her to continue her development as a player and continue to contribute on either the right side or middle positions. She has a steady approach to the game that served her well during her freshman campaign and we look for her to be able to take a bigger role in her sophomore season. We have a good mix of familiar and new faces on the outside hitter positions this year. Emily Alexis and Neira Ortiz Ruiz return and both have made good improvement from last season; we are expecting them to be able to contribute this year on the outside or right side. Emily Alexis is a dynamic athlete who hits



a heavy ball and can be an extremely productive attacker for us. Neira has learned to use her size well in her attacking and has become a much stronger offensive threat as well. New to the court this year are Alexis Austin, Emily Todd and Ana Pantovic, who are all capable of providing significant contribution on the pins as well. Alexis Austin has little playing experience on the outside, but is projecting to be a phenomenal player in this position in time. Emily Todd has the full complement of skills and is a steady outside that has good passing and defensive abilities. Ana Pantovic will work her way back to playing form after a lengthy layoff, but will be our most experienced and accomplished attacker on the pin when she is back to form.

Q: *Alyssa Valentine, the starting setter for the last two seasons, finished her eligibility at the end of last season. Who will you look to run the offense this season?*

A: We have some good options for the setting position this year, and both bring different positives to the table. The duo of Michelle Miller and Nicole Edelman will be a great combination to work together to train and develop this young team and will be able to provide what we need for success on the competition floor. Michelle is the epitome of a team player and takes a very serious role in contributing whatever this team needs for its overall success. She has been our starting setter, our setter that comes off the bench, a defensive and serving sub, and she is capable of performing in all of these roles and is an excellent leader for this team as one of two seniors. Nicole Edelman is a gifted young player who has the ability to take on the setting role for a top collegiate program. She has battled back from injury last year and is feeling great and ready to go for her freshman campaign, and we can expect a pretty significant contribution from her.



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PLAYERS

Q: Besides Nikki Lindow, who will you look to fill the other middle blocker position?

A: Nikki Lindow returns with two years of playing experience in the middle position, and will be joined by a few of her teammates, Kelsey English and Alexis Austin. Nikki is the most experienced of the group and has improved since last season. With solid blocking and attacking skills and an improved physical ability, Nikki is primed to have a very successful campaign. Kelsey is not new to the middle at all, as she played middle through her prep and club career. She will be able to work her way into the lineup very seamlessly and she can provide strong offensive options and will continue to make great strides with her blocking. Alexis can provide significant contribution in the middle position as well, with her superior jumping ability and previous experience in this position.

Q: Elysse Richardson and Jessica Aschenbrenner spent a lot of time in the back row for the Buffs. Who else can be expected to compete with them for the libero position this fall?

A: We will have a strong competition for the libero position this fall, and it may not be filled by just one player when it is all said and done. Elysse has worked extremely hard to improve since last fall and her efforts are easily noticed, so she can contribute significantly to the team. Jess has also played a number of defensive roles on the team, including libero during the spring season. I expect her to continue to contribute on the defensive side for us this season as well. One new challenger for the libero position is freshman, Chelsey Keoho, who has significant experience in the position on both the club and prep levels, as well as within the USA High Performance programs. She has the ability and experience to play this role for us, it all just depends on how quickly she acclimates.

Q: During the offseason you hired two assistant coaches, both former UCLA volleyball players JT Wenger and Kristee Porter. What do each of them bring to the program and what difference to you think they will make since they both have Pac-12 backgrounds?

A: I have assembled a staff that has significant experience with success in the Pac-12, both playing and coaching. The perspective of someone who has already achieved success in this realm is helpful when building a program and instilling confidence in young players. Kristee Porter is one of the best players who has ever played collegiately and followed that up with a prolific professional playing career. She understands what it takes to achieve that level of success, and how to take talent and ability and combine it with absolute diligence to create a successful result. JT Wenger has playing and coaching experience in one of the most storied volleyball programs in the country. He is a highly intellectual coach who has learned from some of the best in the game and brings great insight to our program as we are building it back into a national contender.

Q: One other major addition to the volleyball program was the practice facility, allowing the team to practice simultaneously when the basketball teams also needed time on the main court. How has this helped the team both in and out of season?

A: The addition of the practice facility was a tremendous aid during the spring season and I expect that it will be very helpful through this fall season as well. Having the ability to practice in multiple practice blocks affords a better schedule for our student-athletes and allows them to better balance all the demands they must juggle; school, practice, physical training, recovery and sports med, and competition. The overall experience is enhanced for our players and I believe that the practice facility will add even more benefit as we become more accustomed to using all the new space most efficiently.

Q: The schedule is always loaded with top-25 teams, especially now that CU is in the Pac-12 Conference. UCLA won the 2011 NCAA title, USC was in the semifinals and a total of seven teams made the tournament. How do you prepare your team for that level of play?

A: The Pac-12 prides itself on having more teams appearing in the NCAA semifinals and finals than any other conference. The polls are always laden with Pac-12 teams every year, so the level of play in our training gym must be high enough to prepare for the level of play on the competition floor. As part of our preparation, we train to the top level that we possibly can; to include coaches and practice players on the floor to test our players' ability, both physically and skill-wise, and to ensure the appropriate training environment for our team. I want to have the most prepared team when we take on these top Pac-12 teams and it will be the combination of proper training, effective scouting and program management to ensure that we are ready to do battle nightly with the nation's top teams.

