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sports

'Cats control boards, Buffs

No. 22 k-state 68, COLORADO 51

By Tom Kensler
The Denver Post

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OKLAHOMA CITY — After watching her team get dominated on the boards Thursday in the first round of the Big 12 women's basketball tournament, Colorado coach Kathy McConnell-Miller vowed that the Buffaloes will rebound from an 11-18 season in more ways than one.

Help is on the way with four players signed in November, including three in-state blue-chippers. And McConnell-Miller wants to sign one more during the spring signing period in April: a power forward who, yes, can really rebound. The final piece of her recruiting class likely will be an international or junior-college player, the coach said.

"We obviously need some immediate help in that area," McConnell-Miller said.

In a 68-51 loss to No. 22 Kansas State at the Cox Convention Center Arena, 12th-seeded

Colorado was outrebounded 32-21 by a Wildcats lineup without anybody taller than 6-feet-2. The 21 boards is the fewest for a Colorado team since a 2003 game against Minnesota.

According to the CU sports information office, the Buffaloes set all-time season lows for rebounds, rebounds per game and rebounding margin.

CU lost its best rebounder, Aija Putnina, last May with no time to recruit a replacement. Putnina decided to return to Europe to play pro ball.

Then, in September, the team's only pure point guard, junior Whitney Houston, was lost for the season before it began, with an ACL tear.

"This is not the year we wanted," McConnell-Miller said. "We didn't have our arsenal this year. That really affected our season."

Colorado loses center Kara Richards (13.5 points, 7.1 rebounds), but guard Bianca Smith will be the only senior next fall. Brittany Spears has reached 1,002 career points in just two seasons.

"We recognize that we have a young team, a team that we believe in, a team that can improve," Colorado athletic director Mike Bohn said Thursday after the Buffs were eliminated. "We're anxious to see it mature."

No. 22 KANSAS ST. 68, COLORADO 51

COLORADO (11-18)

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Fressle 0-5 0-0 0, Smith 1-3 0-0 2, Spears 9-18 3-3 23, Mullaney 1-3 0-0 2, Richards 8-10 6-8 22, Skildum 0-1 0-0 0, Seabrook 0-0 2-2 2, Dale 0-0 0-0 0, Piteriece 0-0 0-0 0, Dunn 0-0 0-0 0, Blythe 0-1 0-0 0. **Totals 19-41 11-13 51.**

KANSAS STATE (24-6)

Zanotti 0-2 0-0 0, Sweat 7-10 5-5 19, Kincaid 4-11 2-2 14, Lehning 5-9 1-2 12, Gipson 6-11 2-2 14, Hill 0-1 0-0 0, Nelson 2-8 2-2 6, Voronenko 0-0 0-0 0, Childs 0-1 0-0 0, Brown 1-1 1-2 3, Gilbertson 0-1 0-0 0. **Totals 25-55 13-15 68. Kansas St. 36-17. 3-point goals — Colorado 2-7 (Spears 2-4, Smith 0-1, Fressle 0-2), Kansas St. 5-17 (Kincaid 4-10, Lehning 1-1, Zanotti 0-2, Nelson 0-2, Sweat 0-2). Fouled out — None. Rebounds — Colorado 21 (Spears 8), Kansas St. 32 (Gipson 10). Assists — Colorado 9 (Spears 4), Kansas St. 15 (Lehning 6). Total fouls — Colorado 12, Kansas St. 16. A — N/A.**

Halftime —

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CU falls to Kansas State in Big 12 tourney

McConnell-Miller already looking ahead

By Ryan Thorburn
Thursday, March 12, 2009

OKLAHOMA CITY — Help is on the way.

That's what Kathy McConnell-Miller keeps reminding herself.

Colorado's disappointing season ended with a familiar-looking 68-51 loss to Kansas State in the opening round of the women's Big 12 Tournament on Thursday at the Cox Convention Center.

After a tear-filled press conference with senior Kara Richards -- who scored 22 points but received little help from her teammates in her final game at CU -- McConnell-Miller promised that better days are on the way.

And they had better be after the Buffs ended her fourth season with six consecutive losses and an 11-18 record a year after making it to the WNIT's final four.

"Our backcourt is going to be one of the most athletic backcourts in the history of CU," McConnell-Miller predicted. "You need guards that can make plays in this league. Everybody that has them has success."

CU certainly didn't have a dangerous guard rotation against the Wildcats as Kelly Jo Mullaney, Bianca Smith and Alyssa Fressle combined for four points on 2-for-11 shooting.

Of course, Mullaney -- a shooting guard -- was running the point. Smith -- a shooting guard -- was playing the small forward spot. And Fressle -- a freshman -- was out of gas (0-for-5 from the field).

Next year true point guard Whitney Houston, who missed the entire season with a knee injury, will return.

And McConnell-Miller's highly touted recruiting class includes Colorado Springs point guard Janeesa "Chucky" Jeffery, as well as 6-2 twin wing players Brenna and Meagan Malcolm-Peck of Boulder.

"I really feel like with Whitney hurt I put some players at a disadvantage this year," McConnell-Miller lamented. "So we're going to take some time over the summer for them to regain their confidence in themselves."

Richards, content to let Jackie McFarland have the spotlight by herself for four years, emerged into the center her coach always thought she would be this season.

Unfortunately, the fifth-year senior's best efforts to beat K-State didn't seem to make much of a difference. This game was pretty much over at halftime.

Richards made the first basket to give the Buffs their only lead and the 6-4 center scored 11 of CU's 17 points in the first half.

But the Wildcats still had a 19-point cushion at the break after shooting 51.9 percent from the field and winning the rebounding battle 17-8.

"It was difficult going back into the locker room after the end of the game, knowing that it's not going to be there again," Richards said after averaging 13.5 points and 7.1 rebounds this season. "I'm surely grateful for all five years that I've been here, they've been really great."

Just as McConell-Miller needed Richards to fill the void left by McFarland's graduation last year, she'll need Courtney Dunn to embrace the challenge of being a productive starting center in 2009-10.

Julie Seabrook and incoming freshman Melissa MacFarlane will add some depth inside on a team that struggled on the boards all season.

CU's 21 rebounds on Thursday were the fewest since the Buffs had 21 against Minnesota on Nov. 23, 2003.

"We understand the magnitude of the challenge and appreciate the unbelievable play that Kara has brought to the Big 12 Conference for her career," a relieved Deb Patterson said after her Wildcats beat CU for a third time this season. "She has been a handful for everybody in the league."

Richards finished 8-for-10 from the field and 6-for-8 at the line, but only grabbed one rebound. K-State had 32 rebounds, including 17 offensive boards.

Brittany Spears scored 19 of her 23 points in the second half when the Wildcats were already mentally preparing for today's matchup with No. 4 Texas A&M.

Richards and Spears combined for all but six of CU's points. Their teammates went 2-for-13 from the field.

"I don't think you're going to be very good with only two people scoring," McConnell-Miller said. "You don't even need to watch film to scout us and know where our shots are coming from. All you have to do is look at the stat sheet."

Help is on the way ... help is on the way ... help is on the way.

Kansas St. 68, Colorado 51

COLORADO (51)

min fg-fga ft-fta rb ast pf tp

Fressle 22 0-5 0-0 2 3 1 0

Smith 30 1-3 0-0 3 1 2 2

Spears 32 9-18 3-3 8 4 1 23

Mullaney 34 1-3 0-0 0 1 3 2

Richards 36 8-10 6-8 1 0 3 22

Skildum 19 0-1 0-0 2 0 1 0

Seabrook 2 0-0 0-0 0 0 0 0

Dale 1 0-0 0-0 0 0 0 0

Piterniece 1 0-0 0-0 0 0 0 0

Dunn 9 0-0 0-0 1 0 0 0

Blythe 14 0-1 0-0 0 0 1 0

Totals: 200 19-41 11-13 21 9 12 51

KANSAS ST. (68)

min fg-fga ft-fta rb ast pf tp

Zanotti 33 0-2 0-0 5 0 1 0

Sweat 27 7-10 5-5 4 2 3 19

Kincaid 31 4-11 2-2 2 2 1 14

Lehning 30 5-9 1-2 3 6 1 12

Gipson 27 6-11 2-2 10 4 1 14

Hill 6 0-1 0-0 0 0 0 0

Nelson 19 2-8 2-2 1 1 1 6

Voronenko 2 0-0 0-0 0 0 0 0

Childs 14 0-1 0-0 1 0 3 0

Brown 10 1-1 1-2 1 0 4 3

Gilbertson 1 0-1 0-0 0 0 1 0

Totals: 200 25-55 13-15 32 15 16 68

Score by halves:

Colorado 17 34 -- 51

Kansas St. 36 32 -- 68

3-point field goals -- Colorado (2-7): Spears 2-4, Fressle 0-2, Smith 0-1. Kansas State (5-17): Kincaid 4-10, Nelson 0-2, Zanolotti 0-2, Lehning 1-1, Sweat 0-2.

Officials --Lisa Mattingly, Bev Roberts, Mary Day

Technical fouls -- None

Attendance -- NA

STEALS

Colorado (5):Fressle 2, Smith, Spears, Richards

Kansas State (9):Lehning 4, Zanolotti 3, Gipson 2

BLOCKED SHOTS

Colorado (6):Fressle 2, Richards 2, Spears 2

Kansas State (2):Gipson, Brown

TURNOVERS

Colorado (17):Fressle 5, Spears 4, Mullaney 3, Smith 2, Skildum 2, 1 team

Kansas State (11):Sweat 3, Lehning 2, Gipson 2, Kincaid, Hill , Nelson, Childs



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Lack of balance burns Buffs again

By Ryan Thorburn
Friday, March 13, 2009

OKLAHOMA CITY -- Kathy McConnell-Miller called her the "X-factor."

Unfortunately for Colorado, junior Bianca Smith wasn't much of a factor at all during the Buffs' 68-51 loss to Kansas State in the opening round of the Big 12 Tournament on Thursday at the Cox Convention Center.

Smith -- who averaged 21.3 points in CU's three conference wins and 5.2 points during the 13 losses in the regular season -- mustered only two points on 1-for-3 shooting.

Brittany Spears and Kara Richards combined for 45 points, but the rest of the Buffs made only a total of two shots from the field.

"We have not had a consistent third scorer all year long," McConnell-Miller said. "We need more scoring. I thought with Jackie (McFarland) gone this year we would become a more balanced scoring team. ...

"I've got to look at myself and figure out how that's happening. We have to make sure that we have the right players in there that have the ability and the mental toughness to take a shot."

Smith scored a total of 13 points in the three losses to the Wildcats. As the only senior on the 2009-10 team, the head coach will need her to play more consistently and rally her young teammates.

"First and foremost is the leadership in the offseason," McConnell-Miller said when asked about Smith. "Last year we ended on a good note. Well, Bianca's going to have to be the one that makes sure they get together and get their confidence back."

Smith, who was CU's third-leading scorer (9.2 ppg) and playing out of position at the small forward spot due to injuries and a lack of depth, says she understands what it will take for the Buffs to get back into postseason play a year from now.

"In every workout and in everything we do, we need to always keep in mind those three-minute lapses we had in so many games,"

Smith said. "The focus will to become physically and mentally tougher."

Fressle learning

Alyssa Fressle started 27 games as a true freshman and was named to the Big 12's all-rookie team by the coaches.

But the former Highlands Ranch star took her lumps at this level and has some work to do this offseason.

"I think in high school she willed herself to be the best and to score and to get her team where they needed to be," McConnell-Miller said. "I think transitioning for her was greater than she anticipated it would be."

Fressle's decision to play at CU helped the coaching staff put together an impressive in-state recruiting class that includes Boulder twin wing players Brenna and Meagan Malcolm-Peck and Colorado Springs point guard Janeesa "Chucky" Jeffery.

McConnell-Miller still has two scholarships to give. She plans to use one in the spring on an international or a junior-college player to add some experience. The other scholarship will be saved for the 2010 class.

The Buffs also signed 6-foot-7 center Melissa MacFarlane of Omaha, Neb., last November.

"I think I forced some things early and then probably played a little timid the rest of the game," Fressle said after going 0-for-5 from the field.

Notable

The CU-Kansas State series is now tied 32-32. ... The Wildcats improved to 16-1 when out-rebounding their opponent, a 32-21 edge in this case. ... The Buffs are 3-5 in first-round games at the Big 12 Tournament. ... K-State point guard Shalee Lehning, who had a triple-double in Boulder last Saturday, finished with 12 points and six assists. She also passed Kendra Wecker (2001-05) for first on K-State's list of career minutes played (4,161).



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