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Worlds Apart

Silver Creek graduate Kate Russell is excelling as a freshman soccer player at CU, but her thoughts never stray too far from her father serving in Iraq

By Patrick Ridgell

Longmont Times-Call

BOULDER — Life's a blur for Kate Russell these days.

As a freshman at Colorado and a midfielder who plays every minute for the soccer team, Russell is finding the biggest adjustment to college life is time management.

Soccer and school fill her hours. Friends call, asking if she wants to go out, but Russell usually declines, saying she's going to finish her reading and go to sleep.

She couldn't attend the orientation meetings at her dormitory. She said she's only had the chance to walk around it once to meet neighbors. She didn't even know the dorm had a commons area until the other day, when she saw a group doing yoga in it.

When things finally subside each night, Russell, a Silver Creek High School grad, finds her thoughts drifting to her father. Capt. Gordon Russell is deployed to Multi-National Force-Iraq as a strategic intelligence officer. He left in April and won't return until next April.

He has missed seeing his daughter score Silver Creek's winning goal in the state title game last spring. He missed prom. He missed seeing Kate's club team, Colorado Rush, win regional and national championships. He missed seeing Kate score CU's first goal of 2008. He missed sending his girl off to college.

Kate Russell is OK with it.

"I know he's extremely good at his job," she said. "I'm happy that we have someone so confident doing things we need to get done. And I'm very proud of him for doing what he does. I just wish there was more of him to go around."

In an e-mail exchange with the Times-Call this week, Gordon struggled to say what it's like being away during this time in his daughter's life.

"I can't adequately describe the feelings, other than to say it is extremely difficult," he wrote.

Actually, he's not totally missing everything. He calls at least once a week. The Internet helps him track of Kate's deeds.

CU coach Bill Hempen said he's in the process of shipping him game tapes because the streamed matches sometimes look a little fuzzy.



Kate Russell, who was honored as the Times-Call All-Area Girls Soccer Player of the Year last spring, has carried her success over to the University of Colorado, where she has made an immediate impression as a starting freshman midfielder. **Morgan Varon/Times-Call**

A glance at Kate Russell, the soccer player:

College: University of Colorado freshman midfielder. ... Tied for CU's second leading-scorer entering weekend games

High school: 2008 Times-Call All-Area Girls Soccer Player of the year. ... Member of Silver Creek's 4A state championship team

Club: Member of Colorado Rush club team that won seven state titles from 2001-2008.

Gordon, in fact, was the one who told Kate about how she won the Big 12's Newcomer of the Week award on Sept. 2. He called with the news.

"Congratulations!" Gordon blurted out.

"Thanks dad. For what?" Kate answered.

"You haven't heard?"

"Ummm .. what?"

"You won Newcomer of the Week!"

Kate laughs when she recounts the conversation.

"That was cool," she said.

When Gordon returns, Kate will probably be a similar person to the one the father left at the security gate that day at Denver International Airport in April, where the family convened to send him off, not a dry eye to be found.

Gordon hugged his daughter. He told her he'd call, to have a wonderful time in school, that she'd do awesome.

Kate must've been listening. She entered this weekend's trip to Mississippi and Memphis as the team's second-leading scorer. She scored the winning goal in CU's conference opener against Texas Tech.

Hempen targeted Russell as a recruit in the summer of 2006, when he was coaching in the Olympic Development Program in which Russell played.

Russell told a teammate she planned to go out of state for her college soccer. Hempen overheard and asked, "So we shouldn't even bother recruiting you?"

He did, or as he put it, "We stayed in the game."

Hempen believes Russell should be a team leader right now and doesn't want her to wait.

"You have kids that play soccer, and you have kids that want to play soccer and be really good at it," Hempen said. "I think she's one of those (latter) kids."

Change, however, in a college freshman is inevitable, and Hempen knows of one he hopes he sees in Russell.

She's too hard on herself, Hempen said. He watched her grimace her way through CU's 4-0 defeat of James Madison last Sunday, a game in which her team played well. Hempen asked Russell if she's happy.

She replied, "Not really." Hempen wants her to play with a smile on her face.

"A lot of it has to do with she's very hard on herself and wanting to be perfect all the time," Hempen said.

She hasn't been perfect. But according to Gordon, his daughter has just always been plain good.

"As a child, Kate was always very coordinated and fast, even in grade school," Gordon wrote. "I can remember her playing soccer in a local recreational league when she was in grade school and being surprised at how fast she was and how she could anticipate the ball and place it where she wanted it to go.

"Once Kate started playing competitive club soccer, first in Longmont and then in Denver with Colorado Rush, I could see she had a great deal of talent."

As for missing her father, Hempen said that's something a coach must be sensitive to.

"That's the kind of thing we're trying to help out with," he said.

Said Russell: "He's always in my prayers. ... I wish he could've seen me in that first game because I felt like it was special for me to be able to score that first goal of the season. I wish he could've seen that."

So does Gordon.

"I'm sure looking forward to next April!" he wrote.

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Bufs drop 3rd straight, fall to Heels

After 6-0 start on road, home not so sweet for spikers

By Ryan Thorburn
Sunday, September 14, 2008

Road uniforms?

Pi'i Aiu might want to consider having the Colorado volleyball team wear them against Kansas on Wednesday for the Big 12 opener at the Coors Events Center.

The best start in the program's proud history has quickly turned into a nightmarish beginning to the home portion of the schedule.

The Buffs (6-3), after winning tournaments in Mississippi and Texas against lesser opponents, have now dropped three consecutive matches since returning to the not-so friendly confines after losing to North Carolina on Saturday in four games (25-17, 23-25, 25-21, 27-25).

CU opened its three-match invitational tournament with four-game losses to No. 21 Colorado State and No. 8 Florida.

"I don't know that we're doing anything physically poorly and we're fighting well. We're just mentally not there yet," Aiu said. "And we still have a ways to go. I think we know what we need to do, it's just a matter of doing it and doing it in big points and in big matches."

The Tar Heels (4-4) -- who were swept by CSU in Fort Collins on Friday night -- took advantage of a flat CU team and cruised to victory in the first game. The visitors reeled off six consecutive points and eight of nine to seize control at 8-2. Even after two timeouts by Aiu, the Buffs dug a 19-7 hole too deep to crawl out of.

CU had 12 kills and 11 errors (an attack percentage of .018) in the opening game compared to 13 kills and four errors (.237) for North Carolina.

"I think the mental aspect is what we're really missing. Little mental lapses are what are really killing us," sophomore middle blocker Schylur Edelman said after finishing with 12 kills and four blocks. "We need to learn how to stay mentally and physically strong throughout the entire match"

The Buffs bounced back by taking a very competitive game two only to get off to another wretched start in game three (trailed 4-0 and 11-6) and give the momentum back to North Carolina.

"I think everyone is a little discouraged," junior outside hitter Emilee Sisco said after smashing a team-high 16 kills. " But it's really good that we've gotten some better competition because the teams we were playing the two weeks before this are not anything like the teams we will face in conference. Even the

worst teams in our conference are nothing like the teams we were facing. It was good for us to see that competition."

The Buffs predictably found themselves trailing big, 19-13, in game four. This time they were able to fight all the way back and took a 22-21 lead on a kill by Edelman.

"I felt like that was really encouraging, but the part that was unfortunate was that we were down six points to begin with," junior setter/hitter Kaitlyn Burkett said. "If we can start better that game would be ours. We just need to learn how to go from start to finish."

Alex Buth came up with a clutch kill to keep CU alive on match point and after a block by Lauren Schaefer the home team led 25-24.

And then the Tar Heels calmly closed the match out with the next three points. On the road.

"I hope we can get them there because they deserve it. They're working hard and doing some nice things," Aiu said. "It's just when it comes down to the big points we don't have people making big plays for us. ...

"Maybe I'll call Kansas and see if they'll have us there."

For now, Wednesday's match against the Jayhawks is scheduled to start at 6:30 p.m. at the Coors Events Center.



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