



CU sports roundup: Booters gear up for opener at DU; Aiu disappointed

Bufs begin 2007 with match against in-state rivals

By Ryan Thorburn
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The game doesn't have a fancy title like the "Rocky Mountain Showdown."

It will not be contested in front of 70,000 fans in an NFL stadium or televised nationally.

But the Colorado soccer team's opener against Denver is just as important to both programs in terms of setting the tone for the 2007 season as the in-state rivals look to get back to the NCAA Tournament.

The Buffs' 2-1 victory over the Pioneers last November gave CU its first-ever trip to the Sweet 16. The rematch will start at 4:30 p.m. on Friday at DU.

"Jeff is awesome," CU head coach Bill Hempen said of his DU counterpart, Jeff Hooker. "He runs a great program. He's going to get his Colorado kids, and we're going to get our Colorado kids. ...

"And every year it's going to be a quality game and the kids are going to play hard."

The Buffs are coming off an impressive 6-1 exhibition victory over Northern Colorado in Greeley. True freshman Michaela DeJesus bent a free kick like Beckham for the first goal of the game.

Hempen practically had to beg the promising young talent to take the shot as she gets used to playing at a Big 12 level.

"She's almost embarrassed taking those," Hempen said. "I told her to get used to it. She's a good player."

So good that Hempen said he already sees some of the qualities in DeJesus that CU legend Fran Munnelly demonstrated during her brilliant career in Boulder.

Another Buffs standout, Nikki Marshall, picked up where she left off last year with two goals against the Bears. The sophomore spent her summer playing with the U20 national team at the Pan-Am Games in Rio de Janeiro.

"The kid has got a fire and that fire will never die," Hempen said. "She's going to try as hard as she can every moment she's out there. She does that like no kid I've ever had."

Marshall is more confident and more of a vocal leader this season. That will be important on a team that is welcoming 18 newcomers this season.

Senior defender Brittany Dornseif will not be ready for the start of the season due to a foot stress fracture. The coaching staff hopes to get her back in the lineup by the middle of September and ready to bolster the back line by the time conference play begins.

Hempen said junior Kirstin Radinski will be the starting goalkeeper.

DU senior Taryn Hemmings, a preseason All-Sun Belt pick, is expected to miss the season with a hip injury. The Pioneers tied Wyoming 1-1 in their exhibition tune-up.

Aiu disappointed

Pi'i Aiu is disappointed with CU's 0-2 start to be sure. But the head coach did anticipate that the young Buffs would have some growing pains early in the season.

Especially with the loss of All-American setter Ashley Nu'u to graduation and preseason All-Big 12 hitter Amber Sutherland redshirting due to an injury.

Perhaps the timing of the Colorado Invitational, which starts Friday and runs through Sunday at the Coors Events Center, is perfect as the home team looks to right the ship.

"I think it is good timing," Aiu said. "Confidence comes with wins and we've got to go out and win some of these matches. But it's not going to be a cake-walk."

The Buffs will welcome UNC Wilmington, Central Florida and No. 12 California to town. The first match on Friday will be at 11 a.m. between Central Florida and UNC; CU faces UNC Wilmington at 6:30 p.m.

"Believe me, we are firmly focused on UNC Wilmington," Aiu said when asked about the Buffs possibly peeking ahead to Sunday's showdown with Cal.

Kaitlyn Burkett, who is expected to fill a lot of the void left by Nu'u, sustained a knee injury during CU's five-set loss to Furman during last weekend's Sugar Bowl Classic in New Orleans. She is expected to return to the lineup this weekend.

In her absence, Lauren Fanelli was forced into the spotlight. The freshman setter had 14 assists after replacing Burkett (41 assists).

Two other freshmen, middle blockers Schylur Edelman and Rosie Steinhaus, also gained a lot of experience. The Buffs opened the season with a five-set loss to Tulane. In each loss, CU won the first two games and then lost the last three.

"I think we have to learn to compete better," Aiu said. "And as a team we need to learn how to finish matches. ... But I think in three weeks or so, if we keep working hard we're going to be in good shape."



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Destined to be sweet again

By ELIOT DEMPSEY Colorado Daily Sports Editor
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CU soccer coach Bill Hempen has seen his fair share of challenges during his 30 - odd years involved with collegiate soccer.

This season, however, could prove to be one of the more challenging.

Entering the 2007 season, the Buffs coach will have to figure out to integrate 18 newcomers, including 15 true freshmen, into a team that reached the sweet sixteen in last season's NCAA tournament for the first time in CU soccer history.

In order to reproduce the success of last year's squad, let alone meet the team's preseason goals of surpassing the sweet sixteen, those freshmen, most notably Michaela DeJesus and Kym Lowry, will have to step their games up.

According to junior midfielder Alex Cousins, how those new players get acclimated will be one of the most important factors in determining this year's success.

"I feel the biggest thing is to come together as a team. It might sound cliché, but it is seriously one of the things that I have seen throughout my career that helps the most," said Cousins. "When everyone knows each other they are willing to play harder for each other."

Cousins is one of the key returnees, one of 13 players, including 8 starters, from last year's group. It is early, having only played an exhibition against Northern Colorado thus far, but Cousins was brimming with confidence when she spoke about 2007.

"This season is the one that I am most excited for because I know all the girls and we have some new faces coming in, and new faces are the best part about it," she said. "I feel more comfortable on the field and everyone knows what we are doing."

That confidence is a testament to the work that coach Hempen has put in with the team. The players seem to genuinely love playing for him, and he gets proven results on the field.

"There are so many good things about Bill, but for me, its that he is never pleased," said Cousins. "He is always looking for something more so it pushes you to be a better player. For me, I could have settled at the way I played in high school but he has always pushed me to be better every year so I have always wanted to play better for him."

One player who has obviously flourished under Hempen's tutelage has been sophomore forward Nikki Marshall.

Marshall set the pitch on fire last year as a freshman, scoring a Big-12 leading (and CU record) 17 goals on her way to being named the Big-12 Freshman of the Year.

This summer, Marshall toured the world playing soccer, hitting stops in Manchester, England and then starring for the U.S. U-20 soccer team at the Pan American Games in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

In Brazil, Marshall moved from her customary forward spot to center back, a move that she says should pay dividends this season.

I would say I came back with confidence, because playing on a team like that was awesome. I was privileged enough to start and play ninety minutes with those girls who play at UCLA and North Carolina, big time schools and they are all amazing," said Marshall. "I hope that it makes me a better attacker because I kind of know how a defender thinks now."

Hempen said that one of the best things about Marshall is that she is a player that understands that she does not know it all, and that she wants to be coached and wants get better. He even said that he is excited to see how she plays this year, considering all of the added pressure that comes with being a star.

"If she scores seventeen goals again this year, than she is legit, because she scored those goals last year in relative anonymity. Now, people know who she is and it will be more difficult than it was last year because there will be people keying on her, which will open up opportunities for other players," said Hempen. "It's going to be a challenge for her, but if there is a kid who likes that kind of challenge, it's her. I am looking forward to see how she does react."

The Buffs get their first chance to see how Marshall, Cousins and all of the new talent will play this weekend when they travel to Denver to take on DU on Friday and Fairfield on Sunday in the DU Invitational. They then return home to host BYU (who beat CU at BYU last year) and Utah (a 2006 NCAA tournament team).

The young players, especially DeJesus, who will line up next to Nikki in the forward position, will have to quickly adapt to the speed and competitiveness of the college game if coach Hempen's plans are to be carried out. But first is the DU game, a rivalry match that Hempen says is just the way to start a season.

"You never know. Every coach is, not nervous, but anxious. You just hope that that everything that you tried to instill in them in preseason mode sticks. First games usually aren't that hard to motivate for, and this will be no different than any other," said Hempen. "It helps in the sense that the younger players will find out immediately that this is serious now, as opposed to maybe working yourself into the season with a lesser opponent. Right away it's a rivalry, it's intensity and they will understand that that has to be in place for every game, all year."