



Bufs' Big 12 title hopes dashed with loss to A&M

CU loses 1-0 lead with less than 5 minutes to go

By Ryan Thorburn

Monday, October 27, 2008

Sunday's like this one were the reason why the six seniors came to Colorado to play soccer.

The bleachers were packed with more than 2,000 fans. Ralphie ran across Prentup Field to get the crowd buzzing before the first touch. The game was being broadcast live on regional television.

And the No. 15 Buffs appeared to be on their way to clinching at least a share of the Big 12 title with a 1-0 lead against No. 14 Texas A&M with less than five minutes to play in regulation.

"We saw it all coming together and thought it was over," CU defender Michelle Wenino said. "And it wasn't."

After Alex Cousins was whistled for a foul, Rebecca Herrera's ensuing free kick was headed into the goal by Brianne Young to tie the score in the 87th minute.

Texas A&M took the only three shots in overtime and escaped with a 2-1 victory on Beth West's goal in the 94th minute.

"It was kind of a fast ending on a quick set of shots," said CU keeper Kirstin Radlinski, who made seven saves in the game while her counterpart (Kelly Dyer) faced only two shots on goal. "I thought our girls gave a great effort. It's just the way the ball bounced today." After a scoreless first half the Buffs made their own break when Kelly Butler drew a foul in the box to give her team a penalty shot.

Alex Cousins calmly buried the rare scoring chance in the 48th minute. It almost held up.

"I'm shocked right now," Cousins said. "It's one of those things I already played in my head 15 times before the game was even over. I think about that foul that gave them that free kick and the header that went in ... I just keep seeing it over and over in my mind."

"It's impossible. I'm going to have nightmares about it tonight."

The Buffs -- who would have clinched at least a share of the regular-season conference title with Oklahoma State had they held on for the victory -- finished the regular season 13-3-3 overall and 6-2-2 in the Big 12. The Aggies (14-3-1, 7-2-1) moved ahead of CU in the standings and celebrated on their rival's turf.

The stunning turn of events made the postgame "Senior Day" tribute for Wenino, Cousins, Radlinski, Nikki Keller, Amber Bettenhausen and Gianna DeSaverio a bittersweet goodbye in front of the home fans.

"These days are always the hardest days because you lose a family member, so to speak," CU head coach Bill Hempen said. "It was tough for this group early on in their career, but for them to grow into what they've grown into during their career ... that's why you coach."

CU will look to add some more polish a solid NCAA tournament resume at the Big 12 tournament. Bracket play begins on Nov. 5 at the Blossom Soccer Complex in San Antonio.

"Looking past this, it was a great season. We just got so close as a team, and beyond the record we've just outplayed every team, I feel," Cousins said. "It's just one of those things when you're in the big games you have to finish them off."



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