



# Bufs facing loaded Big 12

## CU's first four games against ranked teams

By Chris Shelton  
Saturday, January 10, 2009

Brutal.

That would be one way to describe Colorado's opening slate of Big 12 women's basketball games.

But the unranked Bufs (8-4) see an opportunity, starting with today's league home opener against No. 6 Baylor (12-1). Tip-off is scheduled for 4 p.m. (FSN) at the Coors Events Center.

Today's game is followed by a trip to No. 21 Oklahoma State (Wednesday), a jaunt to No. 8 Texas (Jan. 17) and a home contest with No. 4 Oklahoma and the Paris twins (Jan. 21).

"If we can win the majority of the next four games, then the rest of the Big 12 should be pretty easy," CU senior center Kara Richards said. "The good news is that teams coming into our house might underestimate us. In the Big 12, you can never underestimate any of the teams.

"I wouldn't have it any other way. It's really going to give us a chance to prove ourselves -- to ourselves, but also to our fans. We know, as a team, that we can do it."

The Bufs don't own the swagger of their next four opponents, all from the Big 12 South. But they did regain some confidence by claiming the Paradise Classic championship in Hawaii last week and finishing the nonconference season on a five-game win streak. The Bufs needed a boost after taking last place in their own holiday tournament, the Coors Classic, on Thanksgiving weekend, and losing four of five before embarking on their recent win streak.

"I don't think we ever lost our confidence," Richards said. "We just needed to get back into our groove of our team play."

Richards has been one key to CU's turnaround.

The Graham, Texas, native averaged 14.4 points over the past five games -- up from her career average of 7.1 points per game -- and has made 29 of her last 44 shots.

Shooting guard Bianca Smith, who is forced to play the power forward position in CU's four-guard lineup -- has turned it around, too.

The 5-foot-9 junior has scored in double figures in four of her last five games after reaching double figures in one of her first seven games. She has made 18 of her last 31 shots from 3-point range.

"I found my place in the offense," Smith said. "I found a way to get shots within the offense. That's kind of helped me."

The Buffs will need Smith to hit her shots, Richards to avoid foul trouble and to seriously battle Baylor on the boards to have a chance at the upset.

The Bears, led by junior center Danielle Wilson's 15.1 points and 8.2 rebounds per game, are out-rebounding opponents by a nation-best 16 boards per game. CU, meanwhile, gets out-rebounded by an average margin of 3.7 per game. It's an advantage Baylor tries to use on the offensive end for easy put-back buckets.

"This week we've been working on boxing out," Richards said. "We brought out the bubble, which goes over the rim. You can't make any of the shots and it just bounces off. We've gotten a lot better. We've made conscious efforts to focus on boxing out and getting some over the back calls."



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## CU women's preview: Baylor

**TODAY --** Colorado (8-4) hosts No. 6 Baylor (12-1) at 4 p.m. in the Coors Events Center.

**BROADCAST --** Television on FSN; Radio on KKZN (760 AM).

**STORYLINES --** With a four-guard lineup, Colorado will be challenged to match Baylor's rebounding prowess. The Bears lead the nation in rebounding margin, averaging 16 more boards per game than their opponents. Five players grab an average of at least 5 rebounds per game for Baylor. ... Colorado sophomore Britney Blythe has started the last five games at point guard, coinciding with CU's five-game win streak, taking over for Kelly Jo Mullaney. ... Baylor's Melissa Jones attended Legacy High School in nearby Broomfield.

**KEY STAT --** Baylor averages 17.8 offensive rebounds per game. The Bears feasted on Florida Atlantic earlier this year to the tune of 70 rebounds and has had 50 or more rebounds five times this season.

**COACHES --** Kathy McConnell-Miller is 49-57 at CU and 140-145 overall. Kim Mulkey is 220-61 at Baylor and overall for a .783 winning percentage, which ranks No. 8 in the nation.

### PROBABLE STARTERS:

CU -- G Britney Blythe, 5-9, sophomore, 1.8 ppg, 1.6 apg; G Alyssa Fressle, 5-10, freshman, 9.3 ppg, 4.3 apg; G Brittany Spears, 6-1, sophomore, 18.9 ppg, 7.8 rpg; G Bianca Smith 5-9, junior, 10.9 ppg, 5.6 rpg; C Kara Richards, 6-4, senior, 12.8 ppg, 5.7 rpg.

BU -- G Kelli Griffin, 5-8, sophomore, 5.6 ppg, 3.7 apg; G Jhasmin Player, 5-10, senior, 9.8 ppg, 5.1 rpg; G Jessica Morrow, 6-0, senior, 9.7 ppg, 3.5 rpg; F Rachel Allison, 6-1, senior, 13.7 ppg, 7.3 rpg; C Danielle Wilson, 6-3, junior, 15.1 ppg, 8.2 rpg.

**THE SERIES --** Baylor has won the last four against CU to tie the series at 8-8.

**UP NEXT --** Colorado is at No. 21 Oklahoma State on Wednesday.



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## CU women confident as Big 12 starts

*By Patrick Ridgell*  
*Longmont Times-Call*

BOULDER — The Colorado women's basketball team enters its Big 12 opener today on a five-game winning streak, brimming with confidence and holding high hopes for a banner conference season.

Sound familiar?

A year ago, the Buffs were ranked and had won 10 straight when league play started. Their 5-11 Big 12 mark disappointed for many reasons, not the least of which was the stark realization that no matter how far the program had come, it still had some ways to go before it could contend in this conference.

Today's game against No. 6 Baylor is CU's first of four straight against ranked opponents, its longest stretch vs. top 25 teams since 2002. It's also the Buffs' first chance to show that their current version is better equipped than last year's to handle this conference's rigors.

Despite a team that coach Kathy McConnell-Miller calls inexperienced — the calling card of CU athletics these days — and despite concerns over depth in the post and unproven play at point guard, optimists in and around the program say it is ready.

"We're more guard-oriented, and we have five people on the floor that can score; that makes us better than last year's team," junior guard Bianca Smith said. "Last year, going into it, our focus was Jackie (McFarland) and how we were going to play off Jackie. ... This season, it's like, who's going to score?"

McFarland, the departed senior forward who led the Buffs with 18.7 points a game last year, was option No. 1. Without her, CU's shooting rate and scoring in 2008-09 are, so far, slightly up. Three players average in double figures, led by Brittany Spears' 18.9 points per, followed by Kara Richards' 12.8 and Smith's 10.9. Last year, only Spears, at 13.9 a game, was above 10.

"We may not be as experienced, we may not be as shiny, we may not be as decorated, but we definitely feel like we have more weapons than we've ever had, and right now we have more options," McConnell-Miller said.

"As a coach, you have freedom to run more stuff, run some different options, and go with some different combination of players. But we still face the inexperience of players who have never faced a Big 12 opponent."

McConnell-Miller calls that inexperience CU's "Achilles' heel," and it's most evident at point guard, where the Buffs lost Whitney Houston to a knee injury

### Area College Basketball Previews

#### No. 6 Baylor (12-1) at Colorado women (8-4)

**When/Where:** 4 p.m. today at the Coors Events Center in Boulder

**TV/Radio:** FSN/KKZN 760

**The series:** Tied 8-8. Baylor has won the past four meetings.

**Leading scorers:** Baylor — Danielle Wilson (15.1 points per game); CU — Brittany Spears (18.9 points per game)

**Notes:** Kathy McConnell-Miller is seeking her 50th win as CU's coach. ... Spears is the Big 12's third-leading scorer. ... CU holds the Big 12's worst rebounding margin, at minus-3.8 a game. Baylor is the nation's best-rebounding team, with a plus-16 margin. Wilson is fourth in the Big 12 with 8.2 rebounds per game. ... The Bears are outscoring their opponents by an average of 76.9 to 53.7.

*Patrick Ridgell*

#### BYU (12-2) at Colorado State (5-10) men

**When/Where:** 1 p.m. today at Moby Arena in Fort Collins

**TV/Radio:** the mtn./KLZ 560 AM

**The series:** In 130 meetings, BYU leads the series, 84-46. CSU is 33-28 against the Cougars at home.

**Leading scorers:** BYU — Jonathan Tavernari (18.5 points per game); CSU — Marcus Walker (16.3)

in the preseason.

Sophomore Britney Blythe is set to make her first start in a Big 12 game today. Blythe struggled some in the non-conference against pressing defenses. McConnell-Miller said she does not expect Baylor to press much today, but when someone does press the Buffs, freshman Alyssa Fressle “makes pretty good decisions” and “needs the ball in her hands,” the coach said. Fressle, obviously, also is making her Big 12 debut.

Meanwhile, CU continues to try to coax Richards out from the long shadow McFarland cast over its post in years past. Richards started only seven times, none in league play, in 2007-08.

As Smith said, this is a guard-oriented team. But attempts to establish Richards in every game are clear. Statistics reflect it, too. CU tried 21.4 3s per game in 2007-08. This year, while starting four perimeter players each night, that figure is down to 17.5.

Keeping Richards on the floor is key, a point McConnell-Miller makes repeatedly. Opponents tend to go on big runs when foul troubles force the 6-foot-4 center to sit. Coaches should be happy to learn Richards is seeing that.

“I think I see now the difference between the chemistry of when I’m on the floor and when I’m off the floor,” Richards said. “I mean, I don’t think it has to do with me. I think it has to do with some of the other girls’ comfort level.”

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**Notes:** Walker averaged 15.8 points as a starter but has posted 17.5 points per game since coming off the bench. ... BYU's Lee Cumard (17.9 points per game) was the Mountain West Conference Co-Player of the Year last season. ... BYU has outscored its opponents by an average of 81.5 to 64.2. CSU, meanwhile, is being outscored on average, 71.5 to 70.7. ... The Rams are 0-1 in the conference. This is BYU's conference opener.

*Brian Howell*