



# CU's Smith must play waiting game

## Colorado junior yet to be released by Tulsa coach

By Ryan Thorburn

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Before Bianca Smith's first game at Colorado she was asked about her decision to follow Kathy McConnell-Miller to Boulder.

"I didn't want to play for anyone else," Smith said.

Per NCAA rules, Smith sat out the 2005-06 season after transferring from Tulsa, where McConnell-Miller had recruited her before accepting the formidable challenge of becoming Ceal Barry's successor.

Three years later McConnell-Miller's replacement at Tulsa -- Charlene Thomas-Swinson -- is still refusing to release Smith from her commitment, which means she will have to sit out one more semester during her CU career.

After point guard Whitney Houston was lost for the season with a knee injury, McConnell-Miller and Smith decided the Buffs needed her on the court to help lead this young team.

That means Smith, a junior, will have to sit out the fall 2009 semester unless Tulsa finally let's her go.

"It was mine and coach's decision, especially when Whitney went down, that me missing half the season wouldn't have been good for the team," Smith said. "Whatever is best for the team. Next year I'll have to hope that Tulsa will release me.

"If not I'll just sit out and keep the kids' heads up on the court when I'm in practice and cheer for them hard when I'm on the bench."

Considering how important each game is for Smith this season, having Friday night's home date with Southern canceled due to inclement weather in Louisiana was an opportunity lost.

Smith is still adjusting to her new role playing a small forward position, which requires her to guard bigger players. And, for whatever reason, she hasn't been able to find her shooting touch.

"That was supposed to really spread the offense out and give Kara (Richards) single coverage," McConnell-Miller said of using what is essentially a four-guard lineup. "We still want the offensive qualities of Bianca as a guard, yet she's defending the four player. So she's gotten in foul trouble a little bit. We as a team haven't really taken advantage of playing with four guards."

McConnell-Miller believes that if Smith can start knocking down shots on a consistent basis CU will look like a completely different team offensively than it has been during a 3-4 start.

"That is a fact," McConnell-Miller said. "If Bianca steps up and she's averaging 12 points a game for us then we have different chemistry on the floor, we've got a different dynamic. And right now we really don't have that."

Smith has started all seven games for the Buffs and is averaging 7.7 points. She is only 12-for-49 (24.5 percent) from 3-point territory so far and was 1-for-5 from the field with three points during the 77-40 loss at Seton Hall.

"It's a change for me trying to get in and run the offense as a four and also look for my shot a little," Smith said. "Hopefully by the time the Big 12 comes I'll have it down."

In the second half of the deflating loss to Seton Hall, McConnell-Miller moved Kelly Jo Mullaney from point guard to shooting guard and gave Britney Blythe some extended minutes running the offense.

"I still believe we have some talented players that are going to be able to handle the point guard position in time," McConnell-Miller said. "Mostly where we miss Whitney is the understanding. I was constantly in her ear about taking care of the ball and controlling tempo and how she helps this team. And she's a really unselfish player, always looking to make somebody better and make the extra pass. So I think that's where she is missed the most."

Last season with Houston and Susie Powers at point guard, Smith averaged 9.8 points per game and set a CU record for made 3-pointers in a season with 80.

They say you're harder on the ones you love. And McConnell-Miller was very demanding of Smith during Friday's intense practice.

"We have to get better at not being so predictable," McConnell-Miller said. "We're just not making teams work very hard to guard us."

That could change in a hurry if Smith gets her groove back.



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