



# New CU volleyball coach used to adversity

## Colorado native led Tulane to conference title, NCAA tourney berth

By Neill Woelk

Tuesday, February 10, 2009

The term "rebuilding" doesn't scare Liz Kritza.

Not in the least.

Colorado's new volleyball coach has already rebuilt a program that endured more devastation than 99 percent of her peers in America could even imagine. What some might see as an incredibly daunting task -- that of competing in one of the best conferences in the nation -- doesn't faze her in the least.

Kritza, 31, was introduced to the media by Colorado athletic director Mike Bohn at a Tuesday press conference. She replaced Pi'i Aiu, who was fired last month after 12 seasons. The Buffs did not qualify for the NCAA Tournament the last two seasons.

"I think what really stood out for us in the end with Liz is not only the fact she is a Colorado native, which I think is awesome, but also just her high energy, her passion, and the fact that she dealt with adversity at the highest level as an intercollegiate coach," Bohn said.

Adversity?

After her very first match as Tulane's head coach in 2005, Hurricane Katrina ravaged New Orleans. Kritza lost her house in the disaster; Tulane literally shut down, and the school's athletic programs were virtually homeless for the next year.

The volleyball team was forced to cancel 10 of its non-conference games. After moving from place to place for a few weeks, the team finally found a "home" in College Station, Texas, on the campus of Texas A&M.

"It was adverse conditions for the coach, athletes -- everyone," Kritza said. "No place to live, no place to eat, no uniforms. ... I'll be forever grateful to my institution for helping us move on. It proved to be one of the most challenging, and one of the most rewarding, times of my life."

Understandably, the Green Wave didn't experience a lot of success that year, finishing just 5-16. Still, the team did manage to advance to the Conference USA Tournament semifinals for the first time since 1997.

That was the only losing season Tulane had under Kritza. The following year, Tulane went 15-11 (11-5 in C-USA), followed by back-to-back 28-6 seasons that included a regular season and conference

tournament title in 2008.

Kritza was twice named the AVCA Midwest Region Coach of the Year, and in 2008 -- when Tulane earned its first-ever NCAA Tournament berth -- she was the conference's co-coach of the year for the second straight season.

Kritza grew up in Colorado, playing high school volleyball at St. Mary's in Colorado Springs before playing at Tulane.

She does, however, hold a special affinity for CU. Her brother, Ted, played basketball for the Buffs for two years in the mid-1990s, a time when CU's volleyball program was also a national power under Brad Saindon.

"I remember the days when CU was at the top of the conference and played deep into the (NCAA) tournament," Kritza said. "That's my idea of Colorado volleyball."

Her plan is to return CU to that platform.

"It's an honor to come back and lead this program to the heights I know the university is committed to and to the heights I know we will achieve," she said.

CU is in the process of accepting bids for the construction of a new basketball/volleyball practice facility, to be built adjacent to the Coors Events Center. Along with practice courts, it will also be the home for the volleyball operations center.

"I can't express how important the university commitment is," Kritza said. "They made it clear how committed they are from the very beginning."

Kritza will be coaching in a conference that last season placed two teams, Nebraska and Texas, in the NCAA Final Four.

"The Big 12 is fast becoming the toughest conference in the nation," she said. "I know the challenge is great."

Kritza will be given one of CU's six yearly contracts. As part of her five-year deal, Kritza's base salary will be \$105,000, with performance incentives that can reach a total of \$65,000 if CU wins the Big 12 regular season title and national championship, and she is named the conference and national coach of the year.

Her contract also includes incentives for academic and community service, which can reach \$20,000, as well as Nike support, camp income and a car allowance, which total \$37,200.

Kritza was CU's third choice for the job. Bohn initially wanted Saint Louis coach Anne Kordes, but she chose to stay at her current job for personal reasons. The Buffs then believed they had Colorado State coach Tom Hilbert, but he too later decided to stay at his current position.

Kritza became the sixth coach in CU volleyball history.

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## Kritza hired as CU volleyball coach

By Tom Kensler  
The Denver Post

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Liz Kritza, head coach at Tulane for four seasons was named the University of Colorado volleyball coach on February 10, 2009. (Tulane University)

**BOULDER** — Vowing to return the Colorado women's volleyball program to the upper-echelon of the Big 12 Conference, newly hired Buffaloes coach Liz Kritza said Tuesday during her introductory news conference that she knows all about rebuilding projects.

Kritza, 31, was head coach for the past four

years at Tulane University in New Orleans. One match into her first season, on August, 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina made landfall in Louisiana. After escaping to safety from the rising water, her team eventually was relocated to Texas A&M, where it played the remainder of its "home" matches that season.

"I'm sure, (they were) the most adverse conditions for a person, for a coach, for an athlete," Kritza recalled.

"Going forward in my career, nothing (else) fazes me. I had a team that had nowhere to live. They had no idea where they were going to eat, no idea if they were going to be in school. We had no uniforms. We had no way to train our team. It was an amazing experience. I'm forever grateful to (Tulane) and to my players for moving forward."

A native of Colorado Springs and former all-stater at St. Mary's High, Kritza agreed to a five-year contract (receiving one of the six multi-year deals available to CU) that specifies an annual salary package of \$142,200, including base pay plus Nike sponsorship, summer camp income and a car allowance. Performance incentives and academics/community service incentives could boost her income by as much as \$85,500 annually.

CU athletic director Mike Bohn said the multi-year contract and the planned practice facility for basketball and volleyball that will be adjacent to the Coors Events Center (bids go out this week, Bohn said) show a commitment to women's

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volleyball. The practice facility also will include the women's volleyball operations center.

Kritza compiled a 76-39 record at Tulane, earning American Volleyball Coaches Association Midwest Region coach of the year honors in 2007 and 2008 after guiding the Green Wave to a 28-6 record both years. Tulane finished with a No. 13 RPI in 2008, compared to No. 119 for Colorado (13-16).

Under Kritza, Tulane earned its first Conference USA championship in women's volleyball in 2008, earning a berth in the NCAA Tournament.

"I told the (search) committee to find a coach and to aim high," Bohn said Tuesday.

Kritza replaces Pi'i Aiu, who was fired in January after 12 seasons at Colorado. Aiu guided the Buffs to nine NCAA Tournament appearances, but CU had a losing record the past two seasons.

Returning to her home state after 14 years at Tulane, Kritza began as a student-athlete there in 1995. She remained at Tulane, progressing from student assistant to volunteer assistant to full-time assistant, before becoming head coach of her alma mater in 2005.

Aiu had been criticized for failing to successfully recruit many of the top in-state prospects.

"I grew up playing volleyball in Colorado. I'm a Colorado kid," Kritza said Tuesday. "It wasn't too difficult to entice me (to take the CU job). I know the strength of (high school and club) volleyball

in this state. I'm really committed to make it a priority that all the best volleyball players in Colorado are coming to the flagship university of this state."

Kritza is no stranger to Boulder. During her high school years, she trekked up I-25 to compete with the Boulder Volleyball Club. An older brother, Ted Kritza, played two seasons (1994-96) with the CU men's basketball team before transferring to Tulane to be closer to family members.

Ted Kritza, a Phoenix-based executive in sports marketing, attended Tuesday's news conference. He had been back to campus only one other time since leaving CU.

"When people talk about life being cyclical, I guess my sister and I are a perfect example of that," Ted Kritza said. "I couldn't be happier for my sister coming here."

The team's only senior-to-be, setter Kaitlyn Burkett, also is a product of St. Mary's in Colorado Springs.

"I'm really excited about Liz's vision of the program and how she sees it getting there," Burkett said after attending the news conference. "I feel a lot of us were getting complacent. Now, she is going to force a drive in us."

Colorado State women's volleyball coach Tom Hilbert turned down the CU job last week because of family considerations.

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