

COLORADO'S NATIONAL CHAMPIONS



Mary Decker
1978 (AIAW)

Tenth months after she bettered her own world record in the 1,000-meter run, Mary Decker won Colorado's first national cross country title in her last race, on CU's then-home course, Kent Denver Country Day.

Her course record 16:59.4 bettered the course record she had set earlier that year by a minute.

At the national championships she grabbed the lead from NC State's Julie Shea and defending national champion Kathy Mills of Penn State (who had led the race by as much as 20 yards going into the final loop). Shea passed Mills, and Decker passed Mills and kicked by Shea to win the race by 10 yards.



Mark Scrutton
1982

Mark Scrutton took the lead 300 yards from the finish and beat Zakarie Barie of UTEP by two seconds for the NCAA men's title in Bloomington, Ind.

His first goal when he came to CU in 1980 was to dominate the Big Eight Conference. He did that to the tune of 14 conference titles, surpassing Kansas great Billy Cunningham's record 13 in the early 1930s.

He lost just one Big Eight race, the indoor two-mile run his freshman season. By his senior year he turned in the best two-mile indoor time in the NCAA in winning his second national title.

Shortly after winning that title, he set an unofficial world record in the Newport Beach Back Bay Run with a time of 22:25.8 over the 8k course.



Adam Goucher
1998

The sign of things to come was on Nov. 21, 1994 when then-freshman Adam Goucher crossed the finish line of the NCAA Cross Country Championships in Fayetteville, Ark. as the national runner-up.

His sophomore year he finished sixth.

He redshirted the '96 season and improved to third in the national race as a junior in Greenville, S.C., a race he was predicted to win.

In the last race of his collegiate career, Goucher took the title that had eluded him for five seasons.

Goucher, buoyed by what he called an unbelievable crowd, bettered the Rim Rock Course Record in 29:26.9, 23 seconds ahead of Arizona's Abdi Abdiraham, who had kept pace with Goucher until the last mile when he pulled away from the field.

With the win, Goucher would become the first American to win the fall classic since Bob Kennedy won in 1992, and the first CU runner to complete the distance trifecta of winning national titles in cross country, the indoor and outdoor track seasons.

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Kara Grgas-Wheeler
2000

In the women's championship sweep, fifth-year senior Kara Grgas-Wheeler won CU's first individual title sans AIAW to complete the nation's only individual undefeated campaign. With the title, Grgas-Wheeler capped of a 1,035-0 season beating the next opponent by a total margin of 2:07.

She ran to a dominant finish on the Iowa State Cross Country Course in 20:30.5, 7.3 seconds ahead of the individual runner up in harsh conditions that included a temperature of 17 degrees with a wind chill of minus-19 at the start.

In textbook Colorado fashion, she trailed the lead pack by four seconds after the 1k mark. She had closed in by the 2-mile mark, never losing site of the defending national champion, Wisconsin's Erica Palmer, who was in the lead, but succumbing to the cold. Soon after Grgas-Wheeler bridged the gap, took the lead, and never looked back... until the final crest of the course where she glanced over her shoulder for the first time of the season and began to savor the sprint to the tape.

The title was her third, first in the fall. Her win marked the first time since 1994 that the individual national champion represented on the NCAA Championship Team.



Jorge Torres
2002

With three NCAA runner-up finishes as a junior resting on his shoulders, Jorge Torres held off Arkansas' Allister Cragg in the final meters to cover the Wabash Valley Sports Center 10k challenge in a then-course record 29:04.7 and win his first national title.

In one of the best men's contests in recent memory, Cragg took the race's initial lead, but before the race reached the halfway point, it was a four-man battle between Torres, Cragg, Alabama's David Kimani and Eastern Michigan's Boaz Cheboiywo.

Torres took the lead from '01 champion Cheboiywo at the 7k mark with Cragg and Kimani hanging on, and at the 8k mark it was Torres and Cragg running shoulder to shoulder for the remainder of the race. With the pro-Torres crowd chanting "Torres, Torres", the two took the final turn into the straightaway and Torres made an unanswered surge to build a 10-meter lead at the finish line to close out the nation's only undefeated season and turn in his fifth course record in as many races.

With brother Ed just nine places behind him, the 1-10 punch was the best by a set of twins in the history of the championships.



Dathan Ritzenheim
2003

Twenty-four months after finishing fourth in the 2001 NCAA Championships as a freshman, Dathan Ritzenheim crossed the finish line in Waterloo, Iowa as CU's fourth national champion in six seasons as a redshirt sophomore.

In temperatures that hovered below zero with the windchill factor, Ritzenheim outdistanced a heavily favored Stanford pack led by Ryan Hall in the closing meters to win his first NCAA crown in 29 minutes, 14 seconds, just 1.3 ahead of Hall for the crescendo in the nation's only unbeaten season.

The win marked just the fourth time and first since the 1989 and '90 seasons that two different runners from the same school took back-to-back titles, as Jorge Torres won the race in '02 in Terre Haute, Ind. It was also the first time since 1987 and '88 that Americans had won two straight individual titles and likely the first time that both scenarios have played out simultaneously.

Ritzenheim's rise as the best runner in the nation was even more impressive when considering he had resumed training 10 weeks earlier following femoral stress fractures suffered the previous cross and track seasons.

2000 NCAA CHAMPIONS



2000 Colorado Women

(left to right) Jodie Hughes, Lesley Higgins, Tera Moody, Kara Grgas-Wheeler, Catherine Wright, Sarah Gorton, Assistant Coach Jason Drake, Jen Fazioli

The 2000 women's cross country team upended the defending national champion to claim the program's first national title, the 18th overall at CU.

Coming off back-to-back team titles at the Big 12 and NCAA Mountain Region Championships, Colorado was the top-ranked team in the country entering the biggest race of the year. As is its goal each year, Colorado wanted to better its ranking, which would now be the biggest challenge in the program's history.

Up for the challenge in wind-chill conditions that brought the late Midwest November temperature to 19-degrees below zero, Colorado methodically worked its way from the back of the pack to the front for the title. With a program-best 117 points, the Buffs finished 50 ahead of defending national champion Brigham Young.

Kara Grgas-Wheeler won the program's first individual crown while freshman Sara Gorton became the second-highest finishing freshman in the race and highest in program history with an eighth place effort. Jodie Hughes locked up All-American honors with a 30th-place effort while Lesley Higgins (52nd) and Tera Moody (71st) rounded out the CU scoring.

In the championship sweep, Grgas-Wheeler won CU's first individual title sans AIAW to complete the nation's only undefeated campaign. With the title, Grgas-Wheeler capped off a 1,035-0 season repeating her Big 12 Conference and Mountain Region titles before capturing her third national title, first in the fall. Her win marked the first time since 1994 that the individual national champion was represented on the NCAA Championship team.

2001 NCAA CHAMPIONS



2001 Colorado Men

(left to right) Jorge Torres, Ed Torres, Sean Smith, Aaron Blondeau,
Dathan Ritzenheim, Jon Severy, Steve Slattery

The No. 1 ranked team in the country from the preseason polls to the national championship podium, the 2001 men's season came to a crescendo with a one-point national championship victory over nemesis Stanford in Greenville, S.C. to bring home to the University its 19th national championship, the last remaining title that had previously eluded Colorado's storied distance program.

The Buffs' successful run at the national title capped off the program's first undefeated season in which they were uncontested at the Rocky Mountain Shootout in Boulder, won their sixth straight Big 12 Conference title in Norman, Okla., claimed their ninth national qualifying race in 10 seasons and improved from their runner-up finish in 2000 at the national championships.

The one-point difference, 90-91, in the final score was the tightest in race history, tying the Villanova men's 1970 85-86 win over Oregon.

The Buffs were paced by a pair of top-10 individual performances in the run to the title. Among the favorites to win the individual national title, junior Jorge Torres made no secret about his intentions to sacrifice an individual crown for the team title, and finished as the individual runner-up in his quest. Big 12 Conference Newcomer of the Year Dathan Ritzenheim finished fourth and was the highest finishing freshman in a national championship race since Adam Goucher's second-place finish in 1994.

Junior Ed Torres improved 12 places from the previous year's national runner-up race to finish 15th for his second All-American certificate. Steve Slattery battled back from a mid-season injury before going on to score as the Buffs' fourth runner, 28th overall. Senior captain Sean Smith, was the final factor in clinching the title as CU's No. 5 runner, 56th overall.

Fifth-year senior Aaron Blondeau who had competed in four NCAA Championship races since his 1997 freshman year, sat out the first two meets of the season due to injury before marking his return five weeks before the NCAA Championships where he came in as CU's sixth runner in the national championship win.

Redshirt freshman Jon Severy reaped the benefits of his redshirt season in 2000 solidifying his role on the NCAA Championship travel squad where he came in as the Buffs' final runner.

With his fourth NCAA cross country title since becoming head coach in 1995, head coach Mark Wetmore became the first coach in the history of the championship to win a men's individual title (Adam Goucher, 1997), women's individual title (Kara Grgas-Wheeler in 2000), women's team title (2000) and men's team crown at one school.

2004 NCAA CHAMPIONS



2004 Colorado Women

(left to right) Amber Smith, Renee Metivier, Jackie Zeigle, Liza Pasciuto, Natalie Florence, Sara Slattery, Laura Zeigle, Christine Bolf

In a championship where the a team needed to run a perfect race, the Colorado women got the ball rolling when the then third-ranked Buffs did just that to claim the first of two titles on the day, their first since the 2000 season.

The women, paced by Renee Metivier's second career national runner-up finish, placed all five runners in the top-30, to score a program best 63 points (it took 117 to win in '00), 81 points ahead of runner-up Duke (144), Providence (164), Notre Dame (170) and pre-race favorite Stanford (175). The margin was the fourth largest in championship history.

An already damp and slightly heavy course on Sunday was worsened by overnight and early morning rains that subsided by the start of the women's race and the skies were clear for the start of the men's, conditions that obviously played in favor of the Buffs.

With Kim Smith (Providence) in control of the individual title, the team title was up for grabs as early as the halfway mark. Smith was running a 9:52.7 pace at the 3k mark, followed by Metivier (10:05) and BYU's Laura Turner (10:14), with just four points separating the Buffs and Stanford at that mark, with Slattery in 16th and Bolf in 18th, followed by Duke and Providence.

The pleasant surprise for the day on the women's team was that of freshman Liza Pasciuto. Pasciuto finished as CU's No. 2 runner for the first time in her career, and her 13th place finish is the second best by a CU freshman in program history, second only to Sara (Gorton) Slattery's eighth place freshman effort in '00.

"Coming in I was trying my best to try and score and help the team achieve the goals that we set at the beginning of the season," said Pasciuto. "But I'm definitely thrilled with my finish. I couldn't have asked for more. I hope to come back next year and do it again."

Christine Bolf (20:48.1) ran to her first All-American title in the fall with a 14th place finish, a career best for the junior that finished 63rd a year ago. In the final race of her collegiate career, fifth-year senior Sara Slattery finished 28th and came away as an All-American for the third time in her career, just the second CU harrier to do so, following current assistant coach Heather Burroughs (1994, 95, 98). She is also now the only runner in the program's storied history to be a member of two national championship teams, as she was a freshman on that 2000 squad.

Natalie Florence (21:07.2) rounded out CU's scoring, finishing 30th overall for her second All-American title. In her first national championship, freshman Amber Smith (21:44.3) finished 78th overall. Laura Zeigle (23:18.1) finished 224th.

"Our race plan was to try and be patient and not fight the conditions (which changed dramatically overnight). By the 600-m mark they had over-ruled my plan and my hope was that they held on. They kept going, so I'm glad that they overlooked my instructions," said Wetmore.

2004 NCAA CHAMPIONS



2004 Colorado Men

(left to right) Austin Baillie, James Strang, Stephen Pifer, Brent Vaughn, Bradley Harkrader, Jared Scott, Jon Severy, Bret Schoolmeester

Not to be outdone by their counterparts, the Colorado men capped what would be the best day in the program's storied history with their second title in four years.

The men's race was a battle for both the individual and team titles from the start of the race. At the halfway mark, a lead pack of 10-plus runners were separated by one second with Arkansas' Josphat Boit in the lead at 15:16.1 and the 10th place runner at 15:17.1, with Vaughn (15:25) in 15th and Schoolmeester (15:26) in 19th. Vaughn had taken sole possession of fourth place at the 8k turn, having caught 13 runners in a 3k span, while Schoolmeester chased down 12. At that point, Wisconsin had control of the team race with 80 points to Arkansas' 160, followed by Colorado.

Senior Jon Severy became the first men's runner in the program's history to have run on two national title teams. Classmate Jared Scott was on the team that season, but did not run at nationals. He was also a freshman in '01 and ran the final cross country race of his career here this afternoon. It happen to be the best of his career, covering the 10k loop in 31:26.9 to finish 21st.

Severy made up as much ground as anyone Monday, as he was 39th at the halfway mark, and 25th at 8k, running down 18 in his final race.

"It was an incredible note to start on," said Severy. "I was carried through a little bit on that 2001 team and it gave me a false sense of what it meant to be on a good team. Since then, I've sunk pretty low and learned an incredible amount of what is necessary to sacrifice for your team and carry it out. Today was just so perfect that I can't describe it."

Newcomers Stephen Pifer and James Strang rounded out the scoring for the CU men, with Pifer running 31:56.8 to finish 44th while Strang ran 31:59.9 to finish 49th. Jared Scott, also running in the last cross country race of his career, was off his junior year pace, but finished 80th in 32:25.0. Freshman Bradley Harkrader, who had scored during the season as CU's third, fourth and fifth runner, finished 121st in 32:50.7 in his first national championship event. While five native Coloradoans ran in the men's race, three scored.

"The front two ran as well as I thought they possibly could and Jon ran way better than I would have expected. All of the five scorers ran better than my most optimistic aspirations. And with Stephen, James and Bradley, all freshmen, the sky is the limit," said Wetmore.

2006 NCAA CHAMPIONS



2006 Colorado Men

(left to right) Bradley Harkrader, Pete Janson, Erik Heinonen, Stephen Pifer, Billy Nelson, James Strang, Brent Vaughn and Kenyon Neuman

The second-ranked Colorado men headed into the 2006 championship knowing the race was theirs to lose. The muddy conditions were just like those two years before when the Buffs captured their second national title and gave Colorado extra confidence as the race approached.

The field got out to a quicker start than CU normally likes and was led most of the way by Brent Vaughn. Vaughn finished 12th overall (31:13.0), earning his second straight top-15 finish at nationals and the second straight time he was CU's first harrier across the finish.

While Vaughn ran a steady race, the men's win can be traced to Pifer's performance over the second 5,000-meters. At the 5k split, he had 52 runners ahead of him, but streaked past 32 of them to nab the 20th spot overall (31:24.2) in the individual standings and his second All-American title.

"I knew in the second half I had to come back and catch a lot of guys," Pifer said. "So I paid attention to sensory data, which is something that Mark Wetmore has been preaching to us all year, checking your heart rate and breathing and things like that to make sure you are comfortable. The race doesn't really start until the last 3k, so you really have to get going."

Erik Heinonen had a story book year after receiving a sixth-year of eligibility from the NCAA for the season. He was the third Buff to cross the line, placing a personal best 28th overall (31:34.7), and earning his first All-American honor.

James Strang took 47th (31:54.5) and Billy Nelson, who passed over 15 in the last 1,000-meters, took 56th (32:02.7). Bradley Harkrader came in at 152nd (33:05.3) and Pete Janson was 213th (33:56.5) as Colorado's non-scorers.

CU's five scorers all finished in the top 56 overall, and in the top 34 of those attached to full teams. CU and Wisconsin were the only schools to have three place in the top 15 in the scoring column.

The Buffaloes recorded 94 points, soundly defeating defending champion and overwhelming favorite Wisconsin by 48 points. Iona (172), Stanford (195) and Oregon (196) rounded out the top five.

"I think the race was very fast for us," head coach Mark Wetmore said. "Every coach has to know their team and how fast they can go. If other teams ran our way, it would certainly hurt them, like if would if we ran another team's plan. We don't talk a lot about expectations, its aspirations for us. We equaled our aspirations today."

"We did well here a couple of years ago too and everyone was telling me that the mud was perfect for us, but Boulder is like a desert and isn't very muddy."

Vaughn, Harkrader, Pifer and Strang joined Jon Severy as the only Buffs to win two national titles.