



Spears develops into team leader

Second-leading scorer in Big 12 leads Buffs tonight vs. Idaho St.

By Ryan Thorburn
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Brittany Spears is a young woman of few words.

The soft-spoken Colorado sophomore -- who is second in the Big 12 in scoring average (20.1 ppg.) and ninth in rebounding (7.4 rpg.) -- had this exchange with a reporter after Monday's practice.

Are defenses focusing on you more this season?

"A little bit more. But it's going all right."

What did you do in the offseason to avoid a sophomore slump after such an impressive freshman season?

"I did what I always do: Play basketball every day and shoot. Nothing extra. It was the same."

Do you like being the team leader?

"I just lead by example."

Head coach Kathy McConnell-Miller believes Spears can lead the Buffs back to the promised land sooner rather than later. Even though a relatively inexperienced roster will get younger next season when four highly touted recruits arrive.

For now Spears -- coming off a 21-point performance on 8-for-10 shooting in a 76-63 victory over St. Louis -- will simply try to lead CU to its third consecutive victory against Idaho State tonight at the Coors Events Center (7 p.m., no television).

"She wants to win more than anything," McConnell-Miller said. "I've watched her bring some of the younger players or less experienced players along and leading them. And that is not her personality at all. But she's really evolved into that player." One of those promising players, Alyssa Fressle, currently leads all Big 12 freshmen in scoring (8.8 ppg.), assists (3.6 apg.) and steals (2.6 spg.).

Bianca Smith has averaged 18.5 points the past two games after an early shooting slump. And senior center Kara Richards is dominant when she stays out of foul trouble.

All of these talented pieces need to fit with Spears consistently in order for the Buffs (5-4) to have any success in the Big 12 this season.

"It's a learning process and it's going to be a growing season for us," Spears said. "But I think it's a good thing."

Spears' game does most of her talking. And there's certainly nothing wrong with that.

"Her intensity level, her conditioning and her focus has gotten better," McConnell-Miller said. "We always knew she could shoot, she could score, she could do what she does offensively and defensively, but the areas she has gotten better in aren't things you can measure in numbers.

"I think she has players around her who can do a lot of good things and I think she sees that. I don't think she sees herself as our best player. She sees herself as a Colorado basketball player and that's her modesty."



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CU women's preview: Idaho State

TONIGHT: Colorado hosts Idaho State at 7 p.m. at the Coors Events Center.

BROADCAST: Television: None; Radio: KKZN AM 760 with Mike Rice (play-by-play) and Carol Callan.

STORYLINE: The Buffs (5-4) are coming off a solid 76-63 victory over St. Louis and are looking for their first three-game win streak of the season in the final home non-conference game. ... The Bengals (3-9) have lost four consecutive games and seven of their last eight. Former Broomfield standout Cara Lambert is averaging 3.2 points for ISU.

KEY STAT: CU has won 11 of its last 14 home games and 16 of its last 19 against non-conference foes.

COACHES: Kathy McConnell-Miller is 46-57 in her fourth season at CU. Seton Sobolewski is 3-9 in his first season at Idaho State.

PROBABLE STARTERS:

CU -- G Britney Blythe, 5-9, sophomore, 2.3 ppg, 1.3 rpg,, G Bianca Smith, 5-9, junior, 10.1 ppg, 5.6 rpg, G Alyssa Fressle, 5-10, freshman, 8.8 ppg, 2.9 rpg, F Brittany Spears, 6-1, sophomore, 20.1 ppg, 7.4 rpg, C Kara Richards, 12.4 ppg, 5.9 rpg.

ISU -- G Jenna Brown, 5-3, senior, 9.1 ppg, 3.8 rpg, G Devin Diehl, 5-9, junior, 6.5 ppg, 2.2 rpg, G/F Michelle Grohs, 6-1, senior, 13.1 ppg, 7.3 rpg, F Cara Lambert, 6-2, sophomore, 3.2 ppg, 1.7 rpg.

SERIES: CU leads 6-1.

UP NEXT: The Buffs travel to Honolulu where they will play Pepperdine on Jan. 3 and Hawai'i on Jan. 4 in the Paradise Classic.



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