



# Colorado's Spears aims to avoid sophomore slump

## Guard/forward scored 2nd-most points in CU freshman history

By Chris Shelton

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A key question facing the Colorado women's basketball team this season is whether Brittany Spears will build on her standout freshman season or whether she will suffer a sophomore slump.

The 6-foot-1 guard/forward heads into her sophomore season after producing one of the better freshman campaigns in Colorado history.

"We talked (last spring) about how difficult it is to go from your freshman year to your sophomore year when you have had such a successful freshman year," CU coach Kathy McConnell-Miller said.

"To come back as a sophomore when the expectations are raised, it's something she needs to know is one of the most difficult things. This is completely different than anything she's going to experience."

Spears' 472 points last year was second best only to Lisa Van Goor's 610 points in 1980-81.

She tied Erin Scholz for second-most blocked shots in a freshman season with 52, and was third in rebounds (259) and fifth in steals (57).

Not only that, but Spears became the first player in program history to notch 50 assists, 50 blocks and 50 steals in the same season en route to making the All-Big 12 rookie team and All-Big 12 honorable mention.

Spears, who was the team's second-leading scorer last season with 13.9 points per game, doesn't want to focus specifically on improving her numbers this season.

"I don't think about it that way," Spears said. "I just play. If you think about it, you just keep worrying that you have to do this and that."

"You have to let the game come to you. Don't worry about last year. Last year is over with. It's another year. I just have to focus on what I could do this year."

The Buffs' new four-guard offense could help Spears put up bigger numbers.

McConnell-Miller began preseason practices with a starting lineup of Spears, freshman Alyssa Fressle, sophomore transfer Kelly Jo Mullaney, junior Bianca Smith and fifth-year senior center Kara Richards.

Fressle and Mullaney prefer an up-tempo game, as does Spears.

"They like to run and shoot, and play defense," Spears said. "That's my style. ... It'll benefit me. I like to run a lot. I like to just go."

Although Spears is CU's top returning scorer and rebounder, McConnell-Miller is hopeful that opponents won't be able to focus their defense solely on stopping Spears.

"That's what people may think, statistically, but once you get a better feel for our team I don't know who you would have guard her," McConnell-Miller said. "Alyssa is just as dangerous with the basketball. Kelly Jo is an offensive threat. Bianca, you have to guard her.

"(Former Buff) Jackie McFarland would have screamed with joy to have four guards around her that could score and give her single coverage. Kara will see double coverage very few times just because of the players we have. They can all make shots and they can all make plays."

McConnell-Miller asked Spears to work on her mid-range game during the offseason.

Spears spent part of her summer back home in Pasadena, Calif., where she played in a summer league with other college basketball players from schools such as USC, California and Cal State Northridge. Teammates Britney Blythe and Courtney Dunn also played in a college summer league on the same team in San Francisco.

Spears spent the rest of the summer in Boulder attending classes and playing pick-up games with her teammates.

"She had a great summer on and off the floor," McConnell-Miller said. "It was evident she worked extremely hard on all aspects of her game."

That's the only way Spears knows how to prepare. In the team's media guide, Spears listed her favorite class at CU as practice.

"My goals are for us to be successful, play together and win," Spears said. "I just want to fit in so we can win. That's all I worry about, winning."



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