

Skyline grad Nikki Marshall on brink of another title

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There will be plenty of familiar faces on the other side for Nikki Marshall on Saturday evening.

But what the former Skyline and University of Colorado soccer star wants to accomplish, she wants with a brand new set of teammates.

The game has taken Marshall everywhere -- both nationally and internationally -- and the latest stop is Portland, where the Thorns FC are part of the National Women's Soccer League. In its expansion season (the league was also re-branded after the Women's Professional Soccer league folded), the Thorns have ridden the wave to the championship game off an 11-6-5 regular season record.

That match comes tonight, and for the Thorns as a team it is a promising event. However, it might carry deeper meaning for the former Falcon and Buff. She and the Thorns will be playing Western New York, the team Marshall won a championship with last year in the WPSL. Western New York also features one of Marshall's former CU teammates, Amy Barczuk.

"It's always fun to play your former team, and I have a lot of respect for everyone over there," Marshall said during a phone interview from Rochester, N.Y., the site of tonight's title game. "It's always fun to play against friends and people you know. I mean, Amy Barczuk, who I went to school with ... there are a lot of exciting things about this game."

Not only was Marshall part of the Flash's 2012 championship team, but she won MVP honors in the final as they defeated the Chicago Red Stars. But after four years on the East Coast -- she was drafted by the Washington team and has also played in Florida and Boston -- Marshall saw a couple of intriguing opportunities on the opposite side of the country.

"I'm such a homebody, I love my family and they're all in Colorado and one of the huge draws was being closer to them," she said, adding she still lives in Colorado in the offseason. "The Northwest has a completely different feel than the East Coast, one that I enjoy more and is more like Colorado."

"But the icing on the cake was, the allocation (part of the introduction of the new league), we got some incredible players I'd always wanted to play with, like Christine Sinclair and Rachel Buehler. It was a pretty easy decision."

Indeed, you may have heard of some of her other current teammates. Alex Morgan is the up-and-coming star of U.S. soccer, and fellow defender Buehler along with midfielder Tobin Heath were on the 2012 National Team Olympic Roster in London.

The chance to play alongside Sinclair, a Canadian star, is something Marshall has fully embraced.

"It's one thing to play with the U.S. National Team players because I've been playing with most of

them for the past four years, but to play with some international players like her is awesome," she said. "It's a little more unique."

Marshall may be known around CU nation for being the Buffs' all-time leading scorer (42 goals), but as a pro she has always played defense. She played defense a little bit in international competition and at the tail end of her CU stay, and she's regarded as an athlete that can play any of the back line positions. On the season, she has one assist with more fouls suffered than fouls committed -- always a sign of solid play.

After a stellar season, she hopes she has one more MVP-type performance in her for 2013, one that will have the Thorns boasting the top spot at the top level of women's pro soccer.

"I just think it's going to be a really good game," Marshall said. "We already played them twice in season and we tied both times. I think both teams are going to make some adjustments and be a little more attack-minded, since it is for a championship. A lot of attacking, more so than normal, but I also think there will be some solid defense."

The 6 p.m. game can be seen on Fox Sports 2 (DirecTV-618, DISH-398) or Fox Soccer (DirecTV-619, DISH-390).

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