



# No. 23 Buffs taking winning show on the road

## CU opens Big 12 play at Missouri

By Chris Shelton

Wednesday, January 9, 2008

The opportunity to qualify for the NCAA tournament lies well within the grasp of the Colorado women's basketball team.

The Buffs enter Big 12 play today on a 10-game win streak and ranked No. 23 in the AP Top 25.

All the Buffs (11-2) need to do is finish with a winning record in Big 12 games and they'll more than likely earn a bid to the big dance.

The key to a winning conference record, however, may depend on how well the Buffs fare on the road. Their first test comes today when they face Missouri at 5:30 p.m. in Columbia.

"It's going to be huge, just because it's conference," Colorado senior Jackie McFarland said. "We need to understand this is a completely new season. What we did in the nonconference doesn't matter right now, maybe at the end of the season, but not right now."

The road has proved to be a struggle the last three years for the rebuilding Buffs, who are attempting to end a streak of three consecutive losing seasons.

Colorado has claimed just one Big 12 road victory in each of the last three seasons.

The Buffs haven't found success away from Coors since CU won its first four Big 12 road games en route to going 5-3 on the road in 2003-04.

But CU has already started to reverse the curse. The Buffs opened this season with a road win at San Francisco and then clocked rival CSU on the road. Their biggest win of the year came when they beat Vanderbilt in Tennessee.

Colorado, in fact, holds a two-game road win streak.

"When we were on the road (last year) it was the No. 1 thing on our mind -- 'It's a road game. We're not at home. What's going to happen?' " McFarland said. "Now we just see Missouri as what we need to do to win, not, we need a win on the road."

Last year, CU handily beat Missouri 71-59 at home in the Big 12 opener, but then lost 61-48 in Columbia later in the season.

Missouri was picked to finish last in the Big 12 by the conference coaches. The Tigers open Big 12 play

with a 7-6 record and have lost to teams such as Samford and Marshall.

Missouri is expected to be without starting sophomore forward Marissa Scott, who has missed the last two games with mononucleosis.

Junior guard Alyssa Hollins, sophomore forward Jessra Johnson and freshman forward Shakara Jones do most of the offensive damage for the Tigers. Only one senior checks in on Missouri's roster.

"We still have a lot of growing pains," Missouri coach Cindy Stein said. "We're still teaching our kids what it's all about. We'll get a wake-up call (today)."

McFarland said Missouri doesn't remind her of any team CU has played this season.

"They run a lot of plays to get a post touch and then a look for a 3," McFarland said. "We have to guard the paint and the perimeter on any given play."

While CU players such as McFarland know how tough the Big 12 can be, the newcomers are about to find out just how much more athletic, more skilled and much stronger the players are in this league.

"Everybody says the Big 12 is a tough conference and it's nothing like preseason," CU freshman Brittany Spears said. "I'm looking forward to a harder schedule and tougher competition."



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## CU women's hoops preview: Jan. 9

**TODAY:** Colorado (11-2) faces Missouri (7-6) at 5:30 p.m. in Mizzou Arena.

**BROADCAST:** Radio on KKZN (760 AM).

**THE SERIES:** Missouri has won four of the last five against CU, but Colorado leads overall 35-26.

**KEY STAT:** The game could come down to 3-point shooting as CU drains a Big 12-best 8.4 treys per game (fourth best in the nation) and Missouri makes 6.9 per game (third best in the Big 12).

**CU UPDATE:** Sophomore Aija Putnina, who moved into a starting role when CU began its 10-game win streak, played all of four minutes against Missouri last year and did not score. ... Colorado's 10-game win streak is the seventh longest in program history. ... Senior point guard Susie Powers has 57 assists in her last nine games. She leads the nation in assist-to-turnover ratio at 3.61.

**MU UPDATE:** The Tigers haven't played since a 55-50 win over Delaware State on Dec. 29. ... Missouri ranks last among Big 12 teams in scoring (65.8 ppg) and defense (66.2 points allowed per game). ... Coach Cindy Stein is in her 10th year at Missouri. ... The Tigers are 5-3 at home this season. ... Missouri is also missing a potential starter in freshman guard Bekah Mills, who suffered an ACL tear in practice on Oct. 27 and is out for the season.

**PLAYERS TO WATCH: Colorado:** Jackie McFarland, F, 6-3, Sr., 17.3 ppg, 8.1 rpg; Brittany Spears, F, 6-1, Fr., 13.5 ppg, 6.8 rpg; Bianca Smith, G, 5-9, So., 10.6 ppg, 32 treys; **Missouri:** Alyssa Hollins, G, 5-11, Jr., 16.8 ppg, 2.4 spg; Jessra Johnson, F, 6-1, So., 16.4 ppg, 8.8 rpg; Shakara Jones, F, 6-2, Fr., 12.6 ppg, 6.9 rpg.

**UPCOMING:** Colorado hosts Iowa State at 2 p.m. Sunday.



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women's basketball

## CU women contending for tourney

By Tom Kensler  
The Denver Post

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Colorado senior forward Jackie McFarland didn't want to come right out and say that proving the Big 12 women's basketball preseason poll wrong serves as a team motto.

But her smile gave it away.

"It's maybe not something at the top of our list," McFarland said. "But being picked so low does serve as motivation for us."

In an October vote of the league's coaches, Colorado was picked to finish 11th, only ahead of Missouri. Don't look now, but the Buffaloes (11-2) carry a No. 23 ranking in The Associated Press poll into tonight's Big 12 opener at Missouri (7-6).

"This is why I came here," McFarland said of the national ranking. "That hard work is finally paying off."

Colorado, 13-17 in 2006-07, has been ranked by AP for the past three weeks, the first appearances in three seasons under coach Kathy McConnell-Miller. CU is riding a 10-game winning streak, the first since the 1994-95 squad won 25 straight. Trouble is, five other Big 12 teams also are ranked.

"Our team knows what monster lies ahead," McConnell-Miller said.

**Winning as expected.** Oklahoma: The Sooners (9-2) are ranked sixth nationally and can say, "We have the Paris sisters, 6-4 Courtney (16.3 points, 16.3 rebounds) and 6-3 Ashley (13.2, 6.9), and nobody else has!"

**Unexpected challenge.** Colorado: It may be premature to think the Buffs can contend for the league title, but they might challenge for an NCAA Tournament berth. Inserting 6-1 freshman Brittany Spears and 6-3 sophomore Aija Putnina into the starting lineup at forward with McFarland has provided more offense and rebounding.

**Struggling as expected.** Missouri: The Tigers lost three senior starters from last season and are depending on youth.

**Unexpected disappointment.** Kansas State: The Wildcats (8-5) apparently have run out of in-state stars and are trying to win with defense.

Tom Kensler: 303-954-1280 or  
[tkensler@denverpost.com](mailto:tkensler@denverpost.com)

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## Players to watch

Courtney Paris, F, Oklahoma, Jr.: The double-double machine is a cinch All-American again.

Jackie McFarland, F, Colorado, Sr.: Ranks second in Big 12 shooting (.583), third in scoring (17.3) and sixth in rebounding (8.1).

Takia Starks, G, Texas A&M, Jr.: Athletic scorer (17.5) is a big reason why Aggies are picked to win the title.

Andrea Riley, G, Oklahoma State, So.: Pint-sized (5-5) blur tops the conference in scoring (20.5).

A'Quonesia Franklin, G, Texas A&M, Sr.: Teams with Starks for one of nation's top backcourts.

## Newcomers to watch

Dominic Seals, F, Texas Tech, Jr.: Second-year Red Raiders coach Kristy Curry isn't afraid to sign junior-college players.

Brittany Spears, F, Colorado, Fr.: Singing is not her thing but can she ever find the hoop (13.5).

Shakara Jones, F, Missouri, Fr.: In-state product producing 12.6 points and 6.9 rebounds.

Danielle Robinson, G, Oklahoma, Fr.: Already a three-time Big 12 rookie of the week.

Kathleen Nash, F, Texas, Fr.: Provides scoring (10.1) and rebounding (7.0) for new Longhorns coach Gail Goostenkors.

## Biggest wins

Baylor (then No. 13) 69, California (No. 12) 56

Colorado 62, Vanderbilt (No. 20) 51

Colorado 69, Wyoming (No. 21) 55

Texas (No. 19) 62, Arizona State (No. 22) 51

Texas Tech 73, Arizona State (No. 18) 69

## Worst losses

South Dakota State 78, Missouri 63

Samford 65, Missouri 49

Siena 83, Colorado 74

Southern Methodist 68, Kansas 56

Texas Christian 97, Oklahoma State 63

## Games to watch

Jan. 12, Oklahoma at Oklahoma State

Jan. 16, Texas A&M at Colorado

Feb. 2, Texas A&M at Texas

Feb. 17, Oklahoma at Baylor

March 1, Baylor at Texas A&M

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TIMES-CALL

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## Monster awaits Buffs

*By Brian Howell**Longmont Times-Call*

BOULDER — Now the real test begins.

At 11-2, and ranked 23rd in the country by The Associated Press, the Colorado women's basketball team has had a great season.

Tonight, however, the Buffaloes begin play in what might be the toughest conference in the country as they play at Missouri (7-6) in the Big 12 opener.

"They know what monster looms around the corner," head coach Kathy McConnell-Miller said after last Friday's 65-53 win over Pepperdine.

The Big 12 is some kind of monster. Nine teams in the conference have already won at least 11 games, and that doesn't even include Oklahoma (9-2), the sixth-ranked team in the country. Half the conference is ranked in the Top 25 and all 12 have a winning record.

Among the questions surrounding the Buffs is whether the non-conference schedule properly prepared them for what lies ahead. San Francisco, Northern Colorado, Colorado State, Texas Southern, Dartmouth and Jacksonville State aren't exactly national powers.

Then again, wins against then-No. 21 Wyoming and then-No. 20 Vanderbilt were impressive.

"There's no doubt we've had challenges through the whole non-conference schedule," McConnell-Miller said.

For the past three years, the Big 12 has been a challenge the Buffaloes have been unable to conquer. Since 2004-05, CU is 11-37 in the Big 12, and it has an all-time mark of 83-93 in the Big 12.

Colorado hasn't come into the conference this hot in a while, though.

"After winning 10 straight games, it's a great way to go into the conference," senior point guard Susie Powers said.

Since a surprising 83-74 loss at home to Siena on Nov. 23, the Buffaloes have been on top of their game. They snapped a 23-game skid against ranked teams by beating Wyoming and Vanderbilt in back-to-back games.

That has helped the Buffaloes gain a national ranking for the first time in four years.

"This team has the characteristics of a Top 25 team, meaning they show up every day, they're competitive in practice, there's no letdowns, the seniors are leading, they're protecting their home floor," McConnell-Miller said. "They're doing so many things a Top 25 team does."

A couple other things a Top 25 team does is compete well — and win a lot of games — in conference play, and qualifies for the NCAA Tournament. Those are both things the Buffaloes are shooting for.



Colorado freshman Brittany Spears is averaging 13.5 points per game as she and the 11-2 Buffaloes open Big 12 Conference play tonight.

**Lewis Geyer/Times-Call**

"I don't want them to rest on this record, and I don't want them to be afraid going into conference," McConnell-Miller said. "I want them to have the same mentality they've had the last three or four weeks."

According to all-Big 12 forward Jackie McFarland, that mentality has been to focus only on the task at hand.

"I think the thing we do stress day in and day out is we prepare for one game at a time," the senior said. "Missouri is our next game. We are not a team that can look over (other teams). We're not that good yet. Just making sure we're getting in the gym, we're working hard every single day and not taking any steps back."

CU has already looked better than many expected. The Buffaloes, despite showing improvements last year, were picked to finish 11th in the conference by Big 12 coaches before the season. Missouri was the only team picked below the Buffs.

"Being an underdog is always something that motivates me and I know the rest of the team, but it's not something at the top of our list," McFarland said.

Rather than focus on how opposing coaches viewed them a few months ago, the Buffs are hoping to continue doing what they've done on the court in recent weeks.

Defensively, the Buffs have been stingy. They rank 17th in the country in scoring defense (53.5 points per game) and field-goal percentage defense (34.7). They've held four of their past eight opponents to less than 50 points.

"I like the defense," McConnell-Miller said. "We've made some changes in our system as far as how we guard people and what we do. I think they're good at whichever way we prepare. I think they're really good at trusting the staff as to how to play a particular team."

The offense has its strong points, too. Powers leads the country in assist-to-turnover ratio (3.61), McFarland is among the nation's leaders in field-goal percentage (58.3 percent), and Brittany Spears and Bianca Smith have emerged as legitimate threats.

McConnell-Miller would like to see more out of Powers, though. As good as she's been running the offense, Powers hasn't scored more than 12 points in any game. She's been held scoreless in six games, and is averaging just 4.4 points a game.

"Although when the ball is in her hands we know somebody is going to score, I would like to know Susie Powers is going to score when she has the opportunity," McConnell-Miller said.

If the Buffaloes can polish up their weaknesses, and continue to play as well as they have, they believe they can finally reverse the trend of the past few years.

"That's what we expect," Powers said. "We are setting the bar that much higher now."