



Expectations high for Jeffery

By Ryan Thorburn
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BOULDER, Colo. — It didn't take Kathy McConnell-Miller long to turn the page on last season's 11-18 finish.

After the Colorado women's head coach saluted outgoing senior Kara Richards for her contributions to the program at a postgame press conference in Oklahoma City -- where the Buffs' 2008-09 season ended with a blowout loss to Kansas State in the first round of the Big 12 Tournament -- her mood took a dramatic turn for the better when she was asked by a reporter about her incoming recruiting class.

The group includes Boulder twins Brenna and Meagan Malcolm-Peck, a pair of promising 6-foot-2 forwards who played at Horizon High School, and two touted prospects from Omaha, 6-7 center Melissa MacFarlane and 6-0 forward Kailah Bailey.

McConnell-Miller believes all of the above will be great fits at CU, but the freshman-to-be who could have the biggest impact on the 2009-10 season is Janeesa "Chucky" Jeffery.

"Coming out of high school, Chucky is more talented than (Brittany) Spears was at the same age," McConnell-Miller said. "She's athletic. She's finesse. She's a hard worker. She's got the body to compete in the Big 12. If it's any indication of how Spears has developed, we expect to see great things from Chucky."

Spears had a smooth transition to the college game as a freshman standout who helped lead the Buffs to the WNIT's Final Four. She led CU in scoring (18.3 ppg.) and rebounding (7.8 rpg.) as a sophomore.

Jeffery, a versatile 5-10 player from Colorado Springs, doesn't mind hearing about the coach's lofty expectations of her.

"That just gives me more motivation to get where she's at. Brittany, she's a great player," Jeffery said during a recent interview with the Camera. "I've watched her play. I want to shoot like her. That's who I'm looking up to right now, her and Whitney Houston."

Houston is on track with her recovery from a knee injury that forced her to sit out last season. There is no question the Buffs missed her experience at point guard throughout the disappointing campaign.

McConnell-Miller said Jeffery has the skills to play point guard, shooting guard or small forward at this level.

"I just hope they give me time to show it because I believe I can play as a freshman in the Big 12 and hang with everybody," Jeffery said.

During her senior season at Sierra High School, Jeffery averaged 22.1 points, 12.9 rebounds, 4.9 steals,

4.6 assists and 3.0 blocks per game.

McConnell-Miller called her the "most underrated player" in the state and said if she played in a high profile prep program like Highlands Ranch she would have been the Colorado player of the year.

Jeffery said she received plenty of attention from other universities during the recruiting process but was set on CU because of its business school and a desire to stay close to home.

Being a part of a group that expects to get the Buffs back into the NCAA Tournament was another reason she decided to come to Boulder.

"We have a really good class, and I think we're going to have a huge impact on the team as the freshmen class," Jeffery said. "We work really hard and (the older players) see that we want to play just as much as they do."

Jeffery has already completed a sociology class this summer and is currently taking an introduction to theatre course as she familiarizes herself with the campus.

Most of the Buffs have gone their separate ways now, however, after some of the freshmen were able to jump into the fray at the Coors Events Center during pick-up games with veteran players last month.

"I was kind of nervous because I didn't know what to expect, but I think we're going to have a really good team," Jeffery said of her early impressions. "Everyone is open and nice and we all get along well. And I can tell they connect well on the court. Hopefully, I can contribute to that."

McConnell-Miller has a solid nucleus of experienced players to work with, including Spears, Houston, Alyssa Fressle, Bianca Smith, Julie Seabrook, Kelly Jo Mullaney and Courtney Dunn.

But you get the feeling that "Chucky" and her classmates weren't recruited to sit on the bench and learn during what will be McConnell-Miller's pivotal fifth season coaching the Buffs.

"I think us being young is kind a good thing because we can all grow together," Jeffery said. "It's not like it's the experienced and the inexperienced. We can all just come together and it will be easy for us to bond and get the communication on the court together."



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