

# CU harriers will rely on balance

## Bufs boast depth on women`s cross country team

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Posted: 08/08/2010 12:02:57 AM MDT

Oscar Wilde references are certainly rare inside the Dal Ward Center. That`s because Mark Wetmore isn`t usually the coach holding press conferences.

During Saturday`s fall sports media day, Wetmore, now entering his 16th season running the Colorado cross country program, was asked the obvious question about life without Jenny Barringer.

"The people who surround me are always 20. It`s some sort of reverse-Dorian Gray existence where everybody stays the same except me," Wetmore said. "But every year is a new challenge, every year has new personnel, and just when you think something very unbeatably exciting has ended, new compelling people or new compelling circumstances arise."

Barringer, of course, won four NCAA titles for the Bufs and competed in the 2008 Olympics before graduating last December. The only thing she didn`t get to experience during her brilliant CU career was a storybook ending as her bid for a national championship in cross country hit the wall last October.

Led by talented sophomore Allie McLaughlin, who was able to quietly gain a year of experience while running in Barringer`s shadow, the women`s team should be more formidable as a whole.

"Often we go to the starting line of the conference or NCAA championships with four solid Division I runners and then somebody or two that we`re prying around the course," Wetmore said. "If (assistant coach) Heather (Burroughs) and I stay patient and sound on the training with this present women`s group, then we could get to the starting line with nine good runners on it at the conference meet."

Barringer`s stunning 163rd-place finish at the NCAA Championships set an ominous tone for the Bufs, who finished 20th in the team standings. McLaughlin was fifth individually as a true freshman. Emma Coburn, another emerging steeplechase superstar, is entering her junior year. Laura Tremblay, Laura Thweatt and Katie Cumming also scored for CU on a disappointing day in Terre Haute, Ind.

Still, the way Barringer handled the adversity and her legendary overall resume elevated Wetmore`s already successful programs nationally.

"In the case of people who were freshmen last year, Allie and Laura Tremblay and Shalaya Kipp, they really overlapped with Jen for only a few weeks," Wetmore said. "But one of Jen`s legacies here will be a new level of possibility."

On the men`s side, five runners return from the group that finished sixth at the NCAA Championships -- seniors Richard Medina and Matt Tebo, juniors Christian Thompson and Andy Wacker, and sophomore Joe Bosshard. The coaches are counting on some talented redshirt freshmen to add some much-needed depth to the lineup.

"Richard and Matt and Christian are all battle-scarred veterans. They have no reason to have butterflies on the starting line at big meets," Wetmore said. "And I hope they can teach that to whatever young guys have to step up this year, because the men`s team is not quite as deep as is the women`s."

The Bufs will have their work cut out for them in 2010 and in the future considering Oklahoma State won the cross country title last year and Oregon was the runner-up. CU is leaving the Big 12 to join the Pac-12 in either 2011 or 2012.

"I`ll make somebody annoyed with this, but I think it`s fair to say the Pac-12 cross country meet will be a deeper team race than was the Big 12. The Pac-12 track meet will be slightly the opposite," Wetmore said when asked to compare the conferences. "When our teams have a decent year we`re usually in the middle of the pack of the Big 12, and the same team would be a spot or two higher in what will be the Pac-12."

Billy Nelson, a former CU All-American and Olympian who was a key member of the track program's first Big 12 outdoor championship team in 2008, has joined the coaching staff as an assistant. His primary focus is on recruiting.

"He has been here a very short time, but he definitely accelerates the energy level in the office and loves to work on the phone," Wetmore said. "He has no apprehensions. One of the tougher things in coaching is there's always a phone call that can be made. At this point in his career, he's excited to do it. He will be a big help."

Oklahoma State will host this year's Big 12 cross country championship on Oct. 30 in Stillwater. The NCAA Championships are Nov. 22 in Terre Haute.

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