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An Interview With:

**COLORADO
COACH KATHY
MCCONNELL-MILLER**

PETER IRWIN: We're now ready for Colorado. Coach, welcome to the Big 12 Media Days, and your comments, please.

COACH MCCONNELL-MILLER: Thank you. It's good to be here. Always good to be back in Oklahoma City having spent five years in the state before I arrived at Colorado. There's always usually a warm feeling here but unusually cold today.

But it's good to be here. And I'm always excited when Oklahoma City hosts the Big 12 Tournament. The tournament that they hosted a few years ago was one of the best I've ever been a part of. So it's good to be back here and be exposed to fans that truly love the game of basketball and really support the women's game.

As far as Colorado goes, I would say that this is by far going to be my most challenging and hopefully most rewarding coaching experience coming into this season -- of course, the graduation of Jackie McFarland, and trying to evaluate this team and evaluate where our strengths are and exactly what Colorado basketball is going to be like this upcoming season as a result of the players that we have.

Came into it with a thought of Whitney Houston as our point guard coming off of a strong run in the WNIT early on in the preseason workouts tore the ACL. So for us there's no doubt that we've got more staff meetings. We've got more conversation, more film watching, and the one thing I have to say is that I am truly going to be challenged this year as a result of the players in our program.

Very, very talented players but not the typical prototype position players that I'm

accustomed to having as far as having a strong 5, a solid, athletic 4 or the point guard that can run the offense. We've got some basketball players that can pretty much play any position and we've got some players in the program right now that we feel like we can put five pretty good players on the floor that may not be the position that they typically have played or the style of play which is typical of that position.

So we've spent a lot of time in the past couple of weeks and the past month really trying to find the niche of these players and what their strengths are and what they do well. And the one thing we know is we've got some players that can score. We've got some players that can shoot the ball. We've got some players that bring some more athleticism and really have no idea what Big 12 basketball is all about but give us a youth and an energy that every day we walk out of practice and there are times that we say wow. And sometimes it's a really good wow and sometimes it's a really bad wow.

But only in that we know that we've got some more work to do and that we're thankful that we've got a couple of weeks before the season starts. But the challenging wow is how do we keep these five that have never played together to gel and to mold and to do the things that we need them to do.

We've got our challenges on the inside as far as lack of experience on the interior. Kara Richards, I really think is our leader right now. She's our strength. She's the one that the players turn to.

She's the one that they look up to and they listen to and fortunately for us she's saying all the right things and she's doing all the right things. And when you have a good leader on the floor in the first three years that we had Kara, Kara's personality is more of a pleaser.

She's one that takes care of people. She's one that coddles, she's one that makes sure that everyone is where they need to be on time. I think for the first time I've seen Kara really taking care of herself making sure that -- it's like an older brother

or older sister. I have to get all my stuff done before I start taking care of other people.

That's where she is right now. That's been the difference between her and our interior. We've got a true center. We have a center that loves to be around the basket, a center that loves to play with their back to the basket and extremely physical. We've got to keep her on the floor as most of you have seen her play she's pretty foul-prone and likes to mix it up a little bit but composure is going to be big for her.

Now, the players that we put around her, I think, Kara is going to be very pleased that she almost never, like Jackie McFarland did or some of the posts did in the past, can or will be able to have double coverage. We've got players that can score, shoot, put the ball to the floor and get to the rim and make Kara look very good.

That's the wow that we've seen these last couple of days in practice and that we're really excited about. Brittany Spears has returned, the one thing we talked about in postseason meetings with her is when you're a freshman, the hardest thing is to come back after averaging 13 1/2 points, seven and a half rebounds and repeat that your sophomore year.

But she has come in. We scrimmaged yesterday and that's exactly what she came up with -- eight rebounds, 14 points, and she's returned better than we anticipated. So she's in the mind-set where she knows she's got to take her game to another level.

Some of the newcomers, Kelly Jo Mullaney, player out of Minnesota is a true warrior and a player that spent the year with us last year and her redshirt year and saw glimpses of it, but knowing how difficult a redshirt year is, has some challenges sitting out but has come back every day in practice and proven why she's one of the toughest players that are going to play at Colorado from a mentality standpoint.

She's physical. She's aggressive, and she's just got a lot to her game that's truly going to help us. Bianca Smith has returned, good condition, three-point shooter, gives us depth and range. Another newcomer Alyssa Fressle, Player of the Year, Gatorade Player of the Year in Colorado. Felt very good about her commitment to Colorado. Came, spent the summer with the players, went to summer school. Did a great job and has jelled in every aspect of her game and has really added to this team.

So right now we feel like we've got about seven players that we could potentially start. I

wouldn't prototype anyone into a position with the exception of Kara. But we just know that we're going to put five players on the floor that can score, five players on the floor that can make plays and we're going to put some basketball players out there that are going to put us in a position to win.

We're really excited coming in, but lots of challenges. And as coaches this is what's fun. This is what you love. You've got to find a way to get this group exactly where you need them. The one thing about this team that I don't have to worry about is the chemistry on and off the floor. It's very good. And that starts with the leadership of Kara.

So that's very exciting for us. The schedule, non-conference schedule, going back to Virginia, I've played there back in the late '80s and so I'll return there for the first time as a coach or the first time in Charlottesville as a player. We've got Minnesota coming to our tournament, playing against Hawaii and Pepperdine in the Hawaii tournament at Seton Hall.

We've got a tough non-conference schedule but most of us know the non-conference schedule is about wins and making sure everybody builds and gets better, because come January we know what's around the corner in the Big 12 and we know what that's all about.

So for me and our staff, it's been a challenging off-season in that we went into the season feeling one way about who was going to lead this team, who our point guard was going to be and right now it's a totally different look and the biggest challenge is right now depth, not necessarily position.

But it's an exciting team and one I think our fans are going to definitely love to watch.

PETER IRWIN: Questions.

Q. Wonder if you could expand a little on Kara when she had the injury situations and then you said personality in some ways, has it been conducive sometimes for what a center has to be, but there's a history in this league of players really coming around their senior year and having the best year of their career. Does she have a chance to do that this year?

COACH MCCONNELL-MILLER: Kara and I have talked about this. Her freshman year she and Jackie played side by side. So they basically mirrored each other their freshman year with points and rebounds. And then my first year Kara was hurt. So Jackie emerged as the go-to player in a

very, very short time averaging 17 or 18 points.

So I think that personality that we're talking about where -- I love having unselfish players, but that year that she came back, which was my second year, was almost detrimental to Kara's development in that she wanted what was best for Jackie. She wanted Jackie to be successful and she was supportive and did everything, where now you take Jackie out of the equation and I'm seeing what we saw her first year. I'm seeing a leader. I'm seeing a player that finishes, a player that huddles them up, a player that not only takes care of themselves but takes care of what she needs to take care of on the floor and really communicates that to some of the younger players.

As good as Alyssa Fressle is, as good as Kelly Jo Mullaney is or Brittany Spears, they still look to her for guidance. And this is the first year I actually hear her as opposed to walking over pulling them aside. It's a leadership that she's not afraid to give anymore.

And as far as coming in her senior year, she knows what this team needs of her and that unselfish side of her says that's what I'm going to give.

Q. Talk about what you're going to need from Bianca and Brittany this year.

COACH MCCONNELL-MILLER: Well, like I said, with Whitney Houston out of the equation, our biggest concern at that spot, what Whitney brought was, of course, her ability to run the point guard spot. But is depth, whether it was Britney Blythe backing her up or Kelly Jo Mullaney or Melissa Fressle, there was so much depth.

Now we're looking at these book ends we're looking at Brittany Spears who can shoot the three. She can go off the bounds. She can do a lot of great things. You've got Bianca Smith who has elevated her game where she was great for 16 minutes a game. Now we feel like we're going to use her 20 to 24 minutes a game. So they stretched things so much. There's no way that teams can play us and not guard either one of them.

And a lot of times it was either Brittany or Bianca on the floor so their best defender would match up with one of them. With both of them on the floor, you really have to guard them. Their shooting percentage, the amount of shots they get up in a night when Coors is shut down and they're coming in, turning the lights on is astronomical.

They get in the gym more than any two players I've seen as far as shooting the balls and

getting a lot of reps in. So they have to be guarded, which is going to allow Kara single coverage. It's going to allow Kara really some movement on the block and our offense. A lot of times whether we start that way finish it that way or see it a great deal, we're going to have four guards on the floor a great deal of the time.

So I think having those two on the floor is really going to stretch defenses. A lot of players that don't shoot the ball as well the ability to penetrate. It's going to allow Kara and any other interior players the ability to do some things on the block that in the past they've doubled Jackie and pulled off some players, whether it was Whitney Houston, whether it was Hannah Skildum, they pulled off players and Jackie was constantly double covered. That was our objective from last year to this year is to put five players on the floor that can score so that does not happen.

PETER IRWIN: Thank you, Coach.

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