



Emma Coburn is making a splash in international steeplechase competition.

Photo Courtesy: CUBuffs.com



Brooks: Coburn Closes In On Former Coach's Prophecy

Release: 06/10/2012 Courtesy: B.G. Brooks, Contributing Editor

BOULDER - When Emma Coburn was a high school runner in Crested Butte, her coach, Trent Sanderson, looked at her potential, gazed four years into the future, and made a brash prediction: "He told me that I had a chance to go to London in 2012."

Coburn's reaction: She laughed all the way to and from her part-time job at the dazzling mountain town's Brick Oven Pizzeria.

"If you know my high school times and career, that was laughable," Coburn recalled. "But he believed in me; I thought he was insane. I think everyone did. But I also think he loved me and believed in me. He'd probably say anything to motivate me. But he said it - and it was still hilarious to me."

Hilarity has given way to reality. Coburn has reinforced Sanderson's - as well as the international track community's - reason to believe. A trip to London and the 2012 Olympics as a member of the U.S. Track and Field team is a very real possibility for the vibrant University of Colorado senior. She'll compete at the end of this month (June 22-July 1) in the U.S. Olympic Trials in Eugene, Ore., with the top three 3k steeplers earning spots on the U.S. team.

Two weekends ago at the prestigious Nike Pre (short for Prefontaine) Classic in Eugene, Coburn reinforced what

had become more than a strong suggestion among followers of the 3,000-meter steeplechase: The lady has world-class talent.

As much as separating herself from her competitors, Coburn went into the race wanting to distance herself from a time - the 9:40 neighborhood. "I think a lot of people run around 9:40, and to be able to break away from that time was a goal I've had for a while," she said. "I thought it was a possibility, but I thought it might happen later in the summer or next year. I was just hoping to run close to 9:30. I didn't know it would happen at Pre."

But here's what did happen: Coburn, whose previous best time was a shade over 9:37, went an astounding 12 seconds under that, running a 9:25.28, and finished fifth in a field that likely was littered with London Olympians. Kenya's Milca Chemos Cheywa won the event in 9:13.69, and five of the world's current top 10 times were recorded at the Pre. Coburn's time ranks her No. 10 on that list. It was the fourth-fastest time ever by an American and the fastest by an American on U.S. soil. (The world record belongs to Russian Gulnara Galkina, who ran an 8:58.81 in 2008.)

Coburn came away from the PreClassic elated, saying her performance "really brought me to a good place in the steeplechase." But she also came away humbled: "To have people ahead of me on the all-time list, especially Jenny (Barringer Simpson, former CU student-athlete) and Anna (Willard Pierce), they've paved the way for American women in the steeplechase. They've made a mark on international races and performed well in world championships.

"The fact that I'm on a list with them kind of higher up now is an honor. I feel humbled. I know Jenny's 9:12 is something that's pretty unbelievable. There are times that are years away for me, as far as closing any gaps. But I think just being able to escape that 9:40 zone and break a new barrier was key for that race."

Equally important for Coburn in that race was her gaining confidence in "running in traffic" and staying competitive in such an elite field. "The top three women (in the Pre field) are hoping to be the top three or four in the Olympics," she said. "I know they were pretty far ahead of me in the race, but it was really neat to be able to race against a woman who has the realistic goal of winning the Olympics. Even though they were pretty far away, it was an honor to be in that field and be on the starting line with that group."

Coburn began turning heads in the steeplechase last year when she won the NCAA championship (9:41.14) and later recorded an Olympic 'A' standard time (9:40.51) at the Stanford's Payton Jordan Invitational, qualifying her for a spot at the U.S. Trials. That was when she realized the Olympic dream Sanderson had proposed suddenly didn't seem so preposterous.

"Prior to that, it was a far off dream," she said. "I thought all the stars would have to align for me to be able to get it. I know I still have work to do in the next few weeks to perform well at the trials. Anything can happen, especially in the steeplechase with barriers and water jumps . . . you have 35 opportunities to fail and trip in that race. There's still so much work to do between now and making an Olympic team. But it became a reality after I got that 'A' standard.

"That was 13 months ago, so even though I got the 'A' standard and people kind of started talking about it, it was still just like this far away thing. It was like, 'Don't talk about it, it's over a year away. I have cross country season to do, I have so many other things.' It wasn't part of the conversation much until then . . . and making the finals in Korea made it a little more of a reality, too. But it's still something that I won't put all my eggs in that one basket until it happens. I don't consider it a guarantee at all."

That shows Coburn's maturity. She's coming off the race of her life but knows she likely will have to duplicate it (or come close) later this month on the same course in Oregon. Even as a CU freshman and a bit beyond, Sanderson's Olympic projection remained "hilarious" for her because she hadn't yet qualified for the NCAA finals. "Not until this last 13 months was it something that because a little more realistic," she said. "It's still something, like I said, that's not a guarantee. I still have to be perfect on that day."

But she continues to push for perfection. Prior to the Nike PreClassic, Coburn lacked experience in coping with

the congestion that routinely develops around the steeplechase's barriers and hurdles - particularly in a world-class field.

"I just haven't had much experience with it," she said. "In most of the college races I've been running with three or four people, and by the end it comes down to two or three people. In the steeple, having to go over hurdles and water jumps, traffic is a whole different animal to deal with. I haven't had the most experience with that.

"It's easy to have perfect hurdle form and have perfect water jumps when nobody's there or in practice. But having people around, I needed to work on that. It was great practice and experience to be able to focus on my form and get more comfortable with it."

Having elite runners at each elbow, she admitted, "was different . . . I know on water jumps in college we all tend to jump very similar. So in an international field, some people hurdle it and some people have different form. You're not all moving over the water jump together in a continuous form. You're all a little more scattered. The idea of that is a little more stressful, so it takes that experience to be able to remain calm."

Keeping your wits and maintaining focus through the inevitable jostling that takes place in the hurdles and barriers is something Coburn says the average on-looker might have trouble comprehending.

"If you were just a pedestrian and went off one of those jumps in a big race, you'd freak out," she said. "You'd be so scared and unprepared for all these people being around you. I think all of us have raced enough that we're a little more comfortable with the jostling - but it's different. Some people hurdle and land a little deeper . . . some go outside or inside (and) that automatically leads to more jostling.

"I think most people guard their space pretty well, most people are prepared for that when they're racing. I think everyone going off a water jump is aware of what is happening around them and ready to guard their space."

With the goal of being well-rested for the Olympic trials in mind, Coburn redshirted for the indoor and outdoor portion of CU's track schedule. She was coming off a nearly year-and-a-half stretch of intense competition of running abroad, then proceeding straight into the Buffs' cross country schedule and the Pac-12 Conference meet, which the CU men and women won.

"I needed a break and my coaches (Mark Wetmore and Heather Burroughs) were very understanding and helpful," she said, adding that the prospect of having an extra year at CU is far from undesirable. "I like it here; I look forward to another year."

As planned, she went into the Nike PreClassic well-rested; it was her first steeplechase of the year. Her finish obviously sent her confidence soaring, particularly in the final stretch when the four runners ahead of her remained life-sized until they reached the finish line. That wasn't the case in some of her previous races, she said: "I had raced some before between the London Diamond League and Daegu (South Korea), but in my international racing prior to this I hadn't really been a factor or been in the frame of the leaders . . . I know in the last race the leaders got pretty far ahead, but to be able to be fifth in that (PreClassic) field and to be able to see the leaders - not just as little dots but as being in the straightaway with me - that was different and pretty special."

Between now and the Olympic Trials, Coburn's goals are to train smart, stay well and still attend to the details that have taken her this far. "There's nothing specific in steeple training," she said. "You stay healthy, get good training in, stay well-rested, make sure all the little things are right - sleeping well, eating right, taking care of my body. All the little things; there's nothing you can do right now to give yourself another five seconds of fitness. But I can work on the little things to make sure I can control everything I can on that day."

When the day comes - women's steeplechase competition in Eugene is set for Friday, June 29 - the Coburns of Crested Butte will be there. "Parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, friends," she said. "Luckily, every one of the family and friends who are going are solely there to support Emma and not there to put pressure on me to make the team.

"If I get fourth, tenth or first they'll be happy. So it'll be nice to share the experience with them no matter what happens. It's just an honor in itself to be able to race there. I'm excited and my family is excited. I can't wait for my teammates to come back from the NCAAs and we can all go there together."

Emma Coburn is in a good place, eyeing an even better one - right there on the cusp of where her high school coach projected she could be. Finally, she's starting to believe him.

Contact: BG.Brooks@Colorado.EDU

SHOW MENU





Photo Courtesy: Larry Lawson



Tebo Finishes Third in the 5k

Release: 06/09/2012 Courtesy: CUBuffs.com

DES MOINES, Iowa - University of Colorado senior Jessica Tebo recorded a third-place finish in the 5,000-meter run on Saturday afternoon at the NCAA Outdoor Track & Field Championships, earning her first Division I USTFCCA First Team All-American honor.

The former Division II standout entered the meet with the top time in the NCAA (15:19.43) and finished with a time of 16:14.32. The temperature was hot, over 90 degrees on the track, which kept the pace very conservative and the field close. The pace started to quicken after 3,200 meters, but the lead pack was still tightly packed as no one wanted to go out too strong with the heat.

With just two laps remaining, Tebo looked to make her move. She worked her way from fourth to first with 700 meters left and started to put a gap between her and the other top two women, Dartmouth's Abbey D'Agostino and Washington's Megan Goethals. As the trio entered the bell lap the other two started to gain on Tebo and passed her with about 300 meters remaining. Tebo looked to be gaining on Goethals in the final 150 meters, but Goethals pulled away from her and almost caught D'Agostino at the finish. D'Agostino won in 16:11.34 and Goethals finished second in 16:11.37.

The CU women tied for 14th-place at the championships with 16 points. Tebo recorded six points today for the

team score and Shalaya Kipp added 10 with her victory in the steeplechase on Saturday night. The finish is the best for the women since 2005 when they placed 12th.

Junior Aric Van Halen also earned second team All-America honors earlier in the day when he recorded a 10th-place finish in the 3,000-meter steeplechase. Van Halen finished with a time of 8:50.64 and was only five seconds outside of scoring for the Buffs. The sixth, seventh and eighth-place finishers each ran times of 8:46 and the ninth-place runner, Indiana's Adriene Dannemiller ran 8:47.86. Princeton's Donn Cabral won the steeplechase in 8:35.44.

The race started off slow, which kept the pack together for most of the event. With a couple laps left, the leaders took off, but the rest of the runners were still very close. Van Halen worked his way up from 13th to 10th and if he had a couple extra meters, he could have picked off one or two more runners.

Van Halen entered the meet ranked 12th overall in the NCAA. He was able to improve on his ranking making his first appearance at the national championships successful.

Florida won the men's team title with 50 points and LSU was the women's winner with 76 points.

Although the collegiate season comes to a close at this championship, many CU athletes, former and current, as well as assistant coaches will compete at the U.S. Track & Field Olympic Team Trials, June 22-July 1, for a chance to compete at the 2012 Olympic Games in London. Assistant coach Casey Malone competed early on Saturday at the Adidas Grand Prix in New York, part of the Samsung Diamond League series, and placed eighth. His toss of 198 feet, 10 inches (60.61 meters) was the best by an American thrower at the meet.

2012 NCAA OUTDOOR TRACK & FIELD CHAMPIONSHIPS

Jim Duncan Track (Des Moines, Iowa)

Men's Steeplechase Finals: (1. Donn Cabral, Princeton, 8:35.44) 10. Aric Van Halen, 8:50.64

Women's 5,000-Meter Finals: (1. Abbey D'Agostino, 16:11.34) 3. Jessica Tebo, 16:14.32

SHOW MENU



Rested Coburn ready to roll for Olympic steeplechase

By John Meyer The Denver Post The Denver Post

Posted:

DenverPost.com

BOULDER — Colorado's Emma Coburn won the steeplechase at the NCAA outdoor championships last year and won at the U.S. outdoor championships two weeks later. That qualified her for the world championships in Daegu, South Korea, but she was worn out by then.

Coburn and her coaches want to make sure that doesn't happen at the London Olympics this summer, so she redshirted for CU's indoor and outdoor track seasons. Assuming she makes the team for London, she figures to be much sharper for the Olympics than she was for worlds last August.

"After last year, doing a full cross country season, a full indoor season, a full outdoor season and full summer of racing, by the time the important summer races came around, I was pretty exhausted," said Coburn, who is from Crested Butte. "Although I made it to the final in Daegu, I didn't race well in the final, (not) as well as I know I could have."

Coburn ran a PR of 9:37.16 at a meet in Paris last summer but finished 12th at worlds in 9:51.4. Last week, in her first steeplechase since Daegu, Coburn set a PR of 9:25.28 at the Prefontaine Classic in Eugene, Ore., and was the top American.

"I had December, January, February, March, April (to train) and didn't start racing until the end of May," said Coburn, 21. "That's been a great block of training for me, something I never experienced before."

CU assistant coach Heather Burroughs said the plan was to give Coburn a chance to do "something really big" in London, and it seems to be working. That doesn't mean it was easy — especially with CU teammate Shalaya Kipp dominating the collegiate steeplechase.

"I was a little stir crazy at moments, seeing my teammates race in the big races indoor and so far in outdoor," Coburn said. "There were times when I got a little sad that I wasn't out there racing. But it's been a good decision, and it's working out so far. I'm really rested and excited for the trials."

Kipp wins NCAAs. When Kipp won the NCAA steeplechase Friday, it was the fifth steeplechase title for a CU woman in seven years. Before Coburn, Jenny Barringer (now Simpson) won it in 2006, 2008 and 2009. It wouldn't be surprising if Coburn and Kipp are two of the three women who make the Olympic team in the steeple. In fact, it's a good bet.

"It's a little surprising to have two women who are so good in the same event on a collegiate and a U.S. level," Burroughs said. "Many times you would think that would lead to tension. I think we're lucky we have two personalities (for whom) that's not an issue. It's rare. I wouldn't blame them if Emma was looking over her shoulder and saying, 'I'm good, I want to be the best in the country, and I might not be the best at CU.' You wouldn't blame Shalaya for saying, 'I'm tired of being in Emma's shadow, I want to beat her.' We're lucky they have personalities that are competitive on the track, but it's not personal, and they train very well together."

Next stop, Olympic Trials. Michael Phelps swam the third-fastest 200-meter butterfly time in the world this year (1:54.79) in the Longhorn Aquatics Elite Invite last week in Austin, Texas. China's Wu Peng was second (1:56.71). The Olympic Trials are June 25- July 2 in Omaha.

John Meyer: 303-954-1616 or [jmeyer@ denverpost.com](mailto:jmeyer@denverpost.com)