



CU Sports Roundup: Buff spikers ready to take on Rams

By Joshua Lindenstein
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Ask members of the Colorado volleyball team about playing in-state rival Colorado State 10 days ago and there'd likely have been some discomfort, maybe a little insecurity about whether they were ready.

And after sweeping three straight matches — including one against then-No. 11 California — over the weekend in the Colorado Invitational?

"I think this week we are so confident and it's just another match, another Cal," junior right side Alex Buth said after practice Wednesday.

The Buffs (3-2) begin play in CSU's Hilton Classic tonight with a 7 o'clock match against the Rams at Moby Arena in Fort Collins. CU faces Winthrop at 5 p.m. Friday and Miami (Ohio) at 5 p.m. Saturday.

A largely inexperienced Colorado squad began the season with two losses at a tournament in New Orleans, both after leading two games to none. But the Buffs rebounded in their own tournament last weekend, capping the event by handing Cal its first loss of the season on Sunday, with Buth being named tourney MVP.

"For sure winning the tournament this weekend and the win over Cal changed our mind-set, but that process started with practice the week before," head coach Pi'i Aiu said. "We had three real hard, real physical, real focused days of practice. The kids did a great job and just kind of started understanding how hard they have to play."

Aiu said that though even many of CU's upperclassmen are inexperienced, the learning process for the team — from the upperclassmen down to the freshmen — has been accelerating.

One key component has been the play of sophomore setter Kaitlyn Burkett, who has averaged 13 sets per game as the replacement for graduated All-American Ashley Nu'u.

"I think just over the week of practice and over the weekend we developed some things we really needed like leadership, like some experience," Aiu said. "We're getting better a little ahead of schedule right now, so that's good."

Not that tonight's match will be all smooth sailing.

The Buffs know the Rams (2-3) aren't to be taken lightly. After losing their first three matches at a tough Hawaii tournament, the Rams have won two straight, including a victory over No. 20 Ohio State.

Not to mention the fact that CSU has beaten the Buffs in their last three meetings — once each in 2003, 2004 and 2005.

"We've had two good days of practice and we know it's CSU, so we'll step it up," Buth said. "I haven't beaten them yet. It's just one of those in-state rivals, so it's going to be amazing if we can pull it out."

Rest time

Rust time.

It's how CU soccer coach Bill Hempen referred to last week after his team followed a season-opening win over Denver by struggling to a 1-1 tie against an unranked Fairfield squad in Denver.

"We pushed probably harder than we've ever pushed before in preseason," Hempen said.

The coach is hoping a little rest and home cooking this week will be just what the team needs to get rolling.

The 18th-ranked Buffs (1-0-1) open their 2007 home slate with a 4 p.m. game against Utah today at Prentup Field, and then host BYU at 4 p.m. Saturday. Both opponents received votes in this week's coaches poll.

CU rested most of Sunday and had Monday and Tuesday off before a lighter-than-usual Wednesday workout in an attempt to let their legs recuperate.

"If you want to set your goals higher, you kind of have to pay that price," Hempen said of the preseason rigors. "Hopefully now they're rested physically and prepared mentally."

Teeing it up

The men's and women's CU golf teams are set to let their swings loose for the first time this fall as both play on Monday and Tuesday.

The women begin the season at the Ptarmigan Ram Classic in Fort Collins, while the men get started with the St. Mary's Intercollegiate in Monterey, Calif.

Coach Anne Kelly's women return three of five players from their lineup at last spring's Big 12 meet. The Buffs lost Hannah Hoch to graduation and Lindsay Caljouw, who transferred. But they return senior Lindsay Senger, the Buffs' low scorer at the Big 12s.

Roy Edwards' men, meanwhile, return four of five players from last year's regional lineup, including Michael Baird, who took eighth at the Big 12 tournament.



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