

Sports

Buescher Leaves UCSB for Personal Reasons

■ Basketball Star Chooses Lower Profile and Closeness to God; Transfers From UCSB

By BRIAN CHONG
Staff Writer

There is a saying which states, "you never know what you have until you lose it." More often than not, that is the case. However, the UCSB women's basketball team, coaches and players knew that was far from the case when 6'3" senior Erin Buescher announced she was leaving UCSB and the basketball team she helped lead to many glorious moments to transfer to The Master's College in Santa Clarita, Calif., on Sept. 14.

From the moment Buescher committed to playing for the Gauchos, the entire team and coaching staff immediately realized what they had: a three-time Big West Player of the Year, Women's College Basketball Player of the Year according to the Women's Basketball News Service, UCSB's all-time leading scorer in three seasons with 1,697 points and a leader on and off the court by way of word and action.

Buescher helped guide the Gauchos to a record of 83-14 over the past three seasons, including three Big West Championships, three Big West regular season titles and three consecutive NCAA tournament appearances. Last year, the Gauchos posted a 26-game winning streak, a school record, which was snapped in the first round of the NCAA tournament.

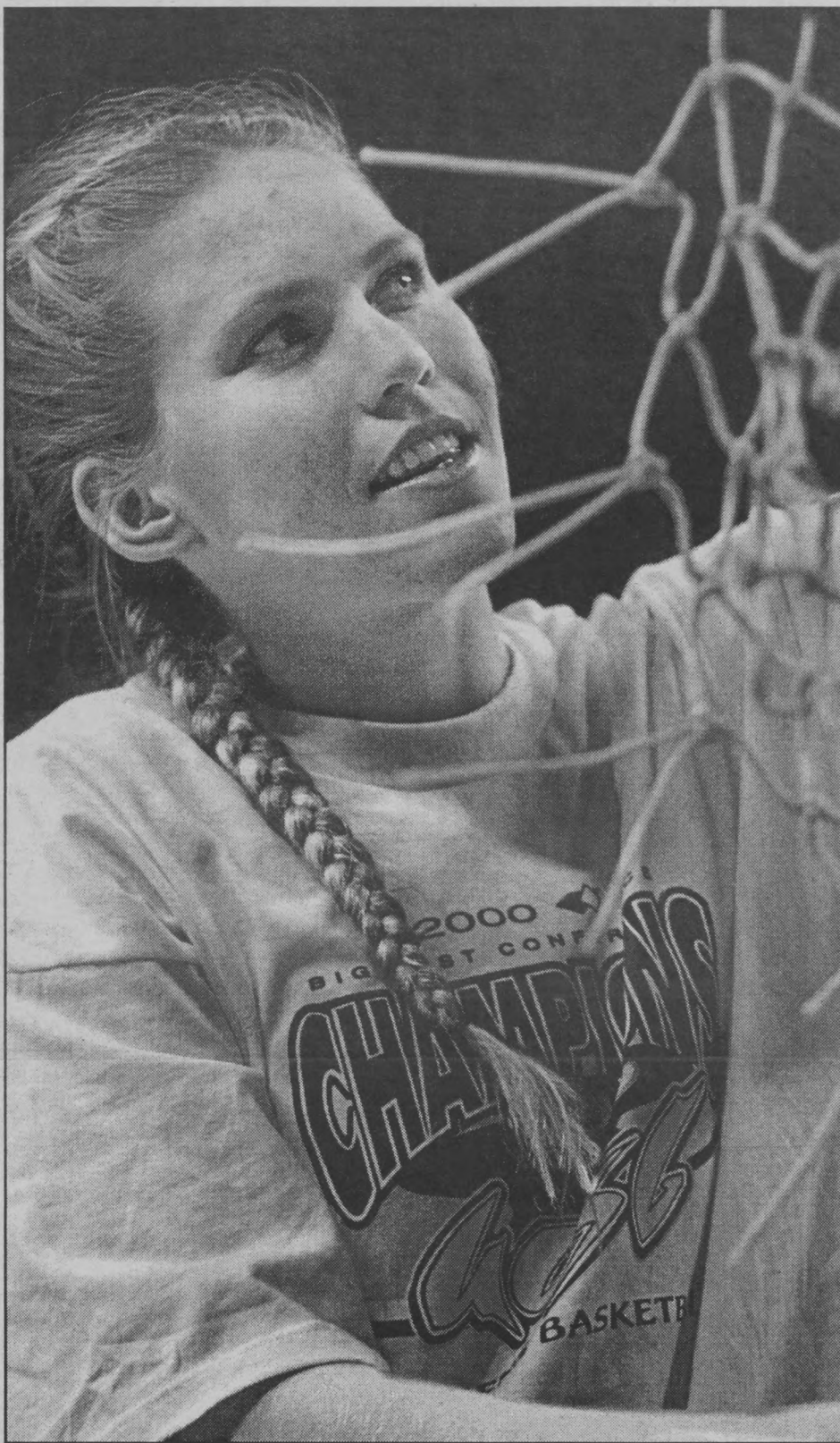
UCSB women's basketball Head Coach Mark French stated, "My personal thoughts are dominated by two feelings: gratitude and sadness. Gratitude for everything Erin has given to our program, university and local community for the past three years, both on and off the court. Sadness, because I won't have the privilege of experiencing Erin's presence in my life on a daily basis."

With so much Buescher has accomplished and with the impact she has made and inspiration she has placed in the lives of others, people are asking why. Why is the three-time Big West Player of the Year leaving? Why is she leaving behind the opportunity to dominate once again in her last year at UCSB? And why is she foregoing the numerous opportunities awaiting her after her UCSB career if she continued to play for the Gauchos?

Buescher did not leave UCSB to play for a higher ranked team in the ESPN/USA Today Top 25.

As a matter of fact, her decision to leave was not due to any reasons dealing with her basketball career, but for personal reasons regarding her Christian faith, which compelled her to leave for a small Christian college. A dilemma between her commitment to a strong basketball program at UCSB and her commitment to God led her to sacrifice the game of basketball at a Division I school, which has played a great part in her life here at Santa Barbara.

Gary Cunningham, athletic director for UCSB, stated, "I know Erin's decision to leave the program was based on strong religious convictions and her desire to attend a small Christian college."



JASON SCHOCK / DAILY NEXUS

Erin Buescher celebrates the women's basketball Big West title last year by cutting off a souvenir. In Buescher's absence a repeat performance will pose a greater challenge for the Gauchos.

This decision was not the first time Buescher has made a surprising move due to her strong beliefs in Christianity. During her high school years, before she attended Rincon Valley Christian High

School, her presence was felt at Rancho Cotate High School, which had a stronger

basketball program.

The head coach for Rincon Valley Christian High School said, "I talked with her Sunday night, and she felt in her heart that God was leading her to a Christian college so she could study the Bible the way she wanted."

Whatever the case, the UCSB women's basketball team was shocked to hear the news, especially because there was no sign or forewarning of this decision. This past week, the team was in Europe for a basketball tour, in which Buescher participated. Ironically, Buescher was attending classes at The Master's College a few days later.

"Erin has always been a very giving

person, and there are times when you can't give anymore," senior Nicole Greathouse, Buescher's closest friend on the team, said. "You have to start worrying about yourself."

What seemed to be rumors and a miscommunication at first has become a reality for the UCSB women's basketball team and the community of Santa Barbara. With Buescher gone, transferring to The Master's College, graduate Stacy Clinesmith drafted to the WNBA, and graduate Kristi Rohr moving on to play for a Greek professional team, the Gauchos have found themselves with a ten-player roster for the season, which includes four freshmen.

Although Buescher's decision to leave the UCSB basketball program will be a major loss and setback, the Gauchos will have to regroup and contend for yet another spot in the NCAA tournament with what they have.

John Wooden, the Wizard of Westwood, once stated, "I would rather be a nobody in this fleeting world to be a somebody in God's Hall of Fame." This news may be surprising and shocking, but to Buescher, basketball is only a game and not a top priority compared to her faith in God.

■ Erin Buescher Decides to Keep the Faith, and Dish the Ball to The Master's College

MATT HURST

I saw a shirt once that said, "Basketball is life. The rest is just details." For some reason, I don't necessarily agree with that shirt anymore and neither does Erin Buescher.

Buescher, the best women's basketball player ever to grace this campus, has left UCSB students, teammates, fans and faculty stunned with her decision to attend The Master's College in Santa Clarita. Buescher said her reason for leaving was to be closer to God at the Christian campus; she will now have the ability to do so.

Being the UCSB basketball fan that I am, this loss was particularly hard to swallow. When I first heard the news I thought my friend was joking. But, there is no joke to this; no punch line coming at the end of this column. "What will happen to the Gauchos this year?" is all I kept thinking.

But in the whole scheme of things, the loss of Buescher is easy to understand. If you weren't happy doing something you were supposed to love, would you quit doing it? Probably.

All the signs pointed to Buescher leading Santa Barbara to another Big West Championship, pulling off a four-year sweep of the Big West MVP award, becoming an All-American again and then going to the WNBA to become a star player. None of that can happen now and Gaucho fans everywhere are shaking their heads.

But, everything will be OK. The Gauchos will do fine this year and Buescher can finally be happy.

You might be thinking, "How stupid. How could she do that to us?" Well, UCSB, how could you do that to her?

She wanted to be known and loved as a person, not a star. That didn't happen.

She didn't want to be in the limelight. Hard to do when you are in the Top 25.

She wanted to be close to God and practice her very strong religious beliefs, next to impossible living in Gomorrah (known to many as I.V.).

Things from this end looked to be fine with Buescher. She had a continuous smile on her face. She was smiling on the court, smiling during interviews, smiling when you saw her on campus. Yet, inside, Buescher wasn't as happy as she appeared, and stunned her teammates by announcing her leave when she did.

The team just returned from Europe on a game-playing tour, and no one could have expected this.

She will play at The Master's College, and as long as UCSB's biggest star is happy, that is something that should make us all happy.

You rooted for her on the basketball court. Now, suck it up and root for her on her court of life.

Matt Hurst is a former Daily Nexus editor in chief.

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Season Opener

GaUCHO Spikers Off to Blazing Start Humbling 6 of 8 Teams

By BRIAN CHONG
Staff Writer

After posting a 29-6 record during the '99 season, the UCSB women's volleyball team is off to another impressive start with its current record standing at 6-2. With the season starting back in the beginning of September, the Gauchos have been on the road for all of their games, sweeping three of the first five teams they faced.

The Gauchos finished ninth in the rankings during the '99 season, but now find themselves ranked 14th to start the 2000 season. The drop in rank is no worry as Santa Barbara again expects to dominate the Big West Conference, which is one of the nation's premiere volleyball conferences. With a solid mix of returning experienced players as well some new talented recruits acquired during the off-season, Santa Barbara is attempting to fill in the holes left by the loss of several core members of the team.

Trying to find talent to match players such as Roberta Gehlke, who was one of the nation's top players, and Jutta Weissenborn, whom the Gauchos lost after she was accepted into pharmacy school in Germany, has been the task for Kathy Gregory, who is entering her 25th season as UCSB head coach.

Despite the loss, Gregory recruited two experienced players: 5'11" outside hitter Missy Blackshire from Capistrano Beach and transferring from Washington State, and 6'2" middle blocker Simone Kuhn from Switzerland. Also added to

the list of new recruits are five freshmen vying for spots in the starting rotation.

"Missy Blackshire is a proven player from a strong conference and brings experience and toughness to our program," said Gregory, the two-time Big West Coach of the Year. "With the loss of Gehlke and Charlene Conley on the outside, we needed someone with the experience of 30 to 40 swings per match. She is a very fluid athlete, very quick, and has great jumping ability."

"Simone Kuhn brings us great experience at the middle blocker position," Gregory added. "We are happy to sign her because she will come in and replace Jutta, who we were disappointed to lose after she was accepted into pharmacy school."

The new and returning players, such as Freshman of the Year outside hitter Brooke Niles and 1998 Big West Freshman of the Year setter Brooke Rundle, will create the chemistry for this season.

"I think after losing Roberta and Jutta, we have big roles to fill, but with some of the new players coming in, they have a lot of talent, and we still have a good shot of being dominant," Niles said. "We need to work on ball control as a team because we lost a lot of that last year. But we have been having very good practices and are doing really well as a team."

After a long road trip, the Gauchos are home and preparing to take on Long Beach State and the University of Pacific, two of the top teams in the Big West, this weekend in the Thunderdome.

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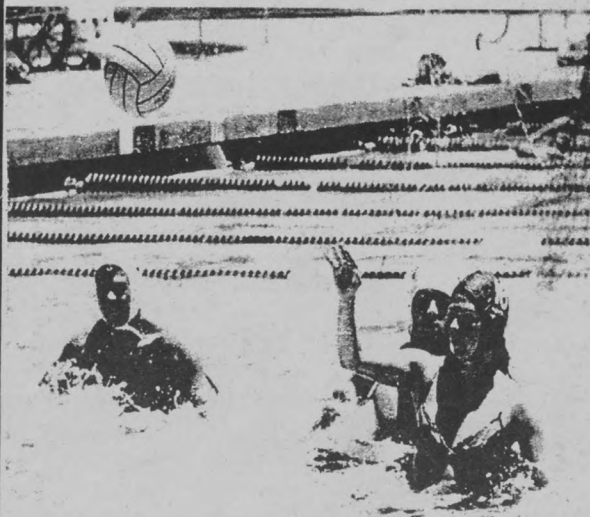
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UCSB Soccer Aims to Surpass Last Year's Impressive Record Without Key Players

BY BRIAN CHONG
Staff Writer

Back in 1998, the UCSB men's soccer team appeared to be ready for a long stage of rebuilding after posting the worst record in school history, 2-17-1. Rebuilding is accurate, but a long period of it is far from what the '99 squad proved after turning its record around to 13-7-0, the best record since 1988.

Much of the improvement has been credited to UCSB Head Coach Tim Vom Steeg, who is entering his second season at UCSB after coaching across town at SBCC for several years. Vom Steeg, who was named Mountain Pacific Sports Federation co-coach of the year, returned to his alma mater and improved the Gaucho squad by recruiting several players, adding to the talented yet inconsistent team.

"We brought in a new batch of young exciting players," Vom Steeg said. "I think with the new guys and the older guys we can be even more dangerous as long as we put the fundamentals together."

After a much-improved season last year, the Gauchos are well into another season attempting to match if not surpass last season's results. Starting their season at the beginning of September, the Gauchos find themselves at the .500 mark with a record of 3-3 beating Valparaiso, Western Kentucky and Kentucky, and losing to San Jose State, Westmont and Cal. Yet the team has already faced several setbacks that will force it to make some adjustments throughout the season.

The first scare for the Gauchos came during their match against crosstown rival

Westmont. Senior forward Thiago Martins suffered a concussion and missed the match against Cal. Martins leads the team in scoring this season with four points, and is questionable for this weekend's matches.

If one scare wasn't enough for the Gauchos, they were faced with another, which created a permanent hole in the lineup. Senior defender and co-captain A.J. Albertalli is out for the remainder of the season after receiving multiple stress fractures to the face and a concussion during a corner kick collision against Cal.

"[Albertalli] got hammered while clearing a ball," Vom Steeg said. "He has three broken bones in his cheek and a concussion. He's big time done. ... This poses problems for the rest of the year because we relied on him to win everything in the middle."

This season, the Gauchos will not have the luxury of a consistently solid lineup, especially with the plague of injuries to the players. Vom Steeg mentioned he will have to juggle the lineup this year because of the loss of several key players. "The big difference this year is that teams that used to take us lightly aren't doing that anymore, and they are preparing for us. With the loss of two solid players, we have to find out what our lineup is going to be," he said.

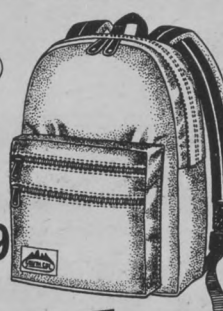
Undoubtedly, the Gaucho squad has improved itself over the past two years and with the 27-man lineup threat under Vom Steeg, excitement is no question. UCSB will be battling Oregon this Friday at Harder Stadium and then is traveling south to match up against UCLA, previous national champions.

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