

CU Buffs' Crested Butte connection

Coburn, Bosshard blossom at Colorado

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The 1,550 residents of Crested Butte know what it's like to live inside a winter postcard.

The idyllic mountain community's official slogan is "Colorado's last great ski town."

In addition to the feathery powder on Mt. Crested Butte, residents have out-the-door access to pristine hiking and biking trails.

Located in Gunnison County about 231 miles southwest of Denver, Crested Butte is nestled 8,885 feet above sea level.

And now the local chamber of commerce can add "running hotbed" to the brochures.

Two of Colorado's three track athletes headed to the NCAA Outdoor Championships in Des Moines, Iowa -- Joe Bosshard and Emma Coburn -- are from Crested Butte.

"I think they were excited about Emma and were like, 'We can also have this guy, I guess we'll take him,' " Bosshard joked of his recruitment to CU.

The truth is, neither of these Buffs tore up the track at an elite level in high school.

In addition to running cross country and track, Coburn played basketball and volleyball at Crested Butte High School.

"It's really a special place, to not have to lock your bike, and to walk two minutes into 'downtown' on Elk Avenue," said Coburn, whose family moved from Boulder to Crested Butte after she finished second grade. "And to have so much freedom growing up to do whatever you want outdoors, it was a really unique childhood that I didn't even realize was special until I got to college and talked to everyone else."

Coburn finished fourth at the state cross country championships in 2006 and 2007. She did win eight 2A state titles in track and set five Crested Butte records.

Still, being a star athlete among a graduating class of 19 doesn't usually mean that head coach Mark Wetmore is waiting at the finish line with a scholarship to CU.

"I didn't have very fast high school times at all," Coburn said. "We make a joke of it, just the girls on our team, how bad I was in high school."

Bosshard's path to Boulder was even more unlikely. He grew up in LaCrosse, Wis., but decided after a disappointing cross country season during his junior year of high school that a change of scenery was needed.

Between semesters Bosshard transferred to Crested Butte Academy, a now defunct boarding school.

"It's unreal. It's so hard to describe to people what Crested Butte is like. It's just this little ski town, but there's no tourists, it has really kept its character and its quaintness," Bosshard said. "I still don't know how I convinced my parents to let me go. I think they didn't believe me that I'd actually do it. ...

"Colorado is a lot different than Wisconsin. There is the attitude of wanting to be active and outdoors and a kind of care-free attitude, which I think started to help me excel at running."

Crested Butte Academy was not a CHSAA-sanctioned school. Bosshard's graduating class only had eight students.

But before their senior years, Bosshard and Coburn both started training with Trent Sanderson, the former cross country coach at Maryland, who established a high elevation running camp in Crested Butte in 2007 called Team Prep USA.

Even though the steeplechase is not run at high school track meets in Colorado, Coburn finished second in the event at the Nike Outdoor Nationals in 2008 to earn All-American honors.

Those results and a recommendation from Sanderson, whose list of great athletes coached includes Deena Drossin, caught the attention of Wetmore and CU assistant coach Heather Burroughs.

"It was like a dream come true to run here," Coburn said. "I didn't even think it was possible. Trent kind of opened up that door for sure."

Coburn, a junior, was able to compete alongside CU legend and 2008 Olympian Jenny Barringer as a freshman before stepping into the national spotlight the past two seasons. She has won back-to-back Big 12 titles in steeplechase and was the runner-up at the NCAA Outdoor Championships last year.

The Buffs coaching staff is also being rewarded for projecting great things for Bosshard when he was a fairly unknown prep prospect.

"I hadn't run that fast and I wasn't that great of a runner. My times in high school were average at best," Bosshard said. "I think it took me three e-mails before (Wetmore) finally gave me a call in the first place. They were recruiting Emma, and Trent Sanderson probably threw in a few good words for me. ...

"For them to give me the opportunity to run here is something I'll be forever grateful for. They had every reason not to let me. Things have turned out pretty well."

Bosshard, a redshirt sophomore, has qualified to compete for a national championship in the 5,000- and 10,000-meter runs. His time of 13 minutes, 34.44 seconds in the 5K at the NCAA West Preliminary in Eugene, Ore., is the 11th-best in CU history.

"It's funny, I was talking to my dad the other day and we were joking that when I originally signed to come to CU we were talking about how good the program is and the guys that have come through here, the Olympians," Bosshard said. "I was hoping I could work hard and by my junior or senior season crack the top seven and maybe get on the national team. And maybe break 14 minutes in the 5K.

"The last month has been a little bit unreal with how things have gone."

Coburn and teammate Shalaya Kipp both qualified at the NCAA West Preliminary to represent CU again at nationals. The steeplechase semifinals will be at 6:30 p.m. on Thursday and the final will be at 11:54 a.m. on Saturday at Drake Stadium.

Bosshard will run in the 10,000 final at 7:50 p.m. on Thursday and the 5,000 final at 12:21 p.m. on Saturday.

Crested Butte will be watching, or at least waiting breathlessly, for the results.

"The number of people isn't going to be a lot, but I bet a quarter or half of them will follow it," Coburn said. "There's a good support system."

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