



# K-Mac's backcourt showing promise for next year

## Houston making progress in rehabilitation

By Ryan Thorburn

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BOULDER, Colo. — Kelly Jo Mullaney is back in the starting lineup and Whitney Houston is on track to do the same.

That bodes well for the Colorado backcourt next season.

Not that the Buffs -- who play at No. 16 Kansas State today (1 p.m., no television) -- have turned the page on this season.

But it's hard not to think about the future when Houston is bouncing around on the side of the court doing her rehab routine while her teammates are practicing.

"Next year I think we'll be unstoppable," Houston said. "During games I'm over here thinking, 'What can I do to make this game better for us? What will I do to cut down the turnovers?' "

It has been five months since Houston had surgery to repair a torn anterior cruciate ligament. Like Tiger Woods, she's ready to get back into the swing of things.

"I feel good," said Houston, who plans to be ready to begin individual workouts in April. "Sitting out I've learned how to become a better player, a better leader and even a better point guard. I can visualize what's going on.

"My freshman and sophomore year I was just doing stuff, I was just out there playing. Now I kind of got a sense of what a point guard wants to do and what coach wants from a point guard."

Kathy McConnell-Miller was counting on Houston to run the team this season. There wasn't really a Plan B when her knee injury occurred just before the curtain was drawn on the campaign.

Mullaney, who sat out last season after transferring from Colorado State, had to begin her CU career trying to fill Houston's role instead of knocking down shots from the off guard spot. She struggled early and lost the job to Britney Blythe after the 77-40 loss at Seton Hall on Dec. 9.

Mullaney was then moved back to her shooting guard position.

McConnell-Miller decided to put Mullaney back in the starting lineup on Wednesday against Kansas and she responded with 13 points and three rebounds to spark the Buffs to a 69-62 victory.

"It was a good challenge for me coming off the bench and getting that look at the game, but I'm definitely used to starting because it's what I've always done," Mullaney said. "We'll be a lot deeper when Whitney comes back. We're going to be good next year."

With Brittany Spears, Alyssa Fressle and Bianca Smith also returning and a highly touted recruiting class arriving ... well, even the head coach doesn't mind looking ahead.

"I think the backcourt is going to be very deep. We miss Whitney and the fact that she's a north to south player and breaks defenses down," McConnell-Miller said. "She's really worked on her shot and has become an offensive threat, but most of all she can really handle the ball."

The Buffs (11-12, 3-8) could really use an upset victory tonight to get back to .500 and put themselves in position to make a run at another WNIT bid.

The Wildcats (20-4, 7-4) have lost two games in a row without All-Big 12 point guard Shalee Lehning, who is questionable again today due to illness.

"She's one of the best players in the conference. She's the point guard I would like to have been, she's that good," McConnell-Miller said of Lehning, who averages 11.3 points, 8.0 assists and 7.5 rebounds per game.



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## CU women's preview vs. Kansas State

BOULDER, Colo. — **TODAY** -- Colorado (11-12, 3-8) travels to Manhattan to play No. 16 Kansas State (20-4, 7-4) at 1 p.m. in Bramlage Coliseum.

**BROADCAST** -- Television: none; Radio: KKZN (760 AM) with Mike Rice and Carol Callan.

**STORYLINE** -- The Buffs are tied for ninth place in the Big 12 with Missouri, while the Wildcats are tied with Texas A&M and Iowa State for third in the conference.

**KEY STAT** -- Kansas State is 11-0 at home this season and has won 23 of its last 25 games at Bramlage Coliseum.

**COACHES** -- Kathy McConnell-Miller is 52-65 in her fourth season at CU. Deb Patterson is 260-142 in her 14th year at Kansas State.

### PROBABLE STARTERS

**CU** -- G Kelly Jo Mullaney, 5-8, sophomore, 4.8 ppg, 2.2 rpg., G Bianca Smith, 5-9, junior, 10.4 ppg, 4.4 rpg, G Alyssa Fressle, 5-10, freshman, 8.2 ppg, 2.7 rpg, F Brittany Spears, 6-1, sophomore, 18.0 ppg, 8.1 rpg, C Kara Richards, 11.7 ppg, 7.0 rpg.

**KSU** -- G Shalee Lehning, 5-9, senior, 11.3 ppg, 7.5 rpg, G Kari Kincaid, 5-10, junior, 7.8 ppg, 2.5 rpg, G/F Danielle Zanotti, 6-2, senior, 2.5 ppg, 2.6 rpg, F Ashley Sweat, 6-2, junior, 16.9 ppg, 4.9 rpg, F Marlies Gipson, 6-0, senior, 12.3 ppg, 6.7 rpg.

**SERIES** -- Colorado leads 32-29.

**UP NEXT** -- The Buffs travel to Ames to face Iowa State on Wednesday (6 p.m., no television).



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