



Wyoming riding high in the saddle

CU women host Cowgirls at 7 p.m. today

By Chris Shelton

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Want to find the best women's basketball team in the region?

Look north.

Back in 1999, Colorado State was at home for the first two rounds of the NCAA tournament and Becky Hammon led the Rams to the Sweet 16.

As recently as 2003, the Colorado Buffaloes were three points away from returning to the Elite Eight for the second consecutive year.

But nowadays, CSU is struggling to win games and the Buffs are trying to rebuild after three consecutive losing seasons.

Wyoming?

The Cowgirls head into today's 7 p.m. game at Colorado (TV on FSN) ranked No. 21 in the country and riding a 12-game win streak dating back to last year's WNIT championship season. Colorado has lost three in a row to Wyoming.

"Wyoming is exciting because they've built from the ground up," CU junior and Littleton native Caley Dow said. "It's really exciting to see that program grow and see how far they've come in such a short time. It's exciting to take them on, on our home court."

Wyoming broke into the AP's top 25 for the first time in program history a week ago.

Why?

The Cowgirls (6-0) own key wins this season over Kansas State at home and at Wisconsin as they continue to build off last year's 27-9 season.

Wyoming returns all five starters and 10 players overall from a season ago, when the Cowgirls beat Nevada, Missouri, Oregon, South Dakota State, Kansas State and Wisconsin in the WNIT.

One of the Cowgirls' key contributors has a surname familiar to longtime CU basketball fans. Aubrey Vandiver, daughter of former Buff standout Shaun Vandiver, is averaging 14 points per game, second-best on the team.

Coach Joe Legerski, a former assistant at Utah when the Utes won seven league titles in his 12 years there, is in his fifth season at Wyoming and has guided the Cowgirls to an 81-48 record.

Wyoming's roster includes one of the best players in the Mountain West Conference in senior forward Hanna Zavec, who averages 16.2 points, 6.3 rebounds and 5.2 assists per game.

Zavec is joined in the front court by senior forward Justyna Podziemska, who averages 13.8 points and 6.2 rebounds per game.

Tonight's game will pit Wyoming's strength — the forwards — against CU's strength — the forwards.

But don't look for that battle to take place in the paint.

"Their (forwards) are very different from us in that they like to shoot the 3," CU coach Kathy McConnell-Miller. "They present challenges in a lot of ways. They've got five players on the floor at almost all times that can score."

Change in schedule?

McConnell-Miller said she's considering not playing Wyoming every year. Colorado has played Wyoming 41 times — the most of any nonconference opponent.

But McConnell-Miller would like to mix it up with other regional teams, such as Denver and Air Force, as well as with teams on the current schedule in Colorado State, Wyoming and Northern Colorado. She would like to keep CSU because of the rivalry, however.

"It should be rotated," McConnell-Miller said. "It's not good for the schedule to play the same team year-in and year-out. You want to have different challenges."

McFarland up for national award

CU senior forward Jackie McFarland has been named one of 30 candidates nationwide for the 2008 Lowe's Senior CLASS Award. The award — presented annually to the NCAA Division I student-athlete of the year in eight sports — focuses on the "four C's" of classroom, character, community and competition.

McFarland leads the Buffs with 18 points and 9.2 rebounds per game while hitting 59 percent of her shots from the field. She's a two-time Academic All-American sporting a 3.89 GPA. She is working on a concurrent degree program which will allow her to earn her MBA while completing her undergraduate degree in accounting.



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