

Emma Coburn proves herself on world stage



Written by Than Acuff

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Reaches finals at world championships

It just keeps getting better for former Crested Butte Titan track star, current CU track star and now world steeplechase finalist Emma Coburn.

Coburn just put the finishing touches on what has been an incredible season in the 3,000-meter steeplechase, taking 13th place at the International Association of Athletics Federation (IAAF) World Championships in Daegu, South Korea on Tuesday, August 30. Except for the Olympics, this is the most prestigious event for track and field athletes.

Coburn opened the 2011 season back in May at the Payton Jordan Invitational at Stanford University. The event draws the top steeplers in the nation, both collegiate and pros, and is a great barometer of where amateur athletes stand among the nation's elite.

Despite the roster of talent, Coburn stood out above the rest, running away from the field to post a personal best time of 9:40 for the win.

Her time was also an Olympic "A" standard time, one of two benchmarks a steepler must reach in order to qualify for the Olympic Games.

But that's still a year away and Coburn had her sights set on a more immediate goal—the national title in the 3,000-meter steeplechase.

On May 15, Coburn defended her Big 12 title and then won her first NCAA collegiate national title in June, winning the steeplechase in a time of 9:41.

The next test for Coburn came June 23-25 when she headed to Oregon for the United States Track and Field (USTAF) national championships.

A top-three finish at the U.S. national championships would punch her ticket to the IAAF World Championships in Daegu, South Korea.

Coburn had the third-fastest time in the 3,000-meter steeplechase of the year heading into the USTAF so, on paper, she was looking good for a shot at South Korea.

She secured her trip to South Korea by winning the USTAF national championships in Oregon with a time of 9:44:11.

Having established herself as the top U.S. steepler, it was time for her to face the best steeplers in the world in South Korea.

Coburn spent time in Europe preparing for the world championships, including racing in the London Grand Prix where she set a new personal best time of 9:37.16.

Still, the biggest names in the sport were on hand and had the times to prove it, some a full 30 seconds faster than Coburn's.

The 33 women who reached the world championships were split into three qualifying heats and ran on Saturday, August 27.

The top four from each heat plus the three best times after those 12 steeplers would make up the field of 15 runners in the finals.

Coburn lined up and at the sound of the gun was off in the front with four other runners. With everyone running at a somewhat slower pace, Coburn eventually jumped into the lead, consciously keeping an eye on her splits and remaining conscious of her pace.

As the race progressed, a lead group of four runners overtook Coburn, leaving her in fifth place with three laps to go.

While the three lead runners started to pull away, Coburn held the fourth-place woman within striking distance. Coburn's work on the barriers all season paid off as she closed the gap on fourth place on the final water jump

and kicked her way to the finish to take fourth place with a time of 9:38.42 and be the only American steepler, both men and women, to reach the finals at Daegu.

Having exceeded her expectations by qualifying for the finals at the world championships, the rest was gravy for Coburn as she ran her way to a 13th-place finish with a time of 9:51, in the final race and now has her sights set on the upcoming collegiate cross-country season running as a senior for CU.

Come springtime, Coburn returns to the steeplechase and if she can repeat with a top-three finish at the 2012 USTAF national championships, she will represent the United States at the Summer Olympic Games in London, England.

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