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## CU soccer sets sights high

Skyline star Marshall plots big season as kid sister comes along for the ride

*By Justin Williams*  
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BOULDER — Nikki Marshall needn't do any more. Her legacy at the University of Colorado is well established, and her name will forever be etched in the program's history.

But, entering her senior year with the CU soccer team, the former Skyline High School standout is more determined than ever to add one more piece of flair to her already-gleaming résumé.

"Realistically, I think we can win a Big 12 championship," Marshall said Saturday at CU media day. "It's been coming. We've gotten that much closer every year.

"I also think there's a good chance we can make it past the Sweet 16 (in the NCAA tournament). That's a huge goal for all of us."

Marshall — who holds six individual records at Colorado and will leave as "one of the most decorated players we've ever had," in the words of coach Bill Hempen — and her Buffs teammates will open the 2009 season August 22 against Oklahoma State with all the pressure and expectations to finally get over the hump.

In Marshall's first two seasons with CU, the Buffs reached the Sweet 16. Last year — with Marshall thousands of miles away, playing with the under-20 U.S. national team — Colorado (14-5-4, 6-2-2 Big 12) lost in the first round of the tournament, days after falling to Missouri in the Big 12 title game.

Frankly, Marshall is tired of that "on the cusp" label that's been placed on the Buffs every year she's been here.

"We lost six good seniors from last year, and now it's on us," Marshall said. "There's a ton of team pressure. We're expected now to do well in the playoffs. That was very disappointing last year, and we don't want to disappoint anyone again."

This year, Marshall finds herself with another added pressure: taking her little sister under her wing. Shaye Marshall joins the Buffs this year as a freshman, and Nikki said Saturday that Shaye, who also attended Skyline, has gone through some growing pains during the first week of her collegiate career.

"She's had her tough times, but she's slowly gaining confidence," Nikki said. "I think she kind of feels like she's here because she's my sister, and we talked about that before she committed. I was like, 'This is something you're going to have to deal with.' But she said, 'I really want to play with you and be part of this program that you've helped build.'"

And the local contingent at CU doesn't end there. Also on the pitch this year for the Buffs will be sophomore Kate Russell (Silver Creek) — who had 11 points last year — and freshman Lauren Shaner (Niwot).

Including that group, the 2009 Buffs are young, with just four seniors. But with Nikki devoting herself full-time to the Buffs this year after splitting time with the national team last season, she's in a much better frame of mind to lead.

Still, with that, she also has a name to live up to now — and that might be her biggest obstacle this season.

“I scored 17 goals my freshman year, and it’s only been going down as I go. I try to live up to those expectations, but it’s difficult,” said Nikki, who has alternated between forward and center-back during the past two seasons. “I want to be that kid that deserves to be on the national team, and (who) everyone respects because I do deserve to be there. I want people to think that I’m good enough to be there, and I want to play like I’m good enough to be there.

“But if there’s one thing I learned, I can’t do it alone. My teammates are behind me 100 percent, and that takes away a lot of pressure.”

Hempen told a story Saturday about how the national team coaches recruited Nikki to the under-20 team. He said they’d ask him about her skills and what she would be able to bring to the team.

“I said, ‘You have to be the judge of this kid, because I think if I put her in a lineup of skillful players, you probably couldn’t pick her out. But what she brings to the table is something you can’t describe,’” Hempen recalled.

Hempen said that two different national team coaches contacted him after just one week of watching Nikki at practice and said, “I have to have this kid.” She rewarded them by becoming one of only two players who played every minute of the U.S.’s run to the World Cup championship in 2008.

Hempen began to get choked up when he spoke Saturday about Nikki’s accomplishments and what she’s meant to the program. Needless to say, Nikki Marshall’s name won’t be forgotten around Boulder anytime soon.

“Her legacy here will live on, and I will use it as often as I can when I’m recruiting,” Hempen said. “She gave us one of her World Cup jerseys, and it’s hanging in my office. I find myself nodding toward it when talking to kids and saying, ‘This kid came from Mead, Colorado. She’s one of those special kids.’

“There’s a handful of those you have when you’re a coach, and Nik’s one of those that I’ll be telling stories about for a long time.”

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# Marshall leaving her mark at CU

## Senior hopes to help Buffs finish on high note this season

By Ryan Thorburn  
Sunday, August 9, 2009

BOULDER, Colo. — Not many coaches get choked up during their media day press conference.

But it isn't possible for Bill Hempen to answer questions about what Nikki Marshall has meant to the Colorado soccer program without getting emotional.

Even when the Buffs' star is sitting right next to him happy, healthy and ready to play every minute of her senior season for him.

"Nikki is going to be one of those players that I will be telling stories about for a long time," Hempen said during Saturday's media day at the Dal Ward Center.

Marshall (76 career points) enters her final collegiate season ranked third on CU's all-time scoring list behind Fran Munnelly (84 points, 2002-05) and Katie Griffin (78 points, 2003-06). Last season the Mead legend scored eight goals, including four game-winners, to help lead the Buffs back into the NCAA Tournament.

An otherwise impressive 14-5-4 campaign ended in bitter disappointment as the Buffs were upset 1-0 by South Dakota in the first round. Marshall, who was unable to be a part of CU's postseason due to her commitment to the U20 national team, was as stunned to learn of the result as the six outgoing seniors who experienced the punch-to-the-gut defeat.

"I was at the (U20) World Cup and I remember we filled out some brackets, just for fun, and I put my team all the way through to the championship game and said we were going to win," Marshall said. "I truly believed with my whole heart that we could make it that far, and it was pretty disappointing when I heard.

"I don't know whether or not I could have made a difference. It just killed me. I think it drove us hard in the offseason for sure."

Practices for the 2009 season are already underway, which means Hempen and his staff have started putting together a new puzzle after losing Michelle Wenino, Alex Cousins, Nikki Keller, Gianna DeSaverio, Kirstin Radlinski and Amber Bettenhausen to graduation.

Sophomores Kelly Butler (13 points) and Kate Russell (11 points) return to the starting lineup, along with defender Caroline Danneberg and goaltender Kara Linder.

"Watching how disappointed the seniors were last year after losing in the first round to South Dakota

and knowing that we were going to be seniors next year definitely drove us," Linder said. "We want to be leaders on the team and strive for more."

Marshall was one of only two members of America's U20 World Cup championship team to play every minute of every game. She will be a marked woman this fall, but Hempen says that won't slow CU's best player down.

"We have some other players that a lot of other people don't know about. No one knew about Nikki, so she was able to kind of go under the radar her freshman year and kind of blow people out of the water," Hempen said. "The good news is I think there are other really good players on our team who will have opportunities. And she's a senior and she won't stop. I've seen her beat two and three players. So if they want to put two defenders on her, go ahead, she'll beat them too."

CU's roster includes seven freshmen, including midfielder Shayelyn Marshall. Yes, she's Nikki's sister.

"I think it's going to be an incredible experience," Nikki Marshall, who played with Shayelyn for one season at Skyline High School, said of being on the same team as her sister again. "Family is my backbone."

Per usual, Hempen has loaded CU's schedule with some of the best programs in the country, including a brutal three-game stretch against potential top 10 teams in Florida, Stanford and Santa Clara.

And it's already obvious that senior day on Oct. 20 is going to get emotional when Nikki Marshall plays at Prentup Field for the final time.

"Nikki will leave here certainly as one of the most decorated players we've had, but you'd be hard pressed to get her to talk about that," Hempen said. "Her legacy here will live on. And I use it as often as I can in recruiting."



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