



K-Mac's Buffs confident for KU

CU faces Big 12's second-leading scorer in McCray

By Ryan Thorburn
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BOULDER, Colo. — Kathy McConnell-Miller received several text messages from her players on Monday night as they were watching Oklahoma deny Tennessee coach Pat Summit her 1,000th career victory.

The No. 2 Sooners defeated the Lady Vols 80-70 for their 15th consecutive victory.

On Jan. 21, Colorado was tied 28-28 with OU at halftime and led by as many as seven points in the second half before losing 72-58 to drop to 0-4 in Big 12 play.

The Buffs (10-9, 2-5) remained confident after the brutal start to conference play and are looking for their third win in four games tonight against Kansas at Allen Fieldhouse (6 p.m., KKZN).

"They are surprisingly confident in their abilities right now," McConnell-Miller said on Tuesday before the Buffs boarded a charter plane to Lawrence. "I don't think the record reflects the improvements they've made in a lot of areas. They keep coming back and wanting more."

The head coach gave her two young stars, sophomore guard Brittany Spears and freshman guard Alyssa Fressle, a lot of credit for keeping the team focused on the big picture.

"Fressle and Spears coming here sort of changed the culture because they are basketball junkies," McConnell-Miller said. "They're all over it, they follow it, and they know we opened up (conference play) with a pretty tough row."

The Jayhawks (12-7, 1-5) are led by Danielle McCray (19.3 ppg), who is second in the Big 12 in scoring and has put over 20 points on the board in each of the last four games.

KU is 9-2 at home this season but enters tonight's game on a four-game skid.

"I think mental toughness is the biggest thing on the road," CU junior Bianca Smith said. "We have to have the mindset that we're going to go in there and run our stuff and kind of tune out the rest of the scene."

After making just 2-of-15 shots from behind the arc in the first three Big 12 games, Smith is an amazing 20-for-33 (.606) in the last four games. During CU's 61-56 road win at Missouri she was 7-for-11 from distance with 25 points.

"At Missouri I was joking with my teammates about how it's just like playing at home. The colors are

the same, they use Nike balls like we do," Smith said. "And that was our mindset going in there that it was another home game. It may not be our home crowd, but it's our home court and we're playing with our ball."

The Buffs are coming off a 75-73 victory over Nebraska on Saturday. Spears made a baseline layup with five seconds remaining to complete the dramatic comeback.

Smith had 21 points with a 7-for-10 performance from behind the arc against the Cornhuskers. McConnell-Miller believes her red-hot shooter will have KU's attention tonight, which is a good thing.

"It's interesting to see how focused and determined she becomes when people start to identify her as a go-to player," McConnell-Miller said. "When she sees that it elevates her intensity even more. When people target her she feels a sense of responsibility that she has to perform and excel. ...

"Bianca's points and her production are important for us to be successful. When she has had big games we've won."



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CU women's preview: Feb. 4

TODAY -- Colorado (10-9, 2-5) travels to Lawrence to play Kansas (12-7, 1-5) at 6 p.m. in the Allen Fieldhouse.

BROADCAST -- Television: None; Radio: KKZN (760 AM) with Mike Rice and Carol Callan.

STORYLINE -- CU is looking to make it three wins in four games after starting 0-4 in conference play. ... The Jayhawks have lost four consecutive games but are 9-2 at home this season. ... KU only gives up an average of 58 points per game.

KEY STAT -- Bianca Smith is 20-for-33 from 3-point range over the last four games.

COACHES -- Kathy McConnell-Miller is 51-62 in her fourth season at CU. Bonnie Henrickson is 69-72 in her fifth season at KU.

PROBABLE STARTERS

CU -- G Britney Blythe, 5-9, sophomore, 2.5 ppg, 1.3 rpg,, G Bianca Smith, 5-9, junior, 11.1 ppg, 4.8 rpg, G Alyssa Fressle, 5-10, freshman, 8.8 ppg, 2.8 rpg, F Brittany Spears, 6-1, sophomore, 18.2 ppg, 7.9 rpg, C Kara Richards, 12.0 ppg, 6.9 rpg.

KU -- Danielle McCray, 5-11, junior, 19.3 ppg, 7.9 rpg, Sade Morris, 5-11, junior, 12.2 ppg, 4.2 rpg, 10.4 ppg, Krysten Boogaard, 6-5, sophomore, 6.5 rpg, 8.3 ppg, LeChelda Jacobs, 5-10, junior, 6.7 ppg, 3.6 rpg, Nicollette Smith, 6-2, sophomore, 4.5 ppg, 3.6 rpg, Porscha Weddington, 6-1, junior, 4.5 ppg, 4.9 rpg.

SERIES -- Colorado leads the all-time series 32-29, including 12 wins in the last 16 meetings.

UP NEXT -- The Buffs host No. 21 Iowa State at 2 p.m. Saturday.



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