



Sutherland out for season

All-Big 12 preseason pick underwent shoulder surgery in offseason

By Ryan Thorburn
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Adversity arrived in the Colorado volleyball locker room on Wednesday as the players dressed for the first practice of the season.

What was still a rumor for some members of the team became official: Senior outside hitter Amber Sutherland, the program's only preseason All-Big 12 selection, will redshirt this season due to injury. Sutherland, who had offseason shoulder surgery, also missed spring drills but at that time was expected to be ready for the fall.

The somber preseason news means other players are going to have to step into the spotlight for the Buffs, who were picked to finish fifth in the conference's preseason coaches poll.

"I don't think the standards have changed," CU head coach Pi'i Aiu said at the team's media day session at the Dal Ward Center. "We expect to finish in the top half of the Big 12. And in the Big 12, that usually means you're in the top 25."

Last season CU finished fourth in the Big 12 and advanced to the NCAA Tournament for the 16th time in the 21-year history of the program.

The Buffs also lose standout setter Ashley Nu'u to graduation after she finished a brilliant career by becoming the only AVCA all-American in program history. Sophomore Kaitlyn Burkett, a top 50 prep prospect coming out of St. Mary's in Colorado Springs, is expected to run the offense.

Aiu will also count on veterans like Alex Buth, Therese Vinal and Kelsey Loop to mesh with a highly touted freshman recruiting class in a hurry.

"Our '07 class is a good class. That's going to be a big help with trying to recover some of the kills Amber would have had for us," Aiu said.

Perhaps the good news for CU, which opened up the 2006 schedule against three top-five teams (Hawaii, UCLA and Florida), is a less daunting nonconference slate for 2007.

"I think it's going to be a nice preseason for us," said Aiu, whose team does host Cal (Sept. 2) and travels to Colorado State (Sept. 6). "It's going to test us and give us some opportunities."

Losing Sutherland — who ranks 15th on CU's career kills chart with 908 — wasn't part of the plan for this season, but she will be able to bolster the lineup in 2008. Now it's up to her teammates to overcome

the adversity and take advantage of their opportunities.

"We all came in with expectations already, whether or not Amber was going to be on the team," Vinal said. "We're going to have to figure things out, we're going to have to jell a lot quicker, and we're going to have to just make it happen."

Notable

Aiu announced that Jil Thomason, his top assistant and recruiting coordinator, has been promoted to associate head coach. "I'm not sure how much will change besides a nameplate, but it's quite an honor for me," Thomason said. "I've been giving my heart and soul to this team for eight years, and it's not going to change at all."... Defending NCAA champion Nebraska visits the Coors Events Center on Oct. 6. ... The Buffs were 24th in the final poll from the 2006 season.

CU volleyball schedule

Home games in all caps

Aug. 24 — at Tulane, 6 p.m.

Aug. 25 — Furman, at New Orleans, 10 a.m.

Aug. 25 — tba, at New Orleans

Aug. 31 — UNC-WILMINGTON, 6:30 p.m.

Sept. 1 — CENTRAL FLORIDA, 6:30 p.m.

Sept. 2 — CALIFORNIA, Noon

Sept. 6 — at Colorado State, 7 p.m.

Sept. 7 — Winthrop, at Fort Collins, 5 p.m.

Sept. 8 — Miami (Ohio), at Fort Collins, 5 p.m.

Sept. 12 — at Texas Tech, 6 p.m.

Sept. 19 — BAYLOR, 6:30 p.m.

Sept. 22 — KANSAS STATE, tba

Sept. 26 — at Oklahoma, 5:30 p.m.

Sept. 28 — at Texas, 5:30 p.m.

Oct. 3 — MISSOURI, 6:30 p.m.

Oct. 6 — NEBRASKA, 6:30 p.m.

Oct. 10 — at Kansas, 6 p.m.

Oct. 13 — at Texas A&M, 6 p.m.

Oct. 17 — IOWA STATE, 6:30 p.m.

Oct. 20 — at Baylor, 6 p.m.

Oct. 24 — OKLAHOMA, 6:30 p.m.

Oct. 27 — TEXAS, 6:30 p.m.

Oct. 31 — at Iowa State, 6 p.m.

Nov. 3 — TEXAS TECH, tba

Nov. 7 — at Nebraska, 6 p.m.

Nov. 10 — KANSAS, 6:30 p.m.

Nov. 17 — at Kansas State, 6 p.m.

Nov. 21 — TEXAS A&M, 6:30 p.m.

Nov. 24 — at Missouri, 6 p.m.



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