



CU's Marshall revels in title experience

CU junior earned Under-20 world championship with national team

By Kyle Ringo
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Two weeks isn't nearly enough to dull the joy in Nikki Marshall.

The star of the Colorado women's soccer team won a world championship earlier this month in Chile as a member of the U.S. Under-20 Women's National Team, and her face is still beaming with pride everywhere she goes.

Marshall will celebrate the holidays with her family in the home in which she grew up in Mead, and conversations, at times, likely will turn to the new medal in Marshall's collection of trophies and awards and all the stories that go along with it.

She spent more than two years training and preparing for the 2008 FIFA U-20 Women's World Cup and the better part of a month in Chile practicing and competing. The culmination was standing on the podium -- it felt more like the top of the world at the time -- after a 2-1 victory over North Korea in the championship game.

"It was a dream come true for me," Marshall said this week. "The entire experience was just so surreal. Even now I'm still getting e-mails from people saying congratulations."

In her role on the Colorado team, Marshall is normally one of the most dangerous forwards in the Big 12 Conference. The Buffs finished 14-5-4 this fall with a disappointing loss in the first round of the NCAA Tournament against South Dakota State.

It was one of three games Marshall missed this season, all because of her commitment to the national team. The Buffs went 2-1 in those contests.

It was a difficult situation to be in, Marshall felt a responsibility to both teams and two sets of teammates and coaches, but playing for the national team trumps just about anything in soccer.

"Everyone at CU has been great to me, allowing me to pursue my dream," she said.

Marshall was Colorado's second leading scorer and leading shot taker. She scored eight goals with four assists in 20 games for the Buffs during her junior season before turning her attention to the national team, where preventing goals became her focus.

Marshall played defense for the national team, and learned a lot about the game and where she fits best from the experience. She said she continues to prefer the offensive end, but the challenges of playing defense taught her some valuable lessons about what defenders might be thinking and looking for when she is coming at them.

"I think what I learned from this experience is that I don't really care where I play," Marshall said. "I'm happy being

able to play the game I love. Hopefully playing defense and having some success will make me a better defender as a forward.”

The U.S. allowed only three goals in six games, including four shutouts. Marshall and her teammates went 5-1 in the tournament, with the only loss coming in what was a meaningless game in group matches against China.

Marshall’s success in international competition capped a year in which Colorado was well represented around the world. Six current and former members and coaches of the track and field program participated in the Olympic Games in Beijing in August.

Marshall enjoyed the most success and it made her hungry for more. She dreamed as a little girl of playing for her country in the World Cup and the Olympics and her triumph this year brought her much closer to achieving them.

“I definitely feel like my dreams are more attainable,” she said. “I think now I feel like I have a chance to make a living playing soccer and that is very exciting.”



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