



# CU aims for national title

## Bufs return 7 with experience in NCAA meet

By Kyle Ringo

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Richard Rokos begins his 18th season as head ski coach at Colorado this week with a heavy heart and a team expected to compete for another national title.

Two of Rokos' close friends died in the past month leading up to the season, which starts this week with two different meets in Alaska -- the Alaska Invitational in Anchorage and the Seawolf Invitational in Girdwood.

Brian Mahon, general manager at Eldora Mountain Resort, who was shot to death last week, was a friend of 15 years to Rokos and the two spent large chunks of those years working out schedules for the team and other details almost on a daily basis.

Former CU national champion skier Bryan Sax was killed last month in a mid-air collision while piloting a plane in Florida. The losses have hit Rokos hard.

"It comes in big shots, not in small portions," Rokos said.

It's probably a good thing the season has arrived and the 58-year-old coach can throw himself into the work of molding his skiers and building toward a strong finish in March at the NCAA Championships.

The Buffs finished second in the nation last season in large part because of the strength of its Nordic team and a pair of national champions on the women's side. This year's team returns seven athletes who competed at the championships last season in Montana.

That experience is just one strength Rokos sees in the team, and it might not be the most important when it comes to what it takes to win a national championship. Photo courtesy CU

"I would say the chemistry is of that kind," Rokos said. "You can feel the years when everybody is willing to do extra workloads and everybody comes together with good kinds of feelings to each other.

"That's a positive sign. There are no distractive elements. Everybody (has) one goal in mind, doing well in skiing and school. I would say with this team, there is no weak link."

The women's team should continue to be strong this season, despite the loss of Lucie Zikova, who set a school record in her career with seven top-five All-American finishes at the NCAA Championships. Nordic national champion Maria Grevsgaard returns to anchor the team and should be favored to win another individual championship.

Rokos said two female skiers will likely be added to the team when the spring semester begins and both will add to the strength of the team on the Nordic side. One of those skiers is Alexa Turzian of Sun Valley, ID. The other is a foreign

skier hoping to come to CU from the Czech Republic.

"The assumption will be that we can put at least three people in the top five or seven nearly every time," Rokos said.

The female Nordic skiers won't be as deep as the returning talent on the men's side, where assistant coach Bruce Cranmer estimates as many as seven skiers can compete for meet championships each week.

Rokos was only slightly less optimistic naming Vegard Kjoelhamar, Reid Pletcher, Jesper Ostensen and Matt Gelso among the team's best.

"The Nordic men's side is loaded I would say," Rokos said. "We have, I would say, four or five guys who are capable of winning any given day."

Rokos said last year he could have easily identified the team's strongest alpine skiers at the outset of the season. He said improvement across the board within the team makes that more difficult this year.

Rokos said the only foreign member of the alpine team, Gabriel Rivas of France, has done well along with Roberts and Stefan Hughes and Pat Duran, who has recovered from a broken femur suffered two years ago.

"In fall training, I would say everybody had an impressive showing," Rokos said.

Senior Lisa Perricone is the natural leader on the team among women's alpine skiers coming off her trip to nationals last season. Rokos said depth there is better this year. Jennifer Allen, Katie Hartman, Carlina Nordh round out a balanced group.



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