

FSC Preview: Marshall keys Freedom turnaround

by WPS - Staff Report
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Since Nikki Marshall was re-inserted in the backline, the Freedom are unbeaten, going 3-0-2 over their past five games.

BRIDGEVIEW, Ill. (Sept. 3, 2010) – Sitting in the middle of the WPS Standings for much of the season, it should come as no surprise that the Washington Freedom (7-8-7, 28 points) are still fighting for a playoff berth with just two games left in the regular season. The Freedom can lock up a spot in the WPS Playoffs presented by MedImmune with a positive result against the Chicago Red Stars (6-11-6, 24 points) on Sunday on Fox Soccer Channel (6pm ET/3pm PT) plus a little help from Sky Blue FC.

After riding a rollercoaster full of ups and downs through the season's first four months including 10-game winless and five-game losing streaks, the Freedom are rounding into form. Since Aug. 1, the Freedom are unbeaten (3-0-2) and have allowed just two goals, which is quite a turnaround for a team who had allowed 20 goals up until that point.

What triggered the dramatic change? The re-insertion of Nikki Marshall into the backline. A 22-year-old rookie from the University of Colorado, Marshall had started the season in the defense but when the Freedom encountered a dry spell in the attack, she moved to forward. While she produced three goals, the Freedom defense crumbled and the team lost four straight games.

Overlooked in the balloting for WPS Rookie of the Year, Marshall is now solidifying a Freedom defense that will need to quell a Chicago Red Stars side that is looking to play the roll of spoiler.

Already eliminated from the playoff race and sitting in sixth place, the Red Stars had lost three straight games before blanking the Philadelphia Independence, 2-0, on Wednesday. While the Independence were still able to back into the playoffs, the loss dropped them into third place and gave the Boston Breakers the inside track to earn the second seed in the playoffs.

A Chicago victory on Sunday would guarantee that the battle between the Freedom and Sky Blue FC for the fourth and final post-season berth would come down to the regular season's final weekend. But if the Freedom win and the New Jersey side loses or ties against the Atlanta Beat, Washington will secure a spot in the playoffs. A Freedom tie and a Sky Blue FC loss would also accomplish the same feat.

Tune in to Fox Soccer Channel on Sunday at 6pm ET/3pm PT to see if the Freedom can continue their fine showing of late and punch their ticket to the playoffs.

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3:33 PM on September 4, 2010

It's good to see Marshall's talents and contribution to the team acknowledged. She is an awesome player and I enjoyed spending a moment with her at a FREEDOM event last week. McLeod, Harris and Asante should have also been formally recognized and put in the running for rookie of the year. GO FREEDOM!!

ksoccer

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5:36 PM on September 4, 2010

Yes, Marshall has done well since she was re-inserted into the back line, but what about Ashlyn Harris? The rookie has come in to post three shutouts in her short 8 game career and would have had 4 had Cat Whitehill not scored an own goal. If you have been to a game you can see that she directs the entire back line with military precision and her presence is felt all over the field. I have been very disappointed that

no one has given this player more credit as I feel she has stepped up and helped turn Washington's season around.

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