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interview

CU stay goes quickly for talented Texan

By Tom Kensler
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Senior Kara Richards traces her time in Boulder to Ceal Barry's final season. (Kathryn Scott Osler, The Denver Post)

Kara Richards has been in Boulder so long, the 6-foot-4 senior center is the last Colorado Buffalo to have played for Ceal Barry — as a freshman starter in 2004-05. Richards looked

forward to playing on Kathy McConnell-Miller's first team as a sophomore but suffered a foot fracture three days before the opener and had to sit out the season.

A proud Texan, Richards played the next two years in the shadow of all-conference forward Jackie McFarland, even losing her starting job last season. But with McFarland having completed her eligibility last season, as the program's No. 2 all-time leading scorer, Richards is being counted on to step up her game. She has responded with her best season, ranking second on the team in scoring (12.5) and rebounding (6.4). As personable as she is competitive, Richards sat down recently with Denver Post staff writer Tom Kensler and talked about the past, the present and her vision for the future.

Q: Has it sunk in yet that your final season is nearing the midway point?

A: I can't believe how fast it's gone.

Q: So far, what's your fondest memory at CU?

A: I'd say the summers spending time with my teammates, during conditioning. You're holding each other up. There's so much growing and jelling. I'll always remember the "buddy carries." You put a teammate on your back and go up and down the stadium steps, 50 or so. When somebody has to carry me, it's no light feat. The good thing is, the backcourt players only carry backcourt players.

Q: You have talked about your mom and

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stepmother being supportive during your youth when kids made fun of your height.

A: I'd come home crying and they would pat me on the back and say, "It's going to be OK." Kids can be cruel. I was 5-11 in fifth grade, taller than all the boys. I was already taller than the teachers. I didn't fit in my desk.

Q: Was Boulder a big adjustment for a small-town girl from the West Texas prairie?

A: Boulder is different. And it's different from the rest of Colorado, I think. It's got the mountain feel to it, and it's got the city feel to it. Then you've got the hippies. And the cowboys. There's a little bit of everything here. It was a little tough on me my freshman year. Jackie McFarland (from Derby, Kan.) and I would talk about it. We were used to saying "Hi" to somebody on the street and them saying "Hi" back. Here, they might just look at you and keep walking. People seem to be always busy.

Q: Does it still feel strange not having Jackie McFarland in the lineup?

A: Yeah, not only not having her in the lineup, but just not having her there, period. She's playing in Athens (Greece), but we keep in touch. She can call me on her computer, which is nice.

Q: Would you like to play professionally?

A: Maybe. We'll see what happens. I've always wanted to teach. I'd like to coach, too, if that's in the cards. But I'd be grateful just to have an

opportunity to teach. I'd like to start at the elementary- school level, working with the really young kids — at least while I have the energy.

Q: A foot injury sidelined you for your sophomore year. What did you take from that?

A: It was difficult. But Susie (Powers) and Bianca (Smith) also were redshirting, and that helped me adjust sitting on the sideline and knowing that you can't really contribute. But sitting on the bench, I realized that you see the game a lot different. For one thing, you see more mistakes. You can see what needs to be done. And by watching Coach (McConnell-Miller) react with the other players, you understand better what she wants.

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Top five

... things Kara Richards misses most about Texas:

1. My mom's fried chicken
2. My dad's steaks
3. Sweet iced tea
4. My sisters
5. Every time you go into a Wal-Mart in Graham, you see at least 10 people you know.

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