



K-Mac's Buffs, Huskers in need of victory

Both teams 1-5 in Big 12 play

By Kyle Ringo
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BOULDER, Colo. — The Colorado women's basketball program holds a lopsided advantage in the series against Nebraska, but not so much lately.

Fifth-year senior Kara Richards is the only person in the CU program -- coaches, players, trainers -- to have experienced a victory over the Cornhuskers, who visit the Coors Events Center today at 1 p.m. (FSN) for an important game for both teams.

Assistant sports information director Troy Andre was there back in March 2005, but he's really the only in-house witness to a win over Big Red other than Richards.

CU's center scored 19 points that day against Nebraska during her true freshman season in 2004-05. That day also happened to be the final home game in the career of legendary CU coach Ceal Barry. Since then, the Buffs have gone 0-7 against the Cornhuskers. Each of the past five games have been decided by 10 points or fewer.

Maybe it's good that when asked about the losing streak against Nebraska prior to Friday's practice, CU players and coaches alike were unaware of it, including Richards. "Quite frankly, I didn't realize that," Richards said. "I guess because we focus on each coming game and don't really worry about the wins and losses. We just worry about the Xs and Os and how to get the job done when the time comes."

Both teams enter today's game in need of a win to avoid slipping into desperation mode in the conference race. Both teams have 1-5 marks in Big 12 play.

Colorado has been through a tough stretch featuring mostly the powerful teams from the South Division and will play 10 of its next 11 games against North Division foes, the perceived "weaker" half of the league. It's a stretch during which CU coach Kathy McConnell-Miller hopes her team can make up some ground.

"They know now that the toughest part technically, statistically and from a ranking standpoint is behind us," McConnell-Miller said. "We're not saying that the teams in front of us aren't tough. They are tough, but if you're going to look at it in black and white, the toughest part of our schedule is behind us."

"So that's a good feeling, that they are still standing and still together after a pretty uphill battle."

Nebraska comes to town having lost six of its past seven outings. The Cornhuskers have scored fewer than 50 points in the past two games.

The winner of today's game could be the team that wins the battle in the post. Richards will tangle with Nebraska sophomore Catheryn Redmon and junior Cory Montgomery, who is averaging 13 points and seven rebounds.

The Buffs and Huskers feature predominantly young lineups and both programs have experienced plenty of inconsistency because of that youth. One of Colorado's biggest problems has been falling into long, scoreless stretches that either allow opponents back into games or provide opponents big leads.

Colorado junior Bianca Smith said two-thirds of the way through the season, the Buffs still haven't put a full 40-minute effort together in one game. She said that has to be the goal today.

"We have to stay focused," Smith said. "We can't decide to start going one-on-one with people. When we lose focus, I think that's what happens. We've had leads against everybody except the Texas and Oklahoma State games and lost them because we get away from what we do best."

A season-long trouble spot has been the Buffs' inability to consistently rebound well. They rank last in the Big 12 with Nebraska just ahead of them. Richards and sophomore Brittany Spears seem to handle much of the caroms, but McConnell-Miller needs more consistency on the boards from every player she puts in the game.

With 10 games remaining in the regular season, McConnell-Miller said she is not discouraged with the .500 record her players have produced. There is still time to construct a postseason résumé. She said her team has the right frame of mind to attack the challenge.

"I think the chemistry is really good," McConnell-Miller said. "I think they're playing hard. They fight on every possession. I think they are remaining pretty coachable under a pretty tough start in the conference, and they're making adjustments better than any team we've had."



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CU women's preview: Nebraska

TODAY -- Colorado (9-9, 1-5) hosts Nebraska (10-9, 1-5) at 1 p.m. at the Coors Events Center.

BROADCAST -- Television: FSN with Brent Stover, Debbie Antonelli. Radio KVCU (1190 AM) with Mike Rice and Carol Callan.

STORYLINES -- Almost everyone in the Colorado program is looking for their first win over Nebraska. ... The Cornhuskers have lost six of their past seven.

KEY STATS -- Nebraska is just ahead of Colorado in most statistical categories in the Big 12. The Buffs have to become a better rebounding team. These are the only two teams in the league with rebounding deficiencies. The Buffs are allowing six more rebounds a game to opponents.

COACHES -- Kathy McConnell-Miller is 50-62 in her fourth season at CU and 141-150 overall. Connie Yori is 116-90 in her seventh season at Nebraska and 311-230 overall.

PROBABLE STARTERS:

Colorado -- G Britney Blythe, 5-9, So., 2.4 ppg, 1.7 apg; G Alyssa Fressle, 5-10, Fr., 9.3 ppg, 3.6 apg; G Brittany Spears, 6-1, So., 17.8 ppg, 7.8 rpg; G Bianca Smith, 5-9, Jr., 10.6 ppg, 4.8 rpg; C Kara Richards, 6-4, Sr., 11.9 ppg, 6.9 rpg.

Nebraska -- G Kaitlyn Burke, 5-7, So., 5.1 ppg, 1.8 apg; G Tvonne Turner, 5-8, Jr., 11.7 ppg, 3.3 rpg; G Dominique Kelley, 5-7, So., 9.7 ppg, 3.3 rpg; F Cory Montgomery, 6-2, Jr., 13.3 ppg, 7.1 rpg; C Catheryn Redmon, 6-3, So., 5.6 ppg, 5.5 rpg.

SERIES -- CU leads 24-5 in Boulder and 38-25 overall.

UP NEXT -- Colorado travels to Kansas for a 6 p.m. Wednesday game (no television).



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