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Marshall's law coming to an end

Nikki Marshall and close ones reflects on her career

By Esteban L. Hernandez on October 29, 2009

Nikki Marshall stood in a single line waiting in an underground concrete tunnel with her teammates from the Under-20 U.S. Women's National Soccer Team.

They were surrounded by the thunderous voices of almost 70,000 souls who were chanting outside the walls, eager like spectators before a gladiator duel. Although she probably didn't hear it, her black leather cleats made a small ticking sound as she began ascending the stairs into the largest stadium in South America.

Walking beside her, in the iconic yellow jerseys made famous by the men's national team, were the Brazilian Women's National Team.

Marshall remembers the final seconds before she stepped onto the pitch in Brazil, participating in the gold medal match of the 2007 Pan American Games.

"I remember we lined up and the Brazilians we're screaming and yelling," Marshall laughed. "You know, those girls are intimidating. They were standing side-by-side waiting to go out, and I was just like, 'Oh my God.' I was so scared, so scared."

The world stage

Although they didn't beat Brazil, the forward first got her first taste of international competition. There was little doubt she didn't enjoy the taste.

A year later, Marshall participated as a defender in the 2008 FIFA U-20 Women's World Cup in Chile. She started in all six games, including the championship game, which the U.S. team won 2-1 over North Korea.

The 21-year-old Colorado Buffaloes senior and Colorado native recalls the odd feeling of the days after she returned home a world champion.

"For a month of my life we were in Chile," Marshall said. "We talked about games every day. It was the World Cup! I was getting e-mails from family, from home, from people who were following us. Then when I came here, it was like that was it. It was kind of like I was just living in this other world for a while and then it just ended. It was weird."

Mike Marshall, Nikki's father, attended every game in Brazil. However, he was unable to attend the games in Chile because of travel difficulties. His daughter's accomplishments in South America and throughout still leave him searching for words.



On Oct. 10, 2008, Colorado forward Nikki Marshall dodges Texas' Erica Campanelli. Marshall's successful years will come to a close at the end of this season. (CU Independent file/William Drumm)

"It was so far beyond our expectations," Marshall said. "We are just amazingly proud. Words cannot describe it."

Alongside the seemingly endless accolades she's earned through her play in her four-year collegiate career, Nikki Marshall's honor as a true world champion stands as something her fellow students may not be able to comprehend because of the lack of attention for soccer at CU.

But for Nikki Marshall, any recognition is gratifying.

Nikki Marshall recounted a day when she was juggling a soccer ball in the CU Recreation Center.

"Some kid came up and said 'Can I juggle with you?'" Marshall said. "I was like sure. So we got to talking and he was like, 'Oh my gosh, you're Nikki Marshall!' That kind of thing is so cool for me because I don't expect people to know me."

There have been three athletes from Colorado who have been called up for national soccer team duties: Nikki Marshall, Fran Munnely in 2004 and Katie Griffin in 2006.

Bufs head soccer coach Bill Hempen coached all three and if the pattern repeats itself, he said he would like a fourth player to join this trio in 2010.

"You don't come across a kid like that that often," Hempen said. "You have one in every cycle of classes. Basically that's the way it's happened — Fran, Katie and Nikki. They have kind of overlapped each other a little bit, so we hope that there is one out there in this group."

Nikki Marshall, who arrived at Colorado in 2006, said the experiences from the stadiums in South America to the grasses of Prentup Field have helped her mature.

"I've grown in my confidence," Marshall said. "I've gotten to travel internationally with the national team, which has been an amazing experience. I've grown so much from that as a player and as a person."

Hempen has witnessed Nikki Marshall's growth and said she's come far.

"She couldn't do an interview four years ago," Hempen joked. "She didn't have much to say. So she's grown as a person, certainly with all of her experiences not only here but internationally."

A record career

Hailing from Mead, Colo., Nikki Marshall said she didn't come to CU expecting to break school records.

"I think I came in with pretty low confidence," Marshall said. "I was living my dream when I came in to play [NCAA] Division I soccer. I thought that's what I always wanted to do and I didn't think I was ever going to get that opportunity, and thanks to Bill, I got that opportunity."

Nikki Marshall began playing soccer after she and her friends, who played basketball and softball together, decided they wanted to try something new.

Mike Marshall, who had coached his daughter at softball since the age of six, agreed to let her play.

"She was 11 when she first came to me and said, 'Our whole team wants to play soccer,'" Mike Marshall said.

According to Mike Marshall, his daughter's soccer debut was eye-opening.

"When she stepped on that soccer field I knew that was the game for her," Mike Marshall said.

Shaye Marshall, Nikki Marshall's younger sister, also plays soccer at Colorado. Shaye Marshall, who also plays forward, got a head start on her older sister. She started playing soccer at 7-years-old.

It's the second occasion the sisters have played alongside each other, with the other instance occurring in high school. The differences between then and now are clear, according to Shaye Marshall.

"It's definitely a lot different," Shaye Marshall said. "I get to see her more than I did because we practice every single day. The traveling trips are different. We get to hang out the entire weekend, so it's a lot of fun."

Shaye Marshall says her big sister is a role model because of her work ethic.

"I think that her hard work just really affects me," Shaye Marshall said. "Whenever she's working hard it makes me want to work harder."

Nikki Marshall said success begins with passion.

"I think that whatever you do in life you have to do with passion, and that will take you places you never thought you could go," Marshall said.

It's that mindset that has etched Nikki Marshall's name in Colorado's record books.

Nikki Marshall is Colorado's all-time leading goal scorer, finding the back of the net 41 times and counting as a Buff. She is also the sole owner of five individual season records, including points per game and game-winning goals.

And with the Big 12 Conference Soccer Championship tournament creeping in as the regular season comes to a close, there is still a possibility Nikki Marshall might pad her career stats and maybe break new records.

Nikki Marshall said her proudest accomplishment at CU was breaking the school record as the all-time points leader against Oklahoma.

"Just hearing them announce it was just, I don't know, it's just cool to have my name next to Fran Munnolley, who has been a legend here at CU," Nikki Marshall said. "That was pretty cool."

The legendary work ethic

When Shaye Marshall joined CU's soccer team this season, she decided to train alongside her sister.

"I trained with her this summer, and she will just go out and even if she doesn't have to, she's just going to kill herself to get in shape or to become better," Shaye Marshall said. "She's always working hard to become a better player."

Nikki Marshall's work ethic has become a source of inspiration for not only her younger sister, but also for her closest friend.

Mary White, a senior defender, said Nikki Marshall's determination is unmatched.

"She works harder than anyone I've ever met," White said. "She's also an incredible teammate. She pushes herself and pushes everyone else. She's so important to the team. She's an incredible leader."

The two met freshmen year while they were roommates in Andrews Hall. Since then, White said her admiration for Nikki Marshall has grown.

"I am incredibly proud of Nikki," White said. "She deserves everything she's gotten not only because of how she's [worked]

for everything, but because she is such an incredibly selfless person. Through all the recognition she's received, she has been very graceful."

Mike Marshall believes there is an added factor to his oldest daughter's tremendous success.

"I think it's just more her heart, her desire to be the best," Mike Marshall said. "I think it's what separates the best athletes from the great athlete. [To] have that mental desire, get up for every game and give 100 percent for every game, that is what she has that separates her."

Hempen has a similar explanation for Nikki Marshall's athletic prowess.

"You hear about heart, and desire, and all that stuff," Hempen said. "Some kids have it and some kids think they have it. She has it and doesn't know she has it. That's probably the thing that sets her apart."

For Nikki Marshall, finding inspiration for her abilities is simple.

"My family is my inspiration," Nikki Marshall said. "They are so supportive and you know they have been throughout my entire life. I think soccer is one thing I've really excelled at because [my father] pushed me and because my mom has been there as well."

Leaving the program as one of the most decorated athletes in school history will not be a simple task. White thinks that when Nikki Marshall departs, a part of her will remain.

"Even if she's not there, she's definitely left her mark on the program," White said. "All the girls that are younger will look up to her and [would like to] leave the team in the way that she has."

Nikki Marshall said she doesn't really know what kind of legacy she is leaving behind.

"I don't really comprehend that," Nikki Marshall said. "I can tell you the kind of legacy I would like to leave behind. I want to break the records, I want my name up on the board. At the same time, there is more to it than just stats. I want people to know that my work ethic is what got me there. I've played 100 percent every single game, every time I was on the field. I wanted to be out there."

Hempen said Nikki Marshall's growth is part of a cycle that all female athletes he has encountered experienced.

"When you get them, really, they're young girls," he said. "And when they leave, they are grown women. And she's not different than any of the others."

For Nikki Marshall, as the experience comes to a close, the nostalgia begins to surface.

"Walking out onto Prentup Field everyday and looking at those mountains is just something unbelievable that I don't think many people get to experience," Nikki Marshall smiled. "I love that part of it. I mean I'll miss everything about it. I'll miss my friends, the people that I have gotten to know here, the coaches, all of it."

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