

Billy Nelson is primed for Monday's steeplechase competition at the Olympic Trials.

Photo Courtesy: Larry Lawson



Brooks: Healthy, Focused Nelson Eyes 2nd Olympics Trip

Release: 06/22/2012 Courtesy: B.G. Brooks, Contributing Editor

BOULDER - Billy Nelson realized a lifelong dream by qualifying for the 2008 Olympics, but his big-picture dreaming always has had a Part B. Four years later, he's also realized that one as he prepares to compete for a spot on Team USA in the London Olympics.

A six-time All-American runner during his Colorado career (2002-08), Nelson was hired by his alma mater two years ago as an assistant track coach/recruiting coordinator.

"It's great . . . it's something I've always wanted to do," Nelson said. "I didn't think it would be while I was running on my own, but I love it. The stuff I do is the stuff I liked to do while I was in school . . . I liked hosting recruits when I was in school. Now, I'm able to recruit high schoolers, get to know them and talk to them about our program."

A bonus is being able to participate in training strategy sessions with head CU track/cross country coach Mark Wetmore and associate head coach Heather Burroughs. "It's nice to sit in on meetings and hear why we do certain things and learn a little more," Nelson said. "I get to reflect on that, and that helps me understand (his workouts) a little more."

Nelson, who won the 2011 USA steeplechase crown, finished 11th in the second preliminary race in that event in the 2008 Games. He has a top time of 8:21:42 this season, which is below the Olympic 'A' standard of 8:23.10 and

the 'B' standard of 8:32.00. This year's top time is a 7:54.31 posted by Kenya's Paul Kipsiele Koech. The world record of 7:53.63 was set in 2004 by Kenya's Stephen Cherono (now Saif Saaeed Shaheen of Qatar).

Nelson typically has his personal workout done before he reports for his daily CU duties, but he occasionally works out with the Buffs' current crop of steeplechasers. His most recent race was on May 31 in Rome, where he finished ninth overall in a prestigious Diamond League field with his time of 8:21.42.

"It was my second-fastest time ever . . . very similar to what I ran in the Trials in 2008," he said. "I was happy with it, I felt comfortable in the splits, and with all the travel it was nice to have a good race. It was definitely good motivation going into the Trials."

As a competitor at CU, Nelson persevered and successfully battled through injuries and won the Big 12 Conference steeplechase crown in 2008. He also was the NCAA runner-up that year. "That was an injury-free year for me and I felt strong going into the Trials that year," he said. "I've been injury-free for four years now and there are no signs of anything now. I'm definitely healthy and strong going in."

He's scheduled to run in the qualifying heat of the 2012 Trials in Eugene, Ore., on Monday. Also competing for positions on the U.S. team is CU assistant track coach Casey Malone (discus) and current Buffs student-athletes Emma Coburn and Shalaya Kipp (steeplechase) and Joe Morris (100-, 200-meters). Aric Van Halen (steeplechase) is a possible entry in his event.

CU also has a handful of former athletes competing, including 2008 Olympian Jenny (Barringer) Simpson, the current world champion in the 1,500 meters. Also, marathoner Kara Goucher placed third in the U.S. Women's Marathon Olympic Trials and has already qualified for Team USA.

Nelson said his performance in Rome boosted his confidence in several areas: "It helped me trust in my fitness and my workouts. It's a tough year; it's probably a little more stacked than 2008. But I'm in a bit of a better position going in than I was then. I think I have a good shot at making the team. I'm definitely mentally and physically strong going in."

Nelson's inclusion on the '08 U.S. team didn't take him by surprise, but it was ahead of schedule. He believed that making the team this summer and achieving what he called the "ultimate goal" was a more realistic long-term goal. That it happened earlier than expected was fine by him.

Competing for the U.S., he said, "means everything. It was the ultimate goal when I started running. Even when I was in the eighth grade, you're thinking about the Olympics. We had the junior Olympics, but the actual Olympics, that's what you're thinking about. Achieving that is a dream come true, something that I had planned on trying to accomplish in 2012.

"But 2008 was four years early and I just kind of went with it. There's some unfinished business that I have; I didn't make the final in 2008 and I hope to make the team and make the final this year. But to me it's everything. It's what you try to strive for as a runner."

Nelson, now sponsored by New Balance, will turn 28 in September. If all goes well, he believes he also can be a candidate for the 2016 Summer Games. "People are running in their mid-30s still and running well," he said. "I think the key to it is staying healthy. Obviously, there's that peak time and (afterward) the times start getting slower, but I think if you're smart with your training you can run the event just as long as you can any other event.

"You do lose a little speed, but there are 10k and 5k runners now that are in their late 30s and they still have the speed that you would need for a steeplechase as well. I think if you're smart with your training you can go into your late 30s.

"Honestly, if I can go four more years at what I'm doing now, I'll be completely happy. If I can make my mid-30s running well - we'll see how the next four years go - and in 2016, I don't think that (Olympics) is out of the

picture. If I can make it until then I'll be really happy with my career."

For now, though, he's focused on the here and now - and more specifically, on Monday.

Contact: BG.Brooks@Colorado.EDU

SHOW MENU



CU Buffs gear up for track Olympic Trials

By Ryan Thorburn Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

London is calling for an impressive herd of Buffaloes.

A total of 10 current and former University of Colorado athletes and/or coaches will compete at the U.S. Track & Field Olympic Trials today through July 1 in Eugene, Ore.

Billy Nelson is looking to make his dreams come true and his job as CU head coach Mark Wetmore's recruiting coordinator easier.

According to Track & Field News, Nelson is America's top-ranked athlete in the men's steeplechase. He qualified in the event four years ago but did not make it to the finals in Beijing.

"I think that experience helps a lot. I've been here before and I shouldn't be nervous," Nelson said. "I'm feeling good and training is going well. I'm fitter than I was in 2008 and racing a lot better. I'm happy with where I'm at. Now I just have to trust the training."

Nelson capped his career at CU with a runner-up finish at the NCAA championships and was also second at the 2008 Olympic trials.

"In my sport, it would mean the world," Nelson said of qualifying for the Olympics in London. "I'm definitely shooting for that goal. I think I left some unfinished business behind in Beijing."

When Nelson isn't focused on his event, the preliminary is next Monday and the final is June 28, he will be cheering on the rest of the Buffs.

Also representing the CU family will be famous alumni (Jenny Simpson, 1,500), rising stars on the current roster (Emma Coburn and Shalaya Kipp, steeplechase) and an assistant coach looking to make his third Olympic team (Casey Malone, discus).

"Something we tell our athletes when they're here and to recruits when we're selling the program is that they can make it to this level," Nelson said. "I take a lot of pride in the fact that we do really well at this level of competition."

Simpson, who competed in the steeplechase at the 2008 Olympics, is among the favorites to represent the U.S. in the 1,500. She was the gold medalist in the event at the 2011 World Championships.

This year Simpson, a four-time NCAA champion at CU, won USA Indoor titles in the 1,500 and 3,000.

Three of Simpson's collegiate national titles came in the 3,000-meter steeplechase. She is still the American record holder in the event.

Coburn (2011) and Kipp (2012) have continued the tradition by winning the last two NCAA championships in steeplechase. Both Buffs could both qualify for London in the finals on June 29, with the top three finishers punching their ticket.

"I didn't even really know what the steeple was until I got to Colorado," Kipp said after edging Florida's Genevieve for the national title earlier this month. "Then I watched my teammates and thought, 'Wow, that's a

crazy event. I'm never doing it.' Then one day Mark Wetmore pulled me aside said, 'How about you try the steeple?' and I haven't looked back since."

CU's Jessica Tebo, coming off a third-place performance at the NCAAs in the 5K, will compete in the trials. So will Aric Van Halen in the men's steeplechase.

The atmosphere at historic Hayward Field, combined with the Olympic stakes, can make the strongest runner's legs shake.

Jeremy Dodson will step onto the track with a sense of calm.

The former CU sprinting star has put some his legal troubles behind him and is looking ahead at attempting to qualify for the London Games as a long shot in the 100-meter dash.

"I will be able to relax and enjoy the experience," Dodson said.

Five months ago Dodson pleaded guilty to one count of identity theft and one count of theft stemming from the fraudulent use of credit cards in 2009 and 2011. The plea deal will allow Dodson, CU's record holder in the indoor (20.88) and outdoor (20.37) 200-meter dash, to remove the felony conviction from his record if he stays on the right path.

"Everything happens for a reason. I've learned to trust God more," Dodson said. "When everything went down hill, I was ready to handle it. There was good and bad that came from it."

Dodson said he can't wait to see how current CU sprinter Joe Morris handles the spotlight. The senior-to-be expects to run the 100 and 200 at the trials.

"I've talked about the 2012 Olympic trials since Day One," said Morris, who ran 10.31 in the 100 and 20.82 at the NCAA West Prelims. "It's fun running with (Dodson) when we do run together because I like to compete every rep. He's one of the fastest out there."

Emma Coburn, steeplechase

Shalaya Kipp headlines Utahns at Olympic Trials for track

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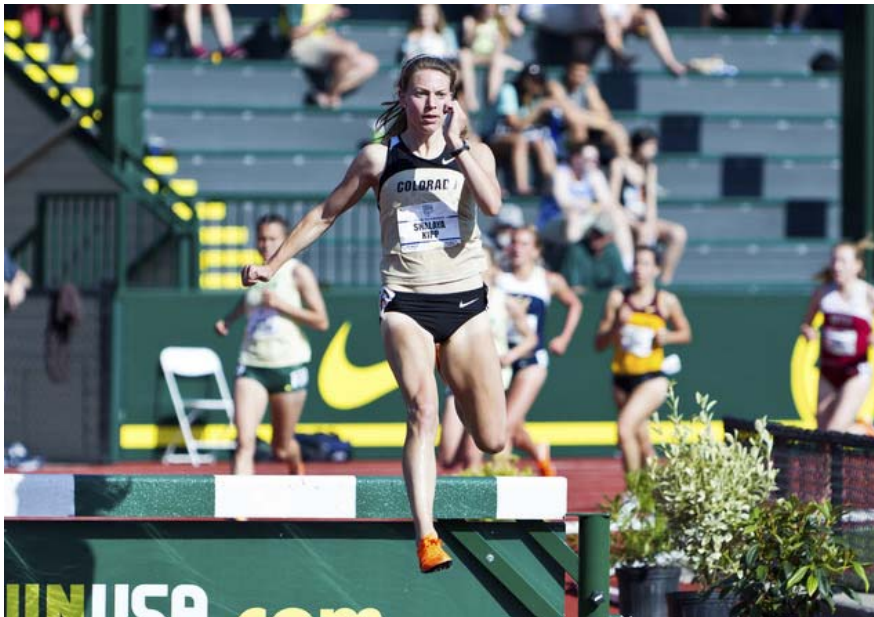
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Steeplechase runner Shalaya Kipp, a Skyline HS grad who now runs for Colorado and hopes to qualify for the London Olympics by racing well enough at the upcoming U.S. Olympic Trials in Eugene, Ore. Courtesy University of Colorado

Shalaya Kipp headlines Utahns at Olympic Trials for track

Track » Skyline grad can't quite believe her rapid ascent in steeplechase.

By Michael C. Lewis | The Salt Lake Tribune

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Shalaya Kipp won three state championships while running track and cross country for Skyline High School, broke myriad records, and earned a scholarship to the University of Colorado — home to one of the nation's powerhouse track programs.

Even so, Kipp almost can't believe what might come next.

The 21-year-old junior from Salt Lake City could be heading to the London Olympics, if she runs well enough at the U.S. Olympic Trials for track and field starting Friday at legendary Hayward Field in Eugene, Ore.

"I definitely am surprised," she said.

Kipp just won the women's steeplechase title at the NCAA Championships, and needs to finish in the top three in her 3,000-meter event at the trials to book a ticket to London. The fact that such a thing is entirely possible is the part

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Utahns at the track and field trials

Seven athletes who attended either high school or college in Utah are competing in the U.S. Olympic Trials for track and field starting Friday in Eugene, Ore:

Athlete School Event

Miles Batty BYU/Jordan HS 1,500

Shayla Houlihan Utah Steeplechase

Shalaya Kipp Colorado/Skyline HS Steeplechase

Nachelle Mackie BYU/Spanish Fork HS 800

Josh McAdams BYU Steeplechase

Katie Palmer BYU 800

Luke Puskedra Oregon/Judge HS 10,000

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texting me about how she watched a race in Indiana, and she was like, 'If these girls are running that, you can totally make the team!' "

If she does, it would represent quite an amazing achievement — especially considering that Kipp began running her unique event barely two years ago.

that amazes Kipp, considering she was a distant ninth at the national championships last year.

"That's a lot of time you have to make up and improve over that next year," she said. "To find myself in the mix of it this year, I'm still a little shocked."

Kipp is among seven athletes with Utah connections who will be competing at the trials, including fellow steeplechaser Shayla Houlihan, a former athlete and volunteer assistant coach at Utah. She's also among four athletes from Utah high schools who will be there — Judge's Luke Puskedra (Oregon), Jordan's Miles Batty (BYU) and Spanish Fork's Nachelle Mackie (BYU) are the others — and probably the one with the best chance of making the Olympic team.

Her qualifying time ranks sixth in the country, and she trains with college teammate Emma Coburn, by far the top-ranked American in the steeplechase, who redshirted the collegiate outdoor track season in hopes of being ready for the trials.

"Absolutely, Emma is probably part of the reason I've upped my success," Kipp said. "She's running every day with me — she's a little ahead in workouts — but she runs with me and encourages me. Even the other night, she was

with me and encourages me. Even the other night, she was

story continues below

Until then, she had been running the 1,500 and 5,000 meters as she acclimated to college.

But coach Mark Wetmore suggested she try the steeplechase, a distance run interspersed with hurdles and water jumps, and she obliged, even if she joked that once Wetmore "watched me do some hurdles, I think he was second-guessing his decision."

"The whole first year I did it, I'd get in a race and I'd see a barrier coming and I'd say, 'What am I doing?' " she said with a laugh. " 'What is this in the lane? What is this giant block of wood doing?' It took some time to get used to."

But few people are better at it, now.

She was already a two-time All-American by the time she won her national title with a terrific finishing kick, and hopes she gets a chance to do it again in Eugene. Both her parents, who still live in Salt Lake City, are planning to go watch, along with her grandparents, who live in Oregon.

Kipp credits working a lot on her form and "just chipping away at it" in training for her improvement — her best time of 9 minutes, 43.09 seconds is a whopping 70 seconds faster than her steeplechase

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On paper, they're Bridget Franek, Sara Hall, Delilah DiCrescenzo and Stephanie Garcia — all with faster qualifying times than Kipp and all probably fighting for two places behind Coburn, whose best is far better than the others.

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U.S. Olympic trials: Olympic hopefuls Brent and Sara Vaughn are on the daddy-mommy track

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Lindsay Schnell, The Oregonian
By



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Runners Brent and Sara Vaughn with daughters Calia (left) and Kiki. Brent runs with Nike's Oregon Track Club/Portland and is a contender in the 10,000. Sara, a mid-distance specialist, runs with Bowerman Athletic Club.

BEAVERTON -- **Brent and Sara Vaughn** are in need of a good baby sitter.

The ideal candidate will enjoy coloring with the Vaughns' two little girls, Kiki and Calia, and trips to the playground, and will have some general housekeeping skills.

Oh yeah, and if there's any way the baby sitter could double as a massage therapist, that would be even better.

Brent and Sara's day job involves endless laps around the track at the Nike campus, as the Olympic hopefuls prepare for the U.S. track and field trials, which kick off Friday in Eugene at Hayward Field. Some athletes have in-home nannies and some

have in-home massage therapists. The Vaughns would like to merge those two.

"Maybe we could get a high school runner, someone like an intern," Sara laughed. "They could follow us around, watch the girls, and see that running is really a lifestyle more than a career."

In the Vaughn household, that certainly is true.

Consider that Brent and Sara's daughters -- Kiki is 5 and Calia will be 2 next week -- have known nothing but running since they were born. When Kiki started preschool two years ago in Denver, she quizzed classmates on what events their mommies and daddies did.

"She thought everyone ran or jumped or threw something," Sara said. "It wasn't until just recently that she

started to understand most of society functions without athletes."

But who can blame Kiki for wondering? Brent estimates that Kiki has played the "Memory" card game with five Olympians, been to more states than most kindergartners and eaten Thanksgiving dinner with some of the best Kenyan runners in the world. Calia also is a track baby through-and-through: Sara was nine months pregnant two summers ago watching Brent race in a 10,000 when the stress of hoping he could win -- he took the lead on the bell lap just as the TV cut away to a no-hitter baseball game -- caused her to go into labor.

So on Friday when Brent runs in the 10,000 meters final in Eugene, and on Thursday when Sara starts out in the 1,500 preliminaries -- with bids to London on the line -- their kids will get it.

But don't expect them to sit still in the stands.

Brent is a contender in the 10,000; Sara, a mid-distance specialist, has an outside shot. And because they are pulling for a family trip to London, the girls already have their passports.

Brent said he feels "fresh, healthy and in the best shape of my life."

"In the 2008 trials, I was just coming out of college," Brent recalled. "I was exhausted from the college season and had a little injury. Now, after training here for almost a year, where the team has been doing so well, I feel ready."

Brent and Sara moved to Beaverton a year ago when he signed a contract with Nike's Oregon Track Club/Portland, coached by Jerry Schumacher. They went on somewhat of a whim -- Sara didn't have a coach or a contract at the time -- but knew it was time for Brent to take a step up.

"I don't think I really understood how hard you have to train to be one of the best," Brent said. "Everything here is more intense, but the support helps."

Sara has since signed a contract with the Bowerman Athletic Club and coach Chris Cook, but often works out with OTC.

The Vaughns were lured to Nike in part by OTC/Portland's star power. Schumacher has coached Olympic medalist Shalane Flanagan since 2009. Olympians Kara Goucher and Lopez Lomong have joined OTC since.

"Running with someone like Shalane every day makes going to the Olympics seem more real and attainable," Sara said.

Make no mistake, the Vaughns are setting their sights on London. Not qualifying would be a disappointment, especially for Brent, who had to drop out of the marathon trials in January after cutting his foot. But

regardless of their finish, Kiki and Calia will be excited to get a post-race hug.

Kiki might even have a few tips for her parents. After five years of being around it, she has picked up a few running tricks from Mom and Dad.

Just last week, Kiki walked into her parents' room and declared that she should probably sleep in the altitude tent.

She had a 200-meter race the next day, and wanted to make sure she was ready to PR.

--**Lindsay Schnell**

twitter.com/lindsayrae19

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