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CU's Coburn latest of great Buffs steeplechase runners

By John Meyer
The Denver Post

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BOULDER — After Emma Coburn recently ran the fastest steeplechase time in the world this year at Stanford's Cardinal Invitational, some of her fans might have gotten just a little carried away.

"Everybody keeps bringing up the O word, bringing up the Olympics," the University of Colorado junior said after a workout this week. "It's exciting. I get excited, my family gets excited, the coaches get excited. We all want that for me, but it's 14 months away."

Perhaps all that excitement is a little premature. It's important to note that three Kenyans and two Ethiopians beat Coburn's time in an overseas meet five days later. But the buzz over her performance was understandable, given that her time, 9 minutes, 40.51 seconds, put her second behind Jenny Barringer on CU's all-time women's list in the event. And Coburn, 20, is young for a junior.

Barringer competed in the 2007 world championships and 2008 Olympics in Beijing before leaving CU, and she set the existing American record at the 2009 world championships. Coburn was in Barringer's wedding last fall — their CU careers overlapped in 2009 — and Barringer sent Coburn a

congratulatory text message after she ran her world-leading time.

"It was just, like, 'Great job, girl, love you, feel proud,' " Coburn said.

CU has built a reputation for excellence in steeplechase, a 3,000-meter event with wooden barriers (30 inches high for women and 36 inches for men) and a water jump. Assistant coach Billy Nelson finished second at the NCAAs in 2008 and made the Olympic team that year. Former Buff Steve Slattery made world championships teams in 2003 and 2005.

"It's obviously helpful to have someone who has achieved the highest achievements you can imagine — an American record that's going to stand for a really long time," Coburn said of Barringer. "And then to have Billy come back and help coach, to have someone still here who is an Olympian and who's done

CU Athletics

[View slide show of CU steeplechaser Emma Coburn.](#)

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and attainable, instead of a dream."

Coburn was born in Boulder but moved to Crested Butte when she was 9. It was an ideal environment to prepare for one of the more athletic events in track.

"If you think Boulder's healthy and athletic, go to Crested Butte and it will blow your doors off," Coburn said. "I never thought of myself as an athlete growing up there, just because I was doing the typical four sports a year, the typical skiing every day on the weekends and snowboarding during the school week after school, hiking fourteeners in the summer with your family, doing big mountain bike rides, backpacking."

Coburn ran low mileage for a high school track star, generally 15-20 miles per week, but those other sports honed important skills.

"I don't just have a passion for running, I have a passion for athletics in general," she said. "At least in the steeplechase, I'd like to think playing basketball and volleyball in high school and doing the high jump in high school has helped my coordination a little, and helped my jumping abilities over the barriers."

CU assistant coach Heather Burroughs said athletic ability is what makes Coburn special.

"If you put her up against our other women in basketball or volleyball, she would probably outshine them," Burroughs said. "She's excellent over the barriers, and we've had to do very little coaching to get her there. She's just a real natural when it comes to being technically sound over the water jump and the dry barriers."

Coburn was the 2010 NCAA runner-up and was ranked fourth overall in the U.S., a season Barringer missed because of a femur injury. Coburn could qualify for the world championships this season by finishing in the top three at the U.S. championships, June 23-26 in

Eugene, Ore.

Then maybe she can start thinking about the 2012 Olympics in London.

"Obviously that's a goal in the back of my mind, but it's conference and regionals and nationals and USAs right now," said Coburn, who races at the Big 12 championships Sunday. "It's meet by meet, getting through this season, accomplishing the goals I want for this season, and then reflecting for next year."

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Top steeplechase performers at CU

Women

Athlete: Jenny Barringer. Time: 9:12.50*. Date: August 2009. Meet: World championships. Comment: Three-time NCAA champion, two-time world championships participant, 2008 Olympian

Athlete: Emma Coburn. Time: 9:40.51. Date: May 2011. Meet: Cardinal Invitational. Comment: NCAA runner-up in 2010.

Athlete: Shalaya Kipp. Time: 9:59.37. Date: June

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2010. Meet: NCAA championships. Comment:
Entering junior year at CU.

Men

Athlete: Steve Slattery. Time: 8:26.45. Date: June
2001. Meet: U.S. outdoor championships.
Comment: World championships participant 2003
and 2005

Athlete: Billy Nelson. Time: 8:28.85. Date: June
2008. Meet: NCAA championships. Comment:
2008 Olympian, currently CU assistant coach

Athlete: Dan Reese. Time: 8:37.10. Date: May
1987. Meet: NCAA championships. Comment:
Bronze medalist, 1995 Pan Am Games

Upcoming meets:

Friday-Sunday: Big 12 championships, Norman,
Okla.

May 26-28: NCAA West preliminary, Eugene, Ore.

June 8-11: NCAA championships, Des Moines,
Iowa

June 23-26: U.S. outdoor championships, Eugene

* American record



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CU Buffs' Mike Bohn to kick off Bolder Boulder

Race officials want to recognize their partnership with CU

By Kyle Ringo Camera Sports Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

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Bolder Boulder organizers have reached for famous faces and proposed to political bigwigs in the past when annually selecting an official starter for the race.

This year they opted to honor their partnership with the University of Colorado once again by inviting athletic director Mike Bohn to fire the starter's pistol prior to each wave -- as many as 94 times -- on race day.

"It's a thrill, an honor and a privilege to be asked to be a small part of it," Bohn said.

It won't be the first time for Bohn, who aided former CU track and cross-country star Jenny Simpson (formerly Barringer) when she was named official starter in 2009. Bohn fired the pistol for each wave after Simpson said, "On your marks, get set ..."

This year, Bohn will have help but it probably won't be the vocal variety. CU mascot Chip also will be on hand, giving the start of the race a distinctive black, silver and gold feel, likely with a little humor here and there.

Cue the starter's gun that fires out a flag unfurling to reveal the word "bang."

Bohn, a Boulder native but not an avid runner, has participated in the race several times over the years, the last being in 2005 a month after he was hired away from San Diego State. He said his wife, Kim, and two grown children, along with other family members, also have participated on multiple occasions and race day is always a big day for the Bohn family.

Growing up in Boulder in the 1970s and returning often as a college student and young man in the 1980s, Bohn has watched the race grow from its infancy confined to North Boulder, to a grand road race unrivaled by any other in the state and by few nationally.

"I believe the race embodies the power of full community support and engagement in a special day, and that is very similar to what we attempt to accomplish every day with our athletic teams," Bohn said.

Bolder Boulder founder Steve Bosley said he and race director Cliff Bosley probably agonize over choosing an official starter each year as much as just about any other decision they make in their preparations. Bosley said the only other decision that receives more of their attention is selecting the military veterans to be honored in the Memorial Day tribute.

With the university and the athletic department embarking on a new chapter with a move to the Pac-12 this year, Bosley said it seemed appropriate to honor the Buffs by inviting Bohn to serve as the official starter.

"We have a really good relationship with CU and the city of Boulder," Bosley said. "It seemed like a good year to look at the recognition of CU again. It's easy to do something after you've had winning seasons and things materialize that are really good. We've concluded things are looking good. The groundwork has been laid and a lot of things have been done, and I think it's a good time to recognize our relationship with the athletic department."

The Bolder Boulder ends each year in the stadium where Bohn's office resides. A majority of the more 50,000 participants pass right by his office windows still breathing hard and cooling down just after crossing the finish line. But Bohn is rarely in there to see them. He usually can be found roaming the Folsom Field seats welcoming participants and spectators to campus.

Bohn said having participated in the race in the past, he understands the sense of accomplishment he sees on so many faces on race day when they have completed the 10k course, finishing with an uphill push into the stadium where runners are rewarded with cheers.

"I think that's what makes it special," Bohn said. "I think that is why I enjoy the business I am in, helping people be inspired to have a sense of community and instill a sense of pride in a collective effort but also have individual accomplishment.

"It's a tremendous feeling."

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