



## K-Mac's squad faces tough road to .500

By Kyle Ringo

Tuesday, February 24, 2009

BOULDER, Colo. — The pilot begins to rev the engines and women begin to sing.

“Fight CU, down the field. CU must win.”

Just about the time the tip of the airplane begins to climb into the sky near the end of the runway they’re done with the fight song and spelling out the name of their school.

“C-O-L-O-R-A-D-O.”

It’s how each road trip has started for the Colorado women’s basketball team this season. Smiles, laughter, unity.

Only one trip has ended with the Buffs and their coaches in a similar mood.

They flew again Tuesday afternoon to Ames, Iowa, where they will take on the No. 25-ranked team in the country tonight at Iowa State. And the Buffs admit they are desperate for a victory with four games remaining in the regular season and the team languishing in a tie in the conference cellar two games below .500.

“We’re in it now,” junior guard Bianca Smith said when asked about desperation mode. “We don’t like to look too far ahead, but overall record-wise, we want to be above .500 for obvious reasons.

“I think with these last four, we’ve got to get three out of four at least.”

Actually, the Buffs must do better than that if they hope to play in the postseason for the second straight year.

They will likely have to win the conference tournament at this point to qualify for the NCAA tournament, but they do play in the best conference in women’s basketball and finishing .500 or better would likely get them an invitation to the Women’s National Invitation Tournament once again.

Even finishing the regular season with three wins in four games won’t be enough to get the Buffs there. They must also win a first-round game in the Big 12 tournament next month.

The Buffs are 11-13 overall. A 3-1 record down the stretch would bring them to 14-14, but a first-round loss in Oklahoma City would give them a losing record and kick them out of the postseason.

Even a first-round win followed by a second-round loss would only bring them back to .500 at 15-15, on the bubble.

Coach Kathy McConnell-Miller said she hasn't even talked to her team about its chances for postseason play and has no plans to do so any time soon.

"I can't put that into perspective for them right now," McConnell-Miller said. "I don't think the team would react to that big of a picture.

"I think we have to focus on how do we improve in the conference? How do we put ourselves in position to have a better seed? How do we get better? How do we win on the road?"

The Buffs are 1-7 in true road games this season and 3-7 in games played away from the Coors Events Center. Going on the road never is easy, but it's been especially difficult for the Buffs in the recent history of the program.

The Buffs haven't won more than four games away from home in one season since the 2003-04 campaign. Tonight the Buffs will face an Iowa State team coming off a tough 1-3 stretch with plenty of motivation.

The Cyclones (19-7, 7-5) will be trying to earn their 20th win of the season. It would be the third consecutive 20-win campaign and the 10th 20-win season in school history. The Cyclones next victory will also be Bill Fennelly's 300th win as coach of the Cyclones.

Iowa State escaped Boulder with a six-point victory earlier this month. They are the best defensive group in the conference. Matching that defensive intensity on the road will be important for the Buffs, who rank 11th in the conference on the defensive end.

Smith said the Buffs continue to talk about putting together their first complete game of the year. They continue to hit 4, 5 and 6-minute scoreless stretches in games.

McConnell-Miller said Smith might be the key to stopping them. She said the games the Buffs have played their best basketball have been games in which Smith is hitting her shots, giving the Buffs a third scoring option other than Brittany Spears and Kara Richards. When Smith's shot is off, the Buffs are much easier to defend.

"Bianca has been the X factor," McConnell-Miller said. "Bianca has been the one who has scored and done some good things. ... When she is six points and not hitting or not providing, that's when I find we struggle the most."



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# CU women's preview: Feb. 25

## colorado-womens-basketball-buffs

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Tuesday, February 24, 2009

**TODAY** — Colorado (11-13, 3-9) travels to Ames, Iowa, to play No. 25 Iowa State (19-7, 7-5) at 6 p.m. in the Hilton Coliseum.

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

**STORYLINE** — The Buffs haven't beaten a ranked opponent on the road in their past seven tries. The last victory over a ranked opponent on the road came Dec. 9, 2007 at Vanderbilt. The Buffs are 0-8 against ranked opponents this season.

**KEY STAT** — Colorado is being outrebounded by opponents by an average of seven per game while Iowa State is outrebounding its opponents by an average of five this season.

**COACHES** — Kathy McConnell-Miller is 52-66 in her fourth season at CU. Bill Fennelly is 299-139 in 14 seasons at Iowa State.

### PROBABLE STARTERS

**CU** — G Kelly Jo Mullaney, 5-8, sophomore, 4.7 ppg, 1.6 apg., G Bianca Smith, 5-9, junior, 10.2 ppg, 4.3 rpg, G Alyssa Fressle, 5-10, freshman, 8.0 ppg, 2.7 rpg, F Brittany Spears, 6-1, sophomore, 18.3 ppg, 8.3 rpg, C Kara Richards, 12.2 ppg, 7.1 rpg.

**ISU** — G Heather Ezell, 5-9, senior, 12.0 ppg, 3.0 rpg, G Alison Lacey, 6-0, junior, 10.4 ppg, 5.1 rpg, G Kelsey Bolte, 6-1, sophomore, 9.3 ppg, 4.7 rpg, F Amanda Nisleit, 6-0, senior, 7.3 ppg, 5.0 rpg, F Nicky Wieben, 6-4, senior, 10.0 ppg, 4.9 rpg.

**SERIES** — Colorado leads 36-26, but the Cyclones have dominated recently winning five straight and 10 of the past 11 meetings.

**UP NEXT** — The Buffs play host to Missouri on Saturday at 4 p.m.



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