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HEADLINE: Air Force remains hopeful among the bleakness

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BODY:

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. — She's been in the NCAA Tournament as a player and coach, most recently as an assistant with Vanderbilt, which reached the final 16 of last year's tournament.

And Robyne Bostick is in not one, but two halls of fame, one for Philadelphia, and the other at her alma mater of St. Joseph's University.

She's also played professionally in Europe, logging time with the Walferdange team in Luxembourg.

But Bostick has gone from the national stage, to the international arena of women's basketball, to where she is now: basketball purgatory.

Bostick is an assistant women's basketball coach at the Air Force Academy, a program that has struggled to win a handful of games each season since moving to Division I in 1996. Air Force is 20-94 in a little more than four seasons, including this year's 2-6 mark.

"I thought this would be a great opportunity to move up to coach and recruit in a different part of the country," Bostick said. "At Vanderbilt the program was pretty well established. Coming here, it was a good chance to try and build something and have more input and put a mark on the program."

For someone who has known nothing but success in her career, Bostick remains hopeful, despite the bleak short-term outlook for the Falcons. Considering the difficulty of its schedule, Air Force may struggle to win five games.

"The Mountain West is a competitive conference," Bostick said. "It's definitely not on the same level of the SEC (Southeastern Conference), but this is just a matter of getting our team to compete at a higher level. We want to get to .500. And we hope to be more competitive in the conference. Then, it's the next step."

That's a lot of steps for a program that has had its feet planted firmly in the cellar. But don't try and sell Bostick on that logic.

"I think it can happen," Bostick said. "We don't want to be content being at the bottom of the conference. It might take a year or two, but we want to be competitive."

Bostick also doesn't buy into blaming the program's lack of success on the Academy's rigid and lofty academic standards.

"We have the same kind of academic standards that Vanderbilt, Stanford and Notre Dame have," Bostick said. "We all recruit kids who set high goals for themselves. We have good upperclass leadership and some good players. But our freshman class this year is the real

beginning of that in terms of the turnaround process and having the basketball background we need."

If the Falcons are to move to the next level, Bostick knows the very culture within and surrounding the team will have to change.

"A lot of it is the mentality, because the Air Force Academy women's basketball program hasn't won at this level," Bostick said. "We have to change the way the kids think. We have to be competitive. And then we have to have the confidence to win those close games."

Air Force head coach Sue Darling is hoping that Bostick is able to instill some of that confidence and attitude and optimism to her team.

"She has truly been an asset to our program," Darling said. "She was an outstanding player, and has brought to our program knowledge of how to play the game. It is good for our players to be coached by her because she was such a good player.

"It is one thing to be a great player, but great players don't always make great coaches. Robyne has made the transition through her experience and ability to teach the game. She is a perfect fit for the Academy."

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