



Marshall raising level of play

By Joshua Lindenstien Camera Sports Writer
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Nikki Marshall's heart nearly broke in two near the end of last month.

While she was training with the U20 national team in Florida, her Colorado Buffalo soccer teammates were routing the Oklahoma Sooners.

That the Buffs were winning was a good thing. It was the not being there that crushed Marshall.

"I think leaving my team at Colorado is just the hardest thing I've ever done," the junior said. "These girls are like my family. The U20s, I only see them like once every two weeks. But these guys, almost every day I hang out with them. They're like sisters to me. So leaving them has taken an emotional toll on me.

"But I get through it."

Marshall, after all, knows no other way but to go full speed ahead and succeed. And there's really no other way the speedy forward could get through this semester.

In addition to playing for the Buffs and her country, Marshall has the usual rigors of being a student and also adds in a couple of hours, three days per week, coaching Boulder Nova youth teams.

And, oh yeah, she's also essentially her own professor, with a full load of online and correspondence courses because, Who has time to go to class when you're training with the national team?

"I'm pretty good at managing my time," Marshall said. "So I love it. If I wasn't busy I don't know what I would be doing."

Despite her schedule, Marshall is hardly just getting through.

For the third straight season, she is leading the 22nd-ranked Buffs -- who host No. 10 Texas at 4 p.m. today -- in scoring with five goals and four assists. And her next goal ties her with former Buff great Katie Griffin for the career school record of 32.

If the speedy CU forward could add one superpower to her repertoire this semester, though, omnipresence wouldn't be a bad choice.

Later this month, she'll play for CU at Iowa State on a Sunday, fly to Portland, Ore., after the game to train with the national team for the week, then fly back to Boulder to face Texas A&M with the Buffs the following Sunday.

She'll miss the Drake game in between, and she'll also miss the NCAA tournament while she is playing in the U20 World Cup for Team USA in November.

"I'm overwhelmed with it all and excited, and I never expected to be here," said Marshall, who went to high school at Skyline in Longmont. "So it's definitely been very humbling.

"It's one thing to represent the state of Colorado, but to be able to represent my country is just a whole different thing."

All in all, the Buffs believe Marshall's experiences — and thus absences — with the national team will help them more than hurt them in the long run.

"It's a great experience for us and for her," senior defender Michelle Wenino said. "For us to play with a player like that it's awesome. It's not a distraction. But it's definitely hard to see her go. She's one of those girls you love having on your team because she's so team-oriented."

Wenino said there is no doubt there is a difference in intensity level on the team when Marshall isn't there. Marshall is known for pushing herself to the limit no matter the game situation or how seemingly insignificant the drill in practice.

More than just raising her teammates' level of play, though, CU coach Bill Hempen said Marshall is helping take the entire program to another level the same way that CU great Fran Munnelly did.

While Marshall admits she came to CU because of players like Munnelly and Griffin, Hempen said Marshall is now that player who recruits are looking to emulate.

Freshman Kate Russell, who went to Silver Creek High School, is one in particular who has said Marshall's play at CU influenced her to become a Buff rather than go out of state to play. And Marshall's own sister, Shaye, has also committed to play at CU despite several out of state offers.

Hempen got a brief flash of what Nikki Marshall truly means to soccer in Boulder County and Colorado as a whole a couple of weeks ago.

The Colorado soccer team was being introduced before the Buffs' match with Oklahoma State, and each CU player received her usual applause.

Then Nikki Marshall was introduced and it was like Hempen was suddenly at a Hannah Montana concert.

"When they were announcing the team, everybody gets their round of applause and then Nikki gets the screams from the little girls, and that's what Fran would get," Hempen said. "It's like, 'Wow, they see this kid that's just relentless on the field and they're just excited to watch her play.'"

Hempen saw the same thing happen with Mia Hamm while he was coaching against Hamm's North Carolina Tar Heels at Duke in the early 1990s.

"She brings a competitiveness that is contagious," Hempen said, "and people want to be like her."



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