



# CU booters get nice surprise

## Despite 9-7-4 record, Buffs will host first 2 rounds of NCAA tourney

By Zak Brown

Tuesday, November 13, 2007

For most of Monday, Bill Hempen was concerned with a little boy's birthday.

His son, Lucas, was having a birthday party. The fate of Hempen's Colorado soccer team would be decided Monday night, but Hempen didn't have much time to wonder if the Buffs' bubble would burst. He had to make sure his son had a good birthday.

Then Hempen got some good news himself.

The Buffs did receive an invite to the NCAA Tournament, the fifth straight for a program Hempen took over in 2001. And despite finishing seventh in the Big 12 with a 9-7-4 overall record, CU was also awarded one of 16 home sites. That means the Buffs will host a first-round game for the second consecutive season — this year against Hawaii on Friday at Prentup Field — with the winner facing whichever team prevails between Denver and Portland. The second-round game will be played Sunday in Boulder.

"Honestly, I had myself pretty resigned that we were not going to get in when we went to the Big 12 Tournament," Hempen said. "I'm not sure why I felt that way, but when we went to the Big 12 Tournament, I talked to a member of the selection committee and felt like we had a legitimate chance. Then in the last few days I built a little bit more hope every day."

This was the lowest win total CU has compiled in an NCAA Tournament year. The Buffs have notched double-digit wins every other time they advanced to the tournament. They finished seventh in the conference but are still playing, while two teams ahead of them — Kansas and Texas Tech — are staying home.

But even more surprising than the tourney invite was the first-round home game the Buffs received. Only 16 teams have the privilege of playing at home. No. 2-seeded Portland has to travel to Boulder to play Denver.

But home sites aren't awarded purely on a team's strength. The NCAA also looks at geographical considerations and how well a host site can draw fans. Last year, the Buffs drew 2,918 fans total in their two games in Boulder.

"Absolutely, (last year) had a lot to do with it," Hempen said. "I think we surpassed what they expected us to do last year. Kudos to our people for putting on a good show."

Game times likely won't be set until today. Portland can choose to play in the first or second game Friday because they are the highest-ranked team at the site.

The Buffs play Hawaii (15-4-2) on Friday after the Rainbow Wahine won the WAC regular season and tournament title. This is the first NCAA Tournament appearance in the 14-year-old program's history. Hawaii has set several school records this season, including wins (15), shutouts (12) and goals (59). It has won eight of its last nine matches and the last five.

CU nearly beat Texas in its last game but lost in the first round of the Big 12 Tournament on penalty kicks.

The team was so excited at the news of its tourney bid Monday that it trained at 9 p.m. in the school's practice bubble.

"Speaking from an emotional standpoint, this is huge," sophomore forward Nikki Marshall said. "Getting into the tournament and hosting is great for us because traveling can be tough. We are definitely excited and ready to play."

The Buffs advanced to the Sweet 16 for the first time in school history last season before losing at Notre Dame. They beat Colorado College in the first round that year and beat DU in the second. They have a much tougher task of advancing to the Sweet 16 if they can beat Hawaii.

DU (13-4-4) won its conference tournament and upset then-No. 1 Stanford earlier this year. Portland (15-3-0) is the No. 3-ranked team in the country and a traditional power. But the Buffs are looking forward to playing at home again.

"It will give us good momentum," junior defender Michelle Wenino said. "Tonight we were pretty unsure if we were going to make it in, and now, being a host, will give us momentum. I think that we all believe that we are capable of beating top teams and we we're definitely excited."



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## DU, CU in tournament in Boulder

**By Rocky Wire Reports**  
**November 12, 2007**

The University of Denver women's soccer team will play No. 2 Portland in the first round of the NCAA tournament at Prentup Field in Boulder on Friday.

Colorado faces Hawaii in the other game. Kickoffs will be announced today.

"It's exciting to have the opportunity to play one of the top teams in country, and it's great to have the game so close to home, where we have such great fan support," Pioneers coach Jeff Hooker said.

The Pioneers won their first NCAA tournament game in Boulder last season, when they beat Kentucky before falling to Colorado in the second round.

Earlier this season, Denver upset then-No. 1 Stanford 1-0 at Prentup Field during the Colorado Soccer Classic.

Senior midfielder Jenna Billingsley of Littleton scored a goal with less than four minutes remaining in regulation.

The win marked the first time DU had knocked off the nation's top team.

The winner of each game will play each other in the second round Sunday in Boulder.

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