



Turnovers plague Colorado women's basketball team

Bufs hope to reduce miscues at Texas A&M

By Kyle Ringo

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BOULDER, Colo. — During her time in the Colorado women's basketball program, guard Bianca Smith has seen coach Kathy McConnell-Miller and her assistants use every trick in the book, so to speak, to cure the team's turnover problem.

Smith said McConnell-Miller has run the team ragged at times, making players pay a stiff price for sloppy passes and poor decision making. At times last season, the Buffs were forced to run suicides on Sox Walseth Court in the Coors Events Center for every turnover committed in a game if they exceeded 15.

That meant if the Buffs had, say, 20 turnovers, thenext day at practice they could count on 20 suicides. The number wasn't based on the difference between 15 and the final turnover total. It was the full number.

Strength and conditioning coaches even focused on turnovers in the offseason. They subtracted the number of turnovers committed by seniors on last year's team and divided the total number of turnovers for the season by the number of remaining players. It left roughly 400 turnovers for which to account. It meant every team workout was punctuated with 50 up-downs.

"I think that has been our Achilles heel since I've been here," Smith said. "I think it's a combination of mental and physical toughness. We just have to take care of the ball.

"A lot of our turnovers are self-committed if you will, bouncing the ball off our foot, giving the ball to the other team. I think a lot of the games we've lost have been because of our turnovers."

None of the coach's punishments seems to have worked very effectively. The Buffs might put together a game or two with relatively few miscues, but then the issue crops back up again.

Here the Buffs are more than halfway through Big 12 Conference regular-season play, and they're tied with Kansas in last place in the league in turnovers, giving up an average of 18 possessions a game entering today's contest at Texas A&M (1 p.m., KVCU 1190 AM).

"There are a few numbers that bother me, but that would be definitely one of them," McConnell-Miller said. "I really think it's a result of the fact that we have some very, very inexperienced players at the point guard position in a league that plays such high-pressure defense, full-court pressure. And we're struggling in that area."

McConnell-Miller correctly points out there are youthful moments to overcome for a team that badly misses injured point guard Whitney Houston. Three different guards have been used at times to bring the ball up the floor, including freshman Alyssa Fressle and sophomores Britney Blythe and Kelly Jo Mullaney.

But it's also true that the turnover issue is not new to the program this season and it's not just guards who are struggling. Turnovers have been an issue every year under McConnell-Miller.

The Buffs finished last in turnover margin in the Big 12 in each of McConnell-Miller's first two seasons. They improved to 10th in the league last year.

CU must take care of the ball if it hopes to end a streak of futility against Big 12 South Division teams. The Buffs haven't won on the road against a team from the southern half of the conference since 2004.

The Buffs' turnover problem is a big contributor to them bringing up the rear in the Big 12 in scoring defense. Turnovers often lead to easy baskets for the opponent, and CU opponents are averaging 62.9 points a game.

CU is 10-11 overall (2-7 in the Big 12) and drawing closer to desperation mode with each loss in terms of advancing to the postseason.

"I think this conference is tough and the NCAA knows that," Smith said. "We just have to try to win games."



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CU women's preview: Feb. 14, at Texas A&M

TODAY -- Colorado (10-11, 2-7) travels to College Station, Texas, to play No. 12 Texas A&M (18-5, 6-4) at 1 p.m. in Reed Arena.

BROADCAST -- Television: None; Radio: KVCU (1190 AM) with Mike Rice and Carol Callan.

STORYLINE -- CU hasn't won on the road against a team from the Big 12 South Division since winning at Baylor on Jan. 7, 2004. The Buffs have lost 16 straight on the road against the south.

KEY STAT -- The Buffs are committing an average of 17.9 turnovers a game.

COACHES -- Kathy McConnell-Miller is 51-64 in her fourth season at CU. Gary Blair is 121-62 in his sixth season at A&M and is 529-225 overall.

PROBABLE STARTERS:

Colorado -- G Britney Blythe, 5-9, sophomore, 2.6 ppg, 1.2 rpg., G Bianca Smith, 5-9, junior, 10.4 ppg, 4.7 rpg, G Alyssa Fressle, 5-10, freshman, 8.7 ppg, 3.3 apg, F Brittany Spears, 6-1, sophomore, 17.6 ppg, 8.0 rpg, C Kara Richards, 12.0 ppg, 6.9 rpg.

Texas A&M -- G Sydney Colson, 5-8, sophomore, 5.9 ppg, 3.3 apg, G Takia Starks, 5-8, senior, 16.1 ppg, 4.3 rpg, G/F Danielle Gant, 5-11, senior, 13.9 ppg, 6.7 rpg, F Adaora Elonu, 6-1, freshman, 5.7 ppg, 4.0 rpg, C La Toya Michaeux, 6-3, senior, 2.8 ppg, 7.2 rpg.

SERIES -- Colorado leads the all-time series 10-6, but Texas A&M has won the past five meetings.

UP NEXT -- The Buffs host Kansas at 7 p. m. Wednesday in the first rematch of the season with a fellow North Division team.



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