



# McConnell-Miller faces her mentor

## CU coach went to NCAA tourney four times at UVA

By Ryan Thorburn

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A lot has changed since the last time Kathy McConnell-Miller was in Charlottesville for a basketball game.

The '80s hair and short shorts are gone.

But legendary Virginia head coach Deb Ryan is still on the bench.

McConnell-Miller -- who played for Ryan from 1986-90 on Cavaliers teams that made runs to the Sweet 16 and Elite Eight -- will try to beat her mentor as Colorado faces No. 11 Virginia at 5 p.m. today.

"They've always supported women's basketball and Debbie was just amazing from a recruiting standpoint and a coaching standpoint and a marketing standpoint in putting Virginia basketball on the map," McConnell-Miller said.

"I loved playing for her. She was great to me as a player and inspired me to get into coaching. She just really brought out the best in me and the profession and showed me the opportunity that was ahead of me in coaching."

Ryan was inducted into the Women's Basketball Hall of Fame in June. She has led the Cavaliers to 22 NCAA Tournament appearances -- including four during McConnell-Miller's career -- with 12 trips to the Sweet 16, seven trips to the Elite Eight, three trips to the Final Four and one trip to the national championship game.

The Cavs (2-1) are coming off a 78-70 loss on Friday at No. 24 Old Dominion, but on Nov. 17, Virginia upset two-time defending national champion and fifth-ranked Tennessee 83-82 in Knoxville.

"We had some heartbreaking losses (in the NCAA Tournament) to Tennessee when I was a player," McConnell-Miller said. "There was a lot of promise with our team and there were some great rivalries playing in the ACC, but Tennessee was our Achilles' heel."

The Buffs (2-0) are coming off easy home victories over Central Florida and Colorado State.

Tonight's game at John Paul Jones Arena appears to be CU's most difficult test of the non-conference schedule.

McConnell-Miller said she didn't start thinking about returning to Virginia until spending nine hours driving from Boulder to Nebraska and back for a recruiting trip last Thursday.

"I spent a lot of time really reflecting on it," she said. "And there was a lot of anxiety."

Virginia guard Monica Wright is averaging 24.7 points per game and reminds a lot of Cavs of Dawn Staley, McConnell-Miller's dynamic backcourt mate.

This is also the first road trip of the season for the Buffs.

"I'm very excited to get them away from here and see what their mentality is like away from home," McConnell-Miller said. "Every team has its own personality, and I hope we can get to a point where we play with as much confidence on the road as we do at home."



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