



Young CU spikers must learn how to win

Bufs open season Friday at Tulane

By Joshua Lindenstien
Thursday, August 23, 2007

Nobody can ever accuse Pi'i Aiu of ducking tough opponents.

Aside from the inevitability of facing a rigorous Big 12 Conference slate every year, the Colorado volleyball coach routinely includes a handful of the nation's elite programs on his team's nonconference schedule.

Last fall, the Buffs made the trip to Honolulu to face Hawaii, UCLA and Florida — three top 10 teams. But CU is taking a somewhat less aggressive approach this year.

No. 12 California — the Buffs' fifth opponent — is the only preseason top-25 opponent on CU's nonconference schedule. The Buffs begin play this weekend at the Sugar Bowl Classic at Tulane University in New Orleans. They'll face Tulane at 6 p.m. Friday and Furman at noon Saturday.

"It's a good thing for us this year, I think, starting this way," Aiu said.

"I'm not saying this is a walk in the park," he added about Tulane, which placed third in Conference USA last season, and Furman, which was the Southern Conference runner-up. "They're not Florida and Hawaii and UCLA but I think it's a real good start for us. I think it's going to be a challenge for us as far as where we are right now with injuries and personnel."

Knowing he had a solid, experienced team entering last season, Aiu wanted to challenge the Buffs against the nation's best early. And though CU came home with three losses from Honolulu, the strategy seemed to pay off as the Buffs upset a ranked Missouri team in the Big 12 opener and later upset eventual national champion Nebraska.

But the Buffs lost four players to graduation off that squad — including third-team All-American setter Ashley Nu'u — and top outside hitter Amber Sutherland is redshirting this season after having offseason shoulder surgery. In addition, middle blocker Lauren Schaefer is still coming off of an ankle injury and defensive specialist Kristen Karlik is out indefinitely with a back injury.

"This year, we knew (sophomore Kaitlyn Burkett) was going to be setting in her first matches really in college, and it probably behooves us not to go play Hawaii and Florida," Aiu said.

The Buffs do figure to have some starting experience in the lineup this weekend in outside hitter Mallori Gibson and right side hitter Alex Buth. The two were second and third, respectively, in kills for CU last season behind Sutherland and thus will likely see their roles increase a bit.

"Our goals are still the same," Gibson said. "Everyone's still working hard and pushing each other to accomplish those goals no matter who's in or out."

Along with Burkett, Gibson and Buth, outside hitters Kelsey Loop and Emilee Sisco are likely to vie for starting time early, while freshmen Rosie Steinhaus and Schylur Edelman figure to start at middle blocker while Schaefer recovers. Junior Callie Webster will get early libero duty.

"This team needs to learn to win," Aiu said. "We have so many young players. I think the kids who were driving that last year are mostly gone."

"That's the big thing about this weekend. If we can come out with two wins, I think that's a great step forward for this team."

Twist of fate

Count Karlik among those whose lives were significantly altered by the devastation of Hurricane Katrina two years ago. She could have been facing the Buffs on Friday if not for the storm.

Karlik, a senior from Colorado Springs, had planned to transfer from Colorado State to Tulane for the 2005 season. She and her mother had been in New Orleans for a week getting ready for school when the Tulane coaches advised her to get out of town for a few days while the storm passed through.

The Karliks caught a flight home to Colorado. But after the storm destroyed New Orleans, Karlik decided to take the fall off and transferred instead to CU for the spring of 2006.

With her injury, she won't get to make the trip to New Orleans to see the city and what was nearly her coaching staff.

"It's been quite a volleyball adventure for me," Karlik said. "It would have been cool to go down there just to see how New Orleans looks now. But obviously it's what's best for the team. You don't want to take someone who's not going to play."

Booters start at UNC

The CU soccer team gets its fall slate started with an exhibition match at the University of Northern Colorado in Greeley on Saturday night.

The Buffs usually play their exhibition opener at home. But the Bears are showing off new facilities at the old UNC football field — complete with new locker rooms — and CU coach Bill Hempen agreed to play in Greeley to help UNC build some excitement around the new digs.

Hempen coaches a Colorado Olympic Development Team of high school students in the summer along with UNC head coach Tim Barrera, and the two are good friends.

UNC opened the season at CU last fall, and the Buffs played an exhibition match at Greeley in the spring.

"They've got a new facility up there that they're proud of, so I said we'll come back up," Hempen said.

The 7 p.m. game will give the 14th-ranked Buffs a chance to see some of the incoming freshmen in

game action before the regular season starts Aug. 31 at the University of Denver.

Some of those youngsters will be key early on as they fill in for some injured Buffs, especially in the defense, where starter Brittany Dornseif is recovering slower than expected from a stress fracture in her foot.

Forward Allison Kidd is also still recovering from a broken foot she suffered during the spring.

Dornseif was in a car accident on Tuesday with teammate Jess Quador but neither player was seriously injured. Quador missed practice Wednesday with whiplash.



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