



Mullaney will be tested by Knights

Former Ram set for new role in season opener

By Chris Shelton

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Colorado sophomore Kelly Jo Mullaney finally begins her Buff career today, and the fresh start comes with a twist.

Not only will she be playing for a new team when the Buffs tipoff at 2:30 p.m. in the Coors Events Center against Central Florida, but she will be asked to fill in at starting point guard while Whitney Houston recovers from a torn ACL this season.

She makes her CU debut against a team that is expected to throw full-court pressure at the Buffs, and specifically at Mullaney.

"It's about how does Kelly Jo break the pressure and do we break it with a new point guard?" CU coach Kathy McConnell-Miller said. "I think it's going to be a great test for Kelly Jo."

Mullaney remembers the last time she played in a basketball game that counted in the standings.

It was Jan. 4, 2007, at Air Force and the then-CSU leading scorer had four points before being knocked out with a concussion. Earlier in the season she scored 17 points against CU and 18 points in a game at Connecticut.

But the sophomore missed the rest of the 2007 season and then transferred to Colorado, where she was forced to sit out last season per NCAA rules.

Playing primarily as a wing or shooting guard, today's season opener marks the first time since her freshman year in high school that her main role will be to run the offense as a point guard, although she did bounce back and forth between positions at times during her career.

She was designated CU's starting point guard about two weeks ago in practice.

"But I love it," Mullaney said. "The ball's always in your hands. You get to distribute and make assists for your teammates. I love doing that. You just have to get used to it."

Mullaney was expected to be a high-scoring guard when she transferred to CU.

She could give the Buffs a scoring point guard that's been missing from the program for quite some time. Mullaney had 16 points in CU's lone exhibition game last weekend against Regis.

"If I was to chart something for her, it would be does she lose her scoring from the point guard

position?" McConnell-Miller said. "She's a scoring point guard. Her mentality is to score. She's taking on a whole new role, yet I still want her to have a scoring mentality."

The Buffs face a Central Florida team that went 10-20 last season and finished last in Conference USA.

But the Knights were one of the youngest teams in the nation a year ago and they return four starters. They also feature 6-foot-4 center Marcquitta Head, a transfer from Georgia State.

The matchup at center will also be watched closely by the Buffs as they look to see whether 6-4 senior Kara Richards emerges out of Jackie McFarland's shadow.

McFarland used up her eligibility last year and left as one of the more successful players in program history.

"She's better against bigger," McConnell-Miller said of Richards. "When she feels like she's (playing against) a smaller player it's not a comfort level for her. A 6-4 matchup is a good matchup for Kara. (But) that center is a little more athletic than Kara."

Today's game also marks the much anticipated debut of Highlands Ranch freshman guard Alyssa Fressle, who led the Buffs with 18 points and seven rebounds against Regis.

"I'm always nervous before any game," Fressle said. "That's probably a good feeling for me. I like that feeling. But I got a lot of it out in the exhibition game."



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Colorado women on guard as season tips off

By Brian Howell

Longmont Times-Call

BOULDER — During the past four years, the University of Colorado women's basketball team was able to rely on one constant.

The Buffs always knew All-Big 12 forward/center Jackie McFarland would show up and, generally, dominate in the paint.

Now? There is no All-Big 12 player in the low post for the Buffs, as McFarland has graduated. In fact, there aren't very many players at all down there.

"There's no doubt our depth in the post, we're thin," head coach Kathy McConnell-Miller said. "Of all the teams I've ever coached as a head coach, we've always been post dominated. This is the first very guard-dominated team."

Today, the Buffs open their season with a home game against Central Florida at the Coors Events Center. It's a new season, and a new style of play at CU. Dominating post players have led the team in scoring for six years in a row. That streak is almost certain to end this year.

"You've got to get in and do what coach asks," said junior guard Bianca Smith, who averaged 9.8 points per game a year ago. "She's manufactured this offense for our guard-heavy team. It gives us a lot of openness and a lot of depth coming off the bench with all these guards to be able to score."

Beginning her fourth year at Colorado, McConnell-Miller learned quickly that strong guard play is the way to go in the Big 12 Conference. Last year's conference champ, Kansas State, is a prime example. The Wildcats finished 11th in rebounding margin but was among the conference leaders in the stats dominated by guards — assist/turnover ration (first), assists (second) and 3-pointers made (fourth).

"If you take a look around, it's the teams that have the strong guards that dominate the league," McConnell-Miller said.

Whether CU has strong guards remains to be seen, but the Buffs sure do have a lot of them. Smith and sophomore Kelly Jo Mullaney (a transfer from Colorado State) are both shooting machines who love to score. Freshman Alyssa Fressle will start immediately and she's proven she's not afraid to shoot, and sophomore Britney Blythe is expected to make an impact as well.

"Definitely, we're running the ball a lot more," said Fressle, who was the Colorado prep player of the year last season at Highlands Ranch High School. "We're more guard-oriented, so that means we've got to push and we've got to take advantage of having smaller people on the floor."

CU's best player may be forward Brittany Spears. She's coming off a freshman year that ranks among the best in team history, as she averaged 13.9 points and 7.6 rebounds. She's an asset inside, but also nailed 57 3-pointers. Senior guard/forward Hannah Skildum also has the ability to knock down some outside shots.

The Buffs do have strength inside; it's just not deep. Senior Kara Richards has started 56 games during her career, and

while she hasn't been a consistent force, she's had her share of big games. Backing her up is highly touted freshman Julie Seabrook from North Vancouver, British Columbia. McConnell-Miller raves about Seabrook and believes she'll make an impact right away.

MAKING ADJUSTMENTS: Replacing McFarland isn't the only hole to fill this season. Susie Powers, who started all 34 games at point guard, also graduated.

Center Aija Putnina, who started 27 games, would have been a junior this season, but she left CU in May to play professionally in Europe.

And in September, junior point guard Whitney Houston, who already has 20 career starts under her belt, tore her ACL and was lost for the season.

CU is still trying to make up for the losses of Putnina and Houston, but the Buffs aren't making excuses.

"Things like that are going to happen," Fressle said. "The season is going to throw you the unexpected, and you're just going to have to learn. We're learning how to deal with it."

THE LINE: This season, the NCAA pushed the 3-point line in the men's game back a foot, to 20 feet, 9 inches. That makes for a tougher shot in men's basketball, but McConnell-Miller has already seen an impact on her team.

At the Coors Events Center, there's a black line marking the women's 3-point range, but just behind it is a white line for the men's game.

"Unfortunately, too many of (the CU players) are shooting beyond the white line," McConnell-Miller said. "We need them to get up to the black line. They see a line, and that's where they shoot the ball from."

A year ago, the Buffs made a school-record 236 3-pointers, and McConnell-Miller expects the 3 to be a major part of the offense this season.

TIP-INS: Sophomore center Courtney Dunn suffered a bone bruise in the Buffs' exhibition win over Regis on Nov. 9. McConnell-Miller said Dunn will not play today. ... Fressle led the Buffs in points (18) and Seabrook led them in rebounds (eight) against Regis. ... McConnell-Miller has a 41-53 record in three years at CU. ... Nine of the Buffs' first 11 games will be at home.

Brian Howell can be reached at bhowell@times-call.com.