



Marshall hopes to lead CU to Big 12 soccer title

Bufs face NU in tourney opener

By Ryan Thorburn

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The 16th-ranked Colorado soccer team will be at its best today when the Buffs open the Big 12 Tournament against Nebraska at the Blossom Soccer Complex in San Antonio.

That's because Nikki Marshall will be in the lineup.

The junior forward hopes to lead the senior-laden Buffs to a conference tournament title before rejoining the U.S. Under-20 women's national team next week.

"This tournament is huge for us," Marshall said. "Especially because it's the last time I get to play with these girls. They just mean so much to me. It's exciting and I hope I can get three more games in with them."

Marshall -- who earned first-team All-Big 12 honors along with senior defender Michelle Wenino -- will not be available for CU during the NCAA Tournament. She will fly to Los Angeles next Tuesday to meet up with her U.S. teammates and the national team will then head to Chile for the FIFA U-20 World Cup, which takes place Nov. 19-Dec. 7.

Texas A&M forward Alyssa Mautz was the only other Big 12 player selected to the roster of 20.

The 17th-ranked Buffs (13-3-3, 6-2-2) will have to adjust without their most talented player during the NCAA Tournament. But right now the focus is on rebounding from a disappointing fourth-place finish in the Big 12 standings with a solid run in San Antonio.

"It's really nice to have her. We're not going to have her after this, but just using her this whole week will definitely be an advantage and will bring out the best in us," said Wenino, who was also named co-Big 12 defensive player of the year. "The dynamic of our team changes a little bit without her speed. It's going to be a little different."

CU had a chance to clinch a share of the regular-season Big 12 title at Prentup Field 10 days ago, but blew a late 1-0 lead and fell 2-1 in overtime to Texas A&M.

"Losing is a tough feeling, but it's always motivation," Marshall said. "After you lose you don't want to feel that way again."

Head coach Bill Hempen said the Buffs focused on the Buffs during preparation for the Big 12 Tournament.

"Much better week (of practice) this week than going into Texas A&M," Hempen said after Tuesday morning's final tuneup at Prentup Field. "I think going into that game they were almost too excited to play the game. But this has been a great week of training. It's been short, it's been crisp, and I'm looking forward to getting down to Texas."

The No. 4 Buffs and No. 5 Cornhuskers open the tournament at 10:30 a.m. today. The winner will face the No. 1 Oklahoma State-No. 8 Texas Tech winner at 4:30 p.m. on Friday with the championship game set for 11 a.m. on Sunday.

"If we've learned anything in the conference over the course of the season ... in one day you go from playing for first place to ending up in fourth based on one game," Hempen said. "So it doesn't matter who you draw. The conference is tough no matter who you play."

The Buffs defeated Nebraska 2-1 Oct. 17 in Lincoln. Marshall scored both of her team's goals in the comeback road victory.

"I never have to worry about Nikki's commitment to our program and to her teammates," Hempen said. "Having a player like her on the field is certainly a positive for us. ... As of right now we'll have all hands on deck."

Wenino said the Buffs have turned the page after the disappointing loss to the Aggies.

"I think we all pretty much got over it and we realize the season is not over. It's a new season for us starting fresh," Wenino said. "We know we can beat every team in our league. We just have to get it done."

Volleyball

The Buffs are hoping to use the momentum from last week's four-set upset of No. 2 Nebraska to finish the season strong and earn a berth to the NCAA Tournament.

CU plays at Kansas at 6 p.m. tonight after handing the Huskers their only loss of the season a week ago. Pi'i Aiu's team opened up Big 12 play with a five-set victory over the Jayhawks at the Coors Events Center.

The Buffs (12-9, 6-6) are currently alone in fifth place in the conference standings. The Jayhawks (10-12, 4-9) are 10th.

Notable

CU's tennis team will compete at the San Diego Invitational Friday through Sunday. ... The cross country teams are preparing for the NCAA Mountain Region Championships Nov. 15 in Fort Collins.



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