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sports weekend

## Bufs closing in on title for fallen teammate

By Nick Groke  
*The Denver Post*

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A heavy heart weighed down the Colorado ski team this season, despite the Buffaloes winning four of five Western states meets to charge into the NCAA Championships this week.

Spencer Nelson, a sophomore on CU's alpine team, was killed when he fell from Maroon Bells, a climbing site near Aspen, in August.

"We set that goal right after Spencer passed away and we've kept him in our minds the whole season," CU coach Richard Rokos said this week.

"As far as accomplishing it, we've done everything we've had to up until this point, and of course we have one piece, the biggest, left to do to meet that goal."

That piece would be an NCAA championship. But three-time defending NCAA champion Denver owns 21 national titles since the first national meet in 1954. Colorado has won 17, and the

Bufs have finished runner-up to the Pioneers the last three years.

The state of Colorado might dominate collegiate skiing, but the trophy skips between Boulder and Denver.

So when the NCAA Championships reached a halfway point Wednesday in Stowe, Vt., and Colorado was well ahead of the pack in the team standings, the title was far from decided.

Anything can happen.

Heading into today's classical cross country races — including the women's 15-kilometer race and the men's 20K — CU tops the standings with 408 points, ahead of second-place Dartmouth at 362. Utah, Vermont and New Mexico round out the top five. Denver trails in sixth place at 262.

Host Vermont entered the meet ranked No. 1 in the nation, but Colorado was on a roll.

"You can always wish for the perfect day at championships, but those are hard to come by," CU nordic coach Bruce Cranmer said. "I'm always really nervous, especially the first day, so it's good to get it out of the way."

And Denver — which has two three-title streaks since 2000 — isn't going quietly. The Pioneers won two individual titles Wednesday, with Ida Dillingoen winning the women's giant slalom and Seppi Stiegler the men's GS.

"The slalom is anyone's race, and I look forward

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to making a charge (today)," DU alpine coach Andy LeRoy said.

The team title will be decided Saturday after the men's and women's slaloms.

## AROUND TOWN

### DU faces tough test from No. 3 Irish.

After a shot to the gut to start its season — a loss to top-ranked Syracuse in New York — the Denver men's lacrosse team picked itself up and started swinging.

The Pioneers have since won three straight, including wins over Jacksonville and Manhattan last week in Denver.

Now ranked No. 14, Denver (3-1) gets another stiff test Saturday night at Peter Barton Stadium. The Pioneers host No. 3 Notre Dame (3-0) at 7 p. m.

"They're very disciplined. We know what we're in for," DU coach Bill Tierney said of the Fighting Irish. "It should be hopping around here."

Notre Dame last season played its way to the NCAA title game.

"Notre Dame is arguably the best defense in the country," Tierney said. "First team to 10 (goals) wins."

Alex Demopoulos (12 goals, six assists) and Mark Matthews (10 goals, eight assists) pace the

Pioneers this season with 18 points apiece.

## STAY ON THE COUCH

### From oval to the quarter-mile.

"I'm just a new guy. I don't want the extra attention."

Well, Kurt Busch, you got it. The NASCAR veteran and Sprint Cup standings leader gets off the oval this week and moves to the quarter-mile. Busch will make his NHRA debut in the pro stock division at the Gatornationals this week.

"It's just a whole new world," Busch told The Associated Press on Thursday. "But at the end of the the day, it's just a race car at a race track, and I'm here to put the best effort down."

Busch won the 2004 NASCAR title and he's tied for the points lead this season. But he will have a tough field to beat in Gainesville, Fla.

In the season opener last week at Pomona, Calif., defending pro stock champion Greg Anderson lost a semifinal matchup to eventual winner Jason Line. They likely will be Busch's top competition this weekend.

Catch Busch trying to qualify Saturday when ESPN2 reruns the races at 10 p.m. Sunday's elimination and finals air on ESPN2 starting at 4 p.m.

## GET OFF THE COUCH

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## Sunday: Runnin' of the Green.

Denver's Runnin' of the Green has grown to be one of the Colorado's biggest late-winter races. Sunday's 10 a.m. kickoff to the Lucky 7K — starting in LoDo at the corner of 17th and Wazee.

Included is a 7-kilometer run, a 7K walk and a sprint 2.2-mile walk. Everything goes to support Volunteers of America. Check [rotg.org](http://rotg.org) for information.

Or, try a smaller green-themed run in Highlands Ranch, with the St. Patrick's Day 5K Run on Saturday at 9 a.m. See [highlandsranchrunseries.com](http://highlandsranchrunseries.com) for information.

## WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE

### Accolades due.

Standout athletes young and old will be honored Sunday at the 37th annual Sportswomen of Colorado awards ceremony.

Five athletes will be inducted into the SWOC hall of fame: swimmer Missy Franklin of Regis Jesuit High; triathlete Judyann Cummings; paratriathlete Tricia Downing; Leadville endurance runner Marge Hickman; and Metro State diver Jessica Andrus.

Former Horizon High and Stanford basketball star Jamie Carey is the featured speaker. She's currently the assistant women's national team director for USA Basketball.

It should be a well-deserved night of celebration. See the full list of award winners at [sportswomenofcolorado.org](http://sportswomenofcolorado.org).

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