

October 21, 2009



An interview with:

COLORADO
COACH KATHY MCCONNELL-MILLER

PETER IRWIN: Coach, your comments, and then we'll take questions.

COACH MCCONNELL-MILLER: Well, first of all, I am sitting here today feeling very good about the past six months. It's probably been the most productive six months or six months of an off-season that I've experienced in my head coaching career.

Last year clearly was a difficult finish for us in a conference that we all know is the strongest conference in the country. However, these young ladies have responded both on the floor and off the floor.

The commitment to becoming physically better, mentally tougher, more skilled, and more focused over the past six months has proven to be a result of, first and foremost, a tough season. And the leadership of some women in our program that have decided that this is the year that they were going to make a difference.

They spent the last six months in Boulder, summer school. We had two players play internationally. They became more aware of what it takes to compete in the Big 12. Their experience has shown these past three days in practice, four days in practice, and right now, again, I just sit here feeling very good about the young ladies that have come to Boulder to compete and make this program a national program.

I brought Brittany Spears with me today. Brittany is a player that two years ago, I couldn't even hear her on the floor. The only way I knew she was on the floor is if she scored or made a great stop. Right now she is one of the most vocal players in our program. It goes to show what two years and what experience and what the development of a player can do.

Overall, we're a very different team as a result of our strength and conditioning program. We have a new strength and conditioning coach. His name is James Hardy. I think his overall focus was, of course, getting stronger, of course being able to run faster, become more explosive. But to gain a mental toughness about these players that, when the game's on the line or situations arise, that they are able to fight through and become better in situations that we've struggled in the past.

Off the floor, academically, we have just shone in the classroom. We have extremely bright young ladies that continue to grow on and off the floor.

My experience this past two months, the month of September and October, has been a very positive one in that recruiting was fairly -- or for the most part finished, and I didn't have to spend too much time on the road. So I had the opportunity to spend time with the players in all of the four-on-ones or the team workout, we had every coaching staff present. It shows the commitment level of our staff and the commitment level of these players that we are -- we were not where we wanted to be, and we know where we want to be at this point.

When you have the unity and the chemistry that this team has shown, that's the reason I'm as excited as I am about this upcoming season. We've got a great nonconference schedule. We've got Virginia coming in. We've got Seton Hall. Of course we have our own holiday tournament. But we've got a very, very strong nonconference schedule that we feel like will prepare us for the Big 12.

Feel like the Big 12 is different this year than it's ever been. Just the makeup of teams, the graduation of players and the addition of some great players is very exciting. We need to be deep in this conference.

Over the past four years at Colorado, we have been very front-court oriented, and we've been dominated by bigs, and our point production has mostly come from the interior.

This team is very different. Whitney

Houston has returned after her injury and has come back with a sense of purpose and with the ability to lead this team where it needs to be at the point guard position.

We've got some incoming freshmen that we feel like can make an immediate impact. Chucky Jeffery is just a phenomenal player out of the Springs that we felt very fortunate to get, very highly recruited that we feel like will definitely give us the ability to play a little bit more up-tempo and of course give us some depth.

Some things we've struggled with in the past has been depth. With the strength in our backcourt right now, that's where the depth is coming from.

A couple of returners, Julie Seabrook, and of course I mentioned Brittany Spears, Bianca Smith, have come back more physically fit, ready to play, great conditioned.

And the chemistry between the newcomers, the newbies, as we call them, and our returners, which we feel like is a very experienced group as far as point production, minutes played, and being battle tested in the Big 12, feel like it's great chemistry amongst the players, and of course with our staff.

So it's an exciting time right now for Colorado basketball. We're ready to get started.

Last Friday could not have come soon enough. But after five days of practice, it feels pretty good. It feels pretty good to be in my fifth season at a university and an institution that I love and hope to continue to build with players like Brittany Spears and Chucky Jeffery and Whitney Houston.

So for our perception and the way we feel right now, our best basketball is yet to come.

PETER IRWIN: Okay, Coach. We'll take questions from the floor.

Q. Can you talk about just, especially with your freshman class, the size that you're bringing in, what that will contribute.

COACH MCCONNELL-MILLER: Well, I think, if you look at our freshman class -- I'll start with the tallest, and that would be Melissa MacFarlane at 6'7". She is very long. She's very good north to south. She's good around the rim. She just gives us the interior presence that, if we need to be big, she takes up a lot of space.

She has improved considerably. She came to Boulder a week after her high school graduation, spent the entire summer on campus

trying to elevate her game, and hopefully be able to contribute this year as a freshman.

The twins out of Boulder, Brenna and Meagan Malcolm-Peck are two that stand about 6'2" and about 6'4", 6'5" in length. Extremely long and extremely versatile. Megan is one that has just come in right away and shown that she is ready to play at this level. She is a player that you will see play anywhere from the two to the five spot, depending on our opponents and depending on the tempo or what the situation calls for. But I would say describing Megan and Brenna as extremely versatile.

Kailah Bailey is one that we signed late. After last season, the rebounding was something our staff identified as an immediate need for somebody to go to the rebounds, go to the boards, get putbacks, defend on the interior, and her athleticism and her energy and just her bounce and what she brings, we feel like she can contribute this year as well.

The most highly touted was probably Chucky Jeffery, and she, I would say, rivals Brittany Spears when she was coming out of high school, as far as the talent level. She's a player that probably has played against boys or guys in her life more than she's competed against girls.

She grew up in a neighborhood where she was consistently playing at the rec or playing at the park. She can play anywhere from the point to the three, and at this point proves to be probably one of our best defenders.

But they do bring great size, and they bring a great deal to the table as far as -- I was talking a little bit earlier. They're the types of players that sometimes when you have returners and they make mistakes, they sort of dwell on them or they feel -- they start to internalize things. Freshmen don't do that. This class does not do that at all.

They make mistakes. They don't even know they're making mistakes. They're having fun out there. They just keep playing. And they bring such a youth and energy about them that I think it's contagious because there are so many of them. It's just added for great practices.

Q. Kathy, talk about the mood in practices this year compared to last year with everybody back.

COACH MCCONNELL-MILLER: Well, I think -- I know we've talked about this a great deal, but when we had finished in the Final Four, the

WNIT in our third year, and we were planning for our future, we were planning for the very next year. We knew we were going to be without Jackie McFarland, but we did not know that Aija Putnina would turn pro, we did not know that Whitney Houston would tear her ACL.

So we're coming into that season losing three starters. One of course we knew about and had the opportunity to recruit and replace. Two we did not. So there was a great concern about who was going to fill certain positions and voids and where the rebounding was going to come from, who was going to be our point guard.

There were so many uncertainties that we were working through as a staff and the players were working through additionally. This year we don't have a lot of uncertainties.

I think if you were to ask Brittany or some of the players who your point guard is or who is your go-to player or what style of player are you going to play, are people going to be able to press you, defensively what is your philosophy, when you have a group that you've been working with and the confidence is there, the ability is there, then you can continue to build on that.

So the mood is exceptional. They're the most competitive practices that we've had. Even though we have players that have sort of set themselves into their roles and their positions, it's fun. It's competitive.

When I walk into practice and Brittany Spears is smiling and she's getting steal after steal and she's scoring and she's talking to freshmen and putting her arm around Chucky Jeffery trying to talk her through some things, and Whitney Houston is high-fiving Melissa MacFarlane, there's such a positive energy that makes you want to come to practice and do more.

Additionally, there's players coming in watching film. There's players wanting to get extra shooting. Those are things that we haven't had so much in the past because there's been uncertainty.

Right now there's just a great vibe in practice. And I have to thank my players for the last six months and their commitment to our program and what they continue to bring.

PETER IRWIN: Coach, thank you very much for your answers and your comments. Best of luck to you through the season.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports