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college basketball

CU women's hoops in for challenge

By Tom Kensler
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Colorado women's basketball coach Kathy McConnell-Miller answers questions at the Big 12 basketball media days in Oklahoma City on Wednesday. (AP | Sue Ogrocki)

OKLAHOMA CITY — Calling this season the "most challenging" of her coaching career, Colorado's Kathy McConnell-Miller said today during Big 12 basketball media day activities the Buffaloes will put players in unconventional spots on the floor.

"We've got some basketball players that can play pretty much any position on the court," McConnell-Miller said. "They're very talented players, but not in the typical, prototype positions."

"We're so guard-oriented; they do things completely out of the box. They're so unpredictable; even I can't predict what they'll do. We're going to have combinations on the floor that you couldn't possibly expect."

Colorado, 19-15 last season and a semifinalist in the Women's NIT, must replace departed post players Jackie McFarland and Aija Putnina, and starting point guard Whitney Houston, who was lost for the season when she tore an ACL this fall during individual workouts.

McConnell-Miller said her lineup could include as many as four guards along with 6-foot-4 senior center Kara Richards.

The Buffaloes were picked 11th in the preseason Big 12 coaches poll, but McConnell-Miller believes the Buffs can put five players on the court who can score. That includes two newcomers in the backcourt, freshman Alyssa Fressle, the 2007-2008 Colorado prep player of the year at Highlands Ranch High School, and Kelly Jo Mullaney, a transfer from Colorado State.

Fressle, Mullaney, junior Bianca Smith and sophomore Brittany Spears figure to be starters, along with Richards.

"We're really trying to find the niche of these players, what their strengths are, what they do well," McConnell-Miller said.

"They can shoot, but they have no idea what Big 12 basketball is all about."

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Asked about problematic matchups with teams that have forwards, McConnell-Miller said: "We'll see. But our philosophy is teams will have to adjust to us."

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Richards has big shoes to fill for Buffs

Fifth-year senior to take McFarland's place in post

By Ryan Thorburn

Wednesday, October 22, 2008

OKLAHOMA CITY -- How do you replace Jackie McFarland?

It was the question of the day for Colorado head coach Kathy McConnell-Miller at the Big 12 women's basketball media days here at the Cox Pavilion.

For starters, the Buffs will lean on fifth-year senior Kara Richards. The 6-4 center is the team's active leader in points (508), rebounds (315) and blocked shots (55) after spending the last three years in McFarland's shadow.

As a freshman, Richards averaged 5.3 points per game in 2004-05. She redshirted the next season due to injuries and then averaged 4.7 points as a sophomore and just 2.0 points last season as a junior.

"I definitely think (her numbers) have to go way up, but I think it's going to be easier for her to go way up with the guards that are on the floor," McConnell-Miller said during Wednesday's event. "We're going to put players on the floor who are going to make plays. I think if Jackie would have been surrounded with the guards that Kara is going to be surrounded by, Jackie would have never been forced to play against double coverage."

McFarland, despite being consistently double- and sometimes triple-teamed by defenders in the post, finished second on CU's all-time scoring list with 1,957 points. She averaged 18.7 points per game as a senior while carrying the Buffs to the WNIT's final four.

After five practices, CU's coaching staff is drooling over the potential of having a quick and skilled five-guard lineup using players like Brittany Spears, Alyssa Fressle, Kelly Jo Mullaney and Bianca Smith on the court together.

"There's going to be weight to carry," Richards said. "And they're going to be able to carry the load."

McConnell-Miller is still trying to figure out how to handle the point guard position with the loss of Whitney Houston to a season-ending knee injury.

"I'm not ready to answer that question yet," she said.

Surprisingly, the McFarland question is getting easier to answer by the day. And not just because Richards has accepted her role as team leader and go-to post player.

Another freshman, 6-3 forward Julie Seabrook, also figures to be an important figure in a rotation

lacking big bodies.

What did McConnell-Miller see in the recruit from British Columbia?

"I saw a young Jackie McFarland," she said. "Now does she score 1,957 points? Probably not. But the mentality is the same, that I'm going to do everything I can to get better."

The Big 12 returns 108 letterwinners, including 41 starters, from last season's rosters. The fact that CU lost McFarland is a big reason the team was picked to finish 11th in the preseason coaches poll.

"This is by far going to be my most challenging and hopefully rewarding coaching experience," McConnell-Miller said. "We've got some players that bring some more athleticism and really have no idea what Big 12 basketball is about. They give us youth and energy where we walk out of practice and there are times we say, 'Wow.'"

"Sometimes it's a really good wow, sometimes it's a really bad wow."



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