

Catching Up with Jenny Barringer

The American record holder has one more season of college running

By Brian Metzler

As featured in the Web Only issue of Running Times Magazine

Rising American track star Jenny Barringer returned for her final season of cross country at the University of Colorado this fall instead of signing a professional contract over the summer. (She only has cross country eligibility, so she'll likely turn pro after the Nov. 23 NCAA championships.) She had a huge breakthrough season on the track, winning a pair of NCAA titles, setting six NCAA records and breaking her own American record in the 3,000m steeplechase (9:12.50) while finishing fifth in the world championships. After a pair of runner-up finishes at the NCAA cross country championships in 2006 and 2007 (she redshirted last fall), Barringer came back with an eye on winning this year's meet on Nov. 21 in Terre Haute, Ind. But hand-in-hand with that goal, she also wants to help lead the Buffaloes back to the podium. And if early season results are any indication, Barringer and the Buffs are well on their way. We caught up with her (and CU coach Mark Wetmore) moments after Barringer won the [Rocky Mountain Shootout](#) on Oct. 3 in Boulder, where she took 13 seconds off Kara Goucher's 5.8K course record by covering the distance in 19:25. It was the last home race of her career and the first all-out race effort since the world track and field championships in Berlin in mid August. *Photo courtesy CUBuffs.com.*



Running Times: Breaking Kara Goucher's course record is a pretty good way to start the season.

Jenny Barringer: I felt pretty good, but it was hard. I didn't know until a couple of days ago if I was going to run all-out and go for the record. It's a hard course and it's hard to run that fast here at elevation. This will be one of the hardest races I have all year, based on the course. But I'm happy with how I ran and I think it gives a good indication of my fitness. I have a long way to go because I took time off and am just getting back into things, but I hope this sets the tempo for the rest of the season, both for me and for the team. We have a really good team and we want to get back to the podium.

You raced at the world championships six weeks ago, took two weeks off from running but then you started school in late August and got back into training. Kind of a whirlwind, huh?

JB: Making the transition from the world championships, where everything is centered around you and what you need and then coming here to start school right away is difficult. And then trying to get back in shape for a totally different kind of running event is also hard. But the team is incredibly supportive. I think my coaches are brilliant. I think they're the best coaches in the country, that's why I have stayed for so long. And the community is incredibly supportive. So with my coaches and my teammates and the community, it's made the transition go as smoothly as it could possibly go.

Are you planning to race every meet with your teammates?

JB: I'm planning on racing Pre-Nationals, conference, regionals and nationals, and I'm really excited about that. It's one of my only years here that I'll wind up running every race with the team. I told my coaches that I came back because I wanted to be a collegiate athlete. I wanted to loosen the reins a little bit and get the green light to go and enjoy my last season here at CU.

Why did you come back for your final year when you had opportunities to turn pro?

JB: We're going to come back as a strong team. We're going to come back as one of the best, most-improved teams in the country this year, I really believe. And we're going to make a run for the podium. I'm really excited. I would not have come back if this was just going to be all about me. It's really, really about the team and I'm really excited about being a leader in the effort that we're all going to be making.

Did you ever consider not coming back?

JB: If I had one more track season, it might be a different story. I don't know how the decisions would go. But anyone who has run cross country on a really good team would understand. You're never going to get this type of team atmosphere or camaraderie ever again in your running career. I've talked to a lot of professional runners about their collegiate years versus their pro years. Hopefully I've got a really good exciting career ahead of me on the track and I just didn't want to lose the opportunity to run with these girls and vie for a national championship. I didn't want to trade that just for a couple of months training on my own as a professional.

You only took two weeks off from training. What does that mean with NCAAAs six weeks or so away?

JB: Yeah, I definitely have to be a little bit careful, but I think the advantage I have this year as compared to last year is another whole year of experience under my belt, and another whole year of communicating with my coaches and the training staff, and another whole year of base work and workouts. The longer you're with a coach, the more you feel comfortable saying 'things aren't right today,' or 'let's talk about my mileage' and things like that. So there are a lot more group decisions being made than ever before because I'm a year more mature in the sport and as a person. And Mark [Wetmore] and Heather [Burroughs, CU's assistant

coach] and I have all found a really great balance and I think that's definitely going to serve us very well, considering I took such a short break.

You ran some very fast times on the track in the spring and summer. How has that helped make you stronger for the cross country season?

JB: I think it was really important. I think I showed a lot of strength and speed. I think a lot of times I got pigeonholed into that "strength runner" category and that I was only a steeplechaser. So it was exciting to kind of see myself kind of expand out of that and show people I am able to be fast on the track and run a lot of different distances. But there was a development that had to take place for that to be able to happen. Now it gives me an enormous amount of confidence on the cross country course because I know I'm strong and I know I can run fast up the hills, down the hills. But I also know I have a hell of a kick for the end of the race. And so it's exciting going into this season knowing that I have another whole set of tools in my tool box to use.

Were you surprised to run sub-4:00 in the 1500m and lower your PRs by so much in the 800 and 5,000m?

JB: Two seasons ago, Heather [Burroughs] was telling me, 'You need to be thinking about running the 800 in 2:06-2:08 if you want to be able to be as fast as you can be on the track.' And I was thinking, 'This woman is crazy.' But she really encouraged me and said 'if you're going to run at the world-class level, then you have to be able to close like that.' I think that was really important to hear that when I was a 2:12-2:14 runner because at that point I realized running 2:12 wasn't acceptable any more. But running 2:02 and running 3:59 this year was really exciting and quite a surprise because I wasn't training as a 1500m runner, I was training as a steeplechaser. But it has been something we've been working on, so it's exciting to see all of that come together.

Was it difficult to avoid turning pro over the summer?

JB: My dad is a huge influence in your life, and he's always said, 'If you know who you are and you can act out who you are, you can be really confident about that and not make any apologies about that.' And I feel great going to bed at night knowing I came back to run for the team. It's a decision I made, and when I made it, it wasn't hard to stick to it. But there were definitely a lot of voices coming from the outside, saying 'listen, this is really a great time to turn pro.' And especially after the Prefontaine meet [where Barringer finished second in the 1500m run in 3:59.9]. People started swooping in and saying 'you should really start taking this seriously and you should be really well informed before you make a decision to go back for cross country. But my coaches and the athletic department have been really supportive, including athletic director Mike Bohn. They wanted me to know what all of my options were before I came back. And so, fortunately, I really believe I'm not sacrificing anything, and instead I'm just gaining another six months of another a really fun team experience. People said, 'what if you step off a curb and you break your leg?' My answer is that then you're a professional runner on the sidelines. So I'm really confident in my decision and really excited about the season. Plus, it's fun to be at the top of your game and fun to be a collegiate athlete and come out here and rock a course and impress people, and I'm not going to get that anywhere else in my career.

What's your outlook for yourself as a runner after the NCAA cross country championships in November?

JB: I really, really enjoyed my running the last four years, but I do get the sense it has been compromised at times because of my schoolwork and because of my commitments in other areas. So I am looking forward to taking the time to focus myself 100 percent to running and seeing where that will take me. I think if I would have been a 4:15 runner or something, who knows what my decision would be like. But given where I am ranked in the world right now, I want to give myself an opportunity just to do that and see how well I can do in that. But I am looking forward to coming back, maybe after the next Olympics, and go back to law school and have a career. I'm excited because what running is going to do is it's going to give me an opportunity to have more than one career.

COLORADO COACH MARK WETMORE

What impressed you the most about Jenny's performance?

MW: Not only was it her first race of the season and her first race since Aug. 17, but really she hasn't taken a step on a cross country course in anger in 22 ½ months. I was pretty sure she could run fast, but it wasn't our original plan for her to run hard the whole way. But I started thinking, if I told her to run 92 percent and she runs 19:50, she's going to be really mad at me. So we just said, 'Go out have fun, find the edge, get out on the edge, remind yourself what it's like, and we'll see what happens.' And that's what happened.

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Barringer sets course record in final Boulder race

Bufs win 11th straight Rocky Mountain Shootout

By Ron Knabenbauer on October 4, 2009

In her last race in Boulder, senior Jenny Barringer went out with a bang.

Barringer set a new course record of 19 minutes and 25 seconds as she won the 5.8-kilometer women's race in the 24th Annual Rocky Mountain Shootout at the Buffalo Ranch Cross Country Course on Saturday morning.

"There were definitely some sentimental parts to the race," Barringer said in a news release. "Knowing that I'm running on our home course and wearing our school uniform, and this is the last time a lot of people in Boulder will be able to see me race."

Barringer's performance for the women, and CU senior Kenyon Neuman's performance for the men, helped marked the 11th straight year that both the men's and women's teams came away with the Rocky Mountain Shootout title.

Neuman finished first in the men's 8K in 24:51.

Coming into the race, the men were ranked sixth in the nation, while the women were ranked 20th.

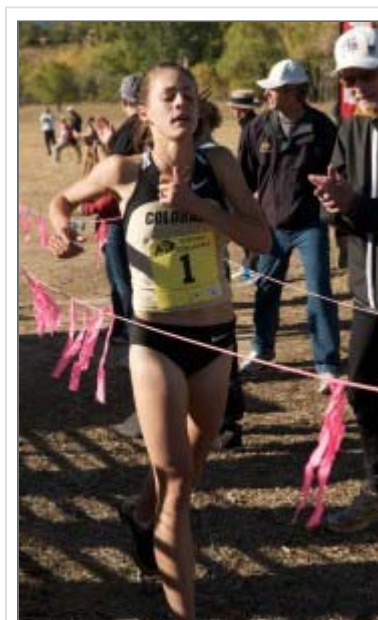
The Bufs will look to improve on those rankings at next Saturday's Fort Hays Invitational in Hays, Kan., before heading to NCAA Pre-Nationals in Terre Haute, Ind. on Oct. 17.

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Senior Jennifer Barringer crosses the line in first place during Saturday's cross country meet in South Boulder. (CU Independent/Lee Pruitt)

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