



Putnina leads McConnell-Miller's Buffs to 9th straight

CU sophomore scores career-high 20 points

Monday, December 31, 2007

Colorado sophomore Aija Putnina expected to play poorly in Sunday's basketball game against Jacksonville State.

She didn't meet her expectations.

The Latvian forward made 8 of her 9 shots, including 4-of-4 from 3-point range, to score a career-high 20 points and help the No. 25 Buffs to a 91-64 win over the Gamecocks in the Coors Events Center.

"There were a couple distractions before the game that I usually don't see," said Putnina, who wouldn't elaborate. "It was just kind of weird. Maybe it's a sign. Maybe I'll start looking for some distractions again."

Putnina entered the game having made only 4-of-19 shots from 3-territory in her career.

But it was the way she finished her shots in the paint that impressed her coach, Kathy McConnell-Miller. Putnina entered the game a career 33.6 percent shooter.

"Aija has one of the prettiest shots on our team," McConnell-Miller said. "This was the first time that Aija finished on the block. She will have the opportunity. Hopefully this will catapult her into more great finishes because she definitely has the skills."

The Buffs (10-2) won their ninth in a row. All nine wins came after Putnina was promoted to a starter.

McConnell-Miller likes Putnina's shooting form. But it's been a process in developing Putnina's confidence.

"Aija is the type of player that's difficult to get on because by the time I open my mouth she's already gotten on herself 15 different ways about making a bad play or missing a shot," McConnell-Miller said. "For me, it's about trying to get her to not beat herself up so much."

Jacksonville State (5-8) gave the Buffs a game in the first half as the Gamecocks broke CU's zone press and led for the first six minutes. Colorado didn't take the lead for good until Putnina hit her second trey of the game with less than seven minutes left in the first half for a 17-13 lead.

Shots began to fall for the rest of the team, too, and CU pulled away with little trouble as post players

such as Putnina began to dominate.

Senior forward Jackie McFarland scored 16 points and grabbed nine rebounds. Freshman forward Brittany Spears had a career-high five blocked shots to go with four assists and nine points. Senior point guard Susie Powers added 12 points, nine rebounds and five assists against one turnover.

Colorado's nine-game win streak is the team's first since the 2003-04 season and CU finished the month of December a perfect 7-0 -- going undefeated in the last month of the year for the sixth time in program history.

Notable

Colorado's 91 points were the most scored in nearly two years, when the Buffs beat Northern Colorado 92-65 on Feb. 13, 2006. ... CU's 10-2 record is its best start to a season since the 2003-04 campaign when the Buffs began 12-2. ... Colorado shot a season-high 56 percent. ... Spears has 11 blocked shots in her last four games and leads Big 12 freshmen in blocks.

Colorado 91,

Jacksonville State 64

JACKSONVILLE STATE (64)

min fg-fga ft-fta rb ast pf tp

Efezokhae 26 3-10 6-7 5 1 4 12

Duhart 25 3-7 0-0 4 0 2 6

Johnikin 30 2-8 0-0 5 3 3 6

Beneby 24 3-8 4-6 5 1 0 11

Stuart 28 5-15 2-2 5 1 1 15

Hollingsworth 16 1-6 0-0 5 0 2 2

Pitts 21 3-6 0-0 2 0 1 6

Chessher 8 0-0 0-0 0 1 1 0

Carmine 7 0-1 0-0 2 1 1 0

Williams 15 1-10 3-4 2 0 2 6

Totals: 200 21-71 15-19 40 8 17 64

COLORADO (91)

min fg-fga ft-fta rb ast pf tp

Spears 28 4-10 1-1 5 4 1 9

Putnina 26 8-9 0-0 7 0 3 20

McFarland 28 4-7 8-10 9 2 2 16

Skildum 17 2-5 0-0 1 1 0 5

Powers 32 5-9 0-0 9 5 0 12

Houston 3 1-2 0-0 0 0 1 2

Smith 17 4-7 0-0 1 2 1 10

Blythe 10 2-4 0-0 1 0 0 5

Ridge 2 0-0 0-0 0 2 0 0

Dale 4 1-1 0-0 0 1 1 2

Piterniece 5 0-3 0-0 2 1 1 0

Dunn 4 0-0 0-1 2 0 0 0

Dow 17 1-2 2-2 2 0 2 4

Richards 7 3-4 0-0 0 1 1 6

Totals: 200 35-63 11-14 42 19 13 91**Score by halves:**

Jacksonville State 36 28 -- 64

Colorado 49 42 -- 91

3-point field goals -- Jacksonville State (7-21): Efezokhae 0-3, Johnikin 2-7, Beneby 1-1, Stuart 3-8, Williams 1-2; Colorado (10-24): Spears 0-3, Putnina 4-4, McFarland 0-1, Skildum 1-2, Powers 2-4, Smith 2-5, Blythe 1-2, Piterniece 0-1, Dow 0-1.

Officials --Kelly Johnson, Ernie Solis, Doug Williams.**Technical fouls** -- Jacksonville State: None; Colorado: None.**Attendance** -- 1,168**STEALS**

Jacksonville State (7):Johnikin 3, Stuart, Hollingsworth, Chessher, Williams.

Colorado (6):Spears, McFarland, Powers 2, Smith, Dow.

BLOCKED SHOTS

Jacksonville State (3):Hollingsworth 3.

Colorado (9):Spears 5, Putnina 2, McFarland, Dunn.

TURNOVERS

Jacksonville State (14):Efezokhae 2, Duhart, Stuart 2, Hollingsworth, Pitts 2, Chessher 2, Carmine, Williams 3.

Colorado (14):Spears, Putnina 4, McFarland, Skildum 2, Powers, Smith 3, Piterniece, Dow.



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Buffaloes remain on roll with rout

By The Associated Press

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CU's Caley Dow pressures Jacksonville State's Cassi Stuart during the first half Sunday. (Cliff Grassmick, Boulder Daily Camera)

BOULDER — Aija Putnina scored a career-high 20 points and Jackie McFarland contributed 16 points and nine rebounds Sunday, leading No. 25 Colorado to a 91-64 rout of Jacksonville (Ala.) State.

Putnina shot 4-for-4 from behind the 3-point arc and 8-for-9 from the field.

Jacksonville State (5-8) took an early six-point lead before CU (10-2) began dominating for its ninth consecutive win.

"I thought Jacksonville State was strong in taking it to us," CU coach Kathy McConnell- Miller said. "We talked about two things: No second-chance opportunities for them and stopping penetration, and that's exactly what they did to us in the first four minutes of the game. We came out and really took that away from them in the first four

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minutes of the second half. I think that was the turning point."

Cassi Stuart led the Gamecocks with 15 points, but they were hampered by 30 percent shooting from the field. It was only the second time Jacksonville State played a ranked team since joining Division I in the 1995-96 season.

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