



Hempen's squad to face new Marshall plan

CU star junior to miss four games, plus NCAA tourney

By Ryan Thorburn
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Bill Hempen knew it wasn't fair but viewed it as a valuable learning experience anyway.

One of the 14 freshmen on the Colorado soccer roster found herself face-to-face with Nikki Marshall during her collegiate practice debut.

"I felt bad for her because her first encounter was against Nikki," Hempen said at Thursday's media day event for CU's fall sports programs. "Nikki had three chances and scored three times on a drill designed for defending."

There is no question that Marshall -- who led the Buffs last season in scoring with 20 points (nine goals, two assists) -- is the program's marquee player.

But Hempen will not have the talented junior's services for four of CU's games this season.

Marshall will be leaving Boulder attimes this season to train with the U.S. under-20 national team in preparation for the U-20 FIFA World Cup in Chile on Nov. 19-Dec. 7.

Marshall returned to CU on Thursday after competing with the U-20 national team in England.

"She tried to get back here from England last night. She's the David Beckham of our program," Hempen said. "She has our full support. As a kid you don't get this opportunity very often. It's going to be taxing on her, but if there's a person who can do it it's Nikki."

Marshall will be working hard with CU's academic support staff to make sure she can stay on top of her class work while playing for the Buffs and practicing with the U-20 national team throughout the fall semester.

If CU makes its sixth consecutive NCAA tournament appearance, she will not be able to play due to her commitment to the U.S. squad.

The Buffs believe they will have the talent, depth and chemistry to execute an alternative Marshall plan when she does miss time.

"I think we all have to step up," senior defender Michelle Wenino said. "It's not one person that's going to make the difference. The more we play together the more successful we'll be."

While Marshall was representing CU on the national team in Mexico and Europe this summer, the rest of the Buffs were getting in the best shape of their lives under the guidance of strength and conditioning coach James Hardy.

On Wednesday night, Hempen put 25 players through his annual fitness test -- which usually determines how much running the team will do in preparation for the season -- and 22 of them aced the grueling exam.

"This spring we pushed ourselves harder than I had ever pushed myself before," said senior midfielder Alex Cousins, who was among the group lifting weights at 6:30 a.m. before hitting the field at 7:30 a.m. "We did everything that the football team was doing and we did it every day. ... And when you're killing yourself with all the other girls you develop a camaraderie."

CU opens the regular season on Aug. 22 against Florida at Prentup Field.

Sutherland returns

At the 2007 fall media day event, Pi'i Aiu said all of the right things. But CU's head volleyball coach wore disappointment on his face while reluctantly making the announcement that star outside hitter Amber Sutherland would miss the entire season with a serious shoulder injury.

Other key injuries would follow and the inexperienced Buffs finished with a painful 6-22 record, missing the NCAA tournament for the first time since 2002.

A year later, a much more upbeat Aiu expects things to turn around with Sutherland returning for her redshirt senior season. She was joined at the podium by senior middle blocker Lauren Schaefer, and the tandem expects to provide CU with a formidable 1-2 punch.

"Last year was very hard for us. It wasn't the greatest outcome," said Sutherland, who is just 98 kills from becoming the 13th player in program history with 1,000 career kills. "Watching my team and not being able to help them, other than being positive on the bench, was really hard. Watching them work so hard and not have the results ... mentally it took a toll on them."

Sutherland is still working her way back but from an ankle injury but says the shoulder is no longer a concern. Schaefer was fourth in the Big 12 in hitting percentage last season and should benefit from Sutherland's presence this season.

And Alex Blum, another senior, also returns after leading the Buffs with 333 kills in Sutherland's absence.

The Buffs play another difficult schedule but face three marquee non-conference opponents -- Colorado State, Florida and North Carolina -- at home in September on the new floor at the Coors Events Center.

Harriers motivated

Mark Wetmore did not show up for Thursday's cross country media day. He had a pretty good excuse. CU's head coach was in Beijing supporting senior-to-be Jenny Barringer as she prepares to represent the U.S. in the women's 3,000-meter steeplechase.

Former Buffs Kara Goucher (5,000 and 10,000-meters), Billy Nelson (3,000-meter steeplechase), Dathan Ritzenhein (marathon) and Jorge Torres (10,000-meters) will also compete in the Olympics.

"It's inspiring," junior Kenyon Neuman, one of the athletes Wetmore will be counting on in men's cross country this fall, said of CU's impressive representation on the world stage.

"It doesn't help in any immediate way, but it shows people in the program that they have the ability to make the Olympics or do well in the trials or do well professionally. It's definitely cool to watch your teammates compete at the

trials and the Olympics and setting records."

The Buffs have won all 12 Big 12 men's cross country titles and 11 of the 12 women's titles. But after sweeping the conference hardware again in 2007, the CU men were seventh and the women were 23rd at the NCAA championships.

That disappointing finish will serve as motivation this fall.

"Most teams would have been happy to have won both conference titles, and we were happy on that day," assistant coach Heather Burroughs said. "But three weeks later the wheels kind of came off and it made it hard to enjoy. ... Our goal, as usual, is to win the Big 12 cross country titles and to be a contender in the NCAA Championships."

CU loses All-Americans Stephen Pifer and Brent Vaughn on the men's side. Neuman and seniors Chris Pannone and Bradley Harkrader will attempt to lead a more balanced team back to glory.

"They always say you're as strong as your fifth man, and I think we have seven guys who could be interchanging positions," Pannone said. "Before we always knew Brent and Steve would be 1-2, so it makes everyone realize they might have to step up and be the top guy."

On the women's side, Barringer is obviously the face of the program. But junior Aislinn Ryan leads a talented group in her absence that also includes sophomores Laura Thweatt, Allison Eckert and Allison Sawyer.

"Every girl on the team is trying to bring us forward," Ryan said. "With Jenny in Beijing it just makes us want to work hard and make a stronger army to support her when she gets back."



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