

Rocky Mountain News

Leaving Buffaloes before start of NCAA tournament hard on Marshall

Pat Rooney, Special to the Rocky

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Junior Nikki Marshall, CU's second- leading scorer, joined the U.S. Under-20 team after the Big 12 Conference tournament.

The University of Colorado lost a first-round game in the NCAA tournament on Friday, but the Buffaloes entered the postseason with one arm tied behind their collective backs.

CU played without second-leading scorer **Nikki Marshall**, a junior forward from Mead (Skyline High School) who joined the Under-20 national team after the Buffaloes completed play in the Big 12 Conference tournament.

"Even though we are part of an awesome experience, we still miss home," Marshall wrote from Chile on her CUBuffs.com blog. "We all agree that leaving our college teams has been one of the toughest things we have ever had to do, especially at this time of year.

"We struggle with not being with our teams, but that is also what brings us together. We represent 17 different colleges around the nation, and everyone eagerly watches 'game tracker' on the weekends to see how their teams are doing in the NCAA tournament."

The University of Portland, which has three players, including Englewood resident **Keelin Winters**, on the national team roster for the Under-20 World Cup, began preparing for the postseason by weaning those three players from the starting lineup.

CU coach **Bill Hemen** could not enjoy the same luxury, though he did attempt to limit the versatile Marshall's time along the back line in hopes of protecting her physically for the World Cup.

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"I certainly wasn't going to be the coach that says your school is more important than your country," Hempen said. "Nikki is proof to every little girl out there that hard work can pay off. No one knew about her on the national stage. We've never had a national-team kid commit to the program, but we have had three that have had that opportunity after they've been here. It's a great place for our program to be."

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