

Jenny Simpson trying to find her niche

Former Buffs star recovering from injury in first year as professional

By Kyle Ringo Camera Sports Writer
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Jenny Simpson has a line of New Balance running shoes named after her, but she hasn't been able to use them nearly as much as she would like over the past year.

Simpson, formerly Jenny Barringer, was busy planning her wedding last summer and fall and when her nuptials to Jason Simpson weren't consuming her time, recovering from the first serious injury of her running career ate up the rest.

She had a stress reaction in her right femur that led to pain elsewhere and other setbacks and eventually forced her off the course she had plotted for her first full year as a professional.

The former CU Buff star was hoping to build on a burgeoning résumé that included being the American record holder in the 3,000-meter Steeplechase and a Beijing Olympian. She missed seven months of competition recovering.

"It was hard because all the plans I had written in the schedule book were totally obsolete once I had decided to take the time off," Simpson said Saturday after signing autographs at an appearance at the Boulder Running Company. "One of the ways that I really coped with it is I told New Balance that I wanted to be involved in the events that they were doing that wouldn't require me to be running."

The Simpsons married in October and shortly after Jenny was healthy enough to begin working her way back into a training regimen with an eye toward the 2011 season.

She surprised herself in her first competition following her recovery in New York City in January. It wasn't just that she won the mile race at the New Balance Games. It was that she set a world leading time of 4:28.60 and came away feeling confident she probably could have gone faster.

"That was really exciting because we had a rabbit (pacesetter) and I was leading at the halfway and once she stepped off the track, I really felt like I could even pick it up from there," Simpson said. "That was a pleasant surprise for me. I was very excited about the level of fitness I had achieved in that short period of time."

Simpson continues to live and train in the Colorado Springs area at the Olympic Training Center and the Air Force Academy. She is finalizing a race schedule for a full professional season in Europe over the rest of the year, but it will also include the Outdoor National Championships in Eugene, Ore.

One of her goals is using this year to identify where her future lies. She plans to enter a handful of events everywhere she goes hoping it will help her figure out where she belongs. She obviously has a proud history in the Steeplechase, but might be ready to put those days behind her in favor of the 1,500 or 5,000 meters.

She believes the decision will work itself out.

"This year I'm really excited about doing what I had hoped and planned to do last year, which is entering every event, run every event hard and kind of start to narrow down where my specialty should be," Simpson said. "I think it's kind of obvious that I'm not going to be a world class 800-meter runner, but running those events is kind of important for me to kind of recognize and discover where I'm best suited to qualifying races like nationals and the world championships."

Simpson said she is entirely focused on this season and isn't looking ahead at all to 2012 and the London Olympics, especially with her injury just now fading in the rear view. But that doesn't mean her Olympic dream isn't a driving force in her training and planning.

"It's constantly present in my mind, especially because I work down at the Olympic Training Center and I know that's ultimately what I'm training for," Simpson said. "I'm training and I'm racing so that I can make the games in 2012. So making that team is paramount when it comes to my plans and my training."

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