

CU Buffs' Van Halen eyes steeple title at Pac-12 Championships

By Brian Howell Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

Pac-12 Track and Field Championships

WHAT: Pac-12 Track and Field Championships at Hayward Field in Eugene, Ore.

WHEN: Today and Sunday.

STORYLINES: This is CU's first Pac-12 championship meet. ... Live results will be available at www.pac-12.org throughout the weekend. ... In the 3,000-meter steeplechase, Colorado's Aric Van Halen is ranked No. 1 on the men's side, while Shalaya Kipp is ranked No. 1 on the women's side. ... Senior Jessica Tebo is the top-ranked woman in the 5,000 meters. She also ranks fourth in the 1,500. ... Overall, CU comes into the meet with 22 top-10 rankings in individual events.

KEY STAT: CU is 15-0 when shooting 40 percent or better from the floor, and has shot 39.6 percent on the season. Oklahoma State, however, ranked second in the Big 12 this season in field goal percentage defense, allowing opponents to shoot just 34.7 percent.

CONFERENCE HISTORY: CU won its only men's outdoor conference title in 2008 as a member of the Big 12. The women won their only outdoor title in 1996 as a member of the Big Eight. A year ago in the Big 12, the men finished eighth and the women were 10th.

UP NEXT: : Buffs that finish in the top 48 of the region will head to the NCAA West preliminary championships May 25-26 in Austin, Texas.

Like it or not, Aric Van Halen has a target on his back this weekend.

Today and Sunday, the Colorado track and field team is in Eugene, Ore., for the Pac-12 Championships. Van Halen, a junior from Los Angeles, is the top seed and favorite to win the 3,000-meter steeplechase.

"It makes it a little more nerve-racking," he said of being seeded No. 1. "You've got a lot more to lose as opposed to chasing other guys, but I'm excited for the opportunity.

"It's not a sure victory. I don't think anything really is. I'm ready to go out there and race some guys."

Van Halen is one of several Buffs hoping for a strong performance in the squad's inaugural Pac-12 championship meet.

"It feels to me like we're at the top of our game for the season so far," CU head coach Mark Wetmore said. "We're finally into good weather and consequently great workouts and everybody seems to be feeling ready."

As a team, the Buffs don't have the firepower that many of their competitors do. The Pac-12 features five top-25 teams on the men's side and five top-25 teams (all ranked 16th or higher) on the women's side.

Wetmore said the Buffs are aiming to finish in the top half of the team standings this weekend, but added, "Even then, we'd have to have a pretty good day."

Van Halen is one of the Buffs capable of having a pretty good day. His time of 8 minutes, 42.79 seconds at the Mt. SAC Relays on April 19 is the top 3,000-meter steeplechase performance of the season in the Pac-12. Van Halen believes he's capable of that type of performance again.

"I think I'm still riding my good training right now," he said. "I think I've still got a lot left in me."

He credits his dedication for that.

"I hadn't been as serious as I should have been earlier on in my career at CU," he said. "This past year, since November, I've started to really get serious and really put the miles in and work on rehab on my body."

After finishing fourth at the Big 12 Championships last year, he'd love to take the top spot in the Pac-12 this year.

"It would be great," said Van Halen, whose father, Alex, is the drummer for the rock band Van Halen. "I have some family coming down to watch and I'd really like to show everyone that all the hard work and dedication is paying off."

Hard work has paid off for Buffs sprinter Joe Morris, as well. The junior ranks fifth on the conference in the 100-meters (10.42 seconds) and sixth in the 200 (20.77).

"I actually feel like if I go out there and do what I've been doing all week in practice, I have a good shot of getting up in the top spot," he said. "Definitely, my goal is to win. I see myself as having the potential and talent. It's just about executing it."

This weekend is all about execution for the Buffs. Whether they win conference titles or not, several of them are currently sitting in prime spots to reach the NCAA West preliminary championships (the top 48 in each event qualify). However, considering just about every conference in the country is holding championships this weekend, the Buffs could be knocked down in a hurry if they don't perform well.

"There's no laying back on your laurels right now," Wetmore said.

The Register-Guard<http://www.registerguard.com/>

Bufs look plenty tough in distances

BY CURTIS ANDERSON*The Register-Guard***Published:** *Midnight*, May 12

Colorado has always been a mecca for distance runners.

To nobody's surprise, the Buffaloes will make their greatest splash in the longer races as they make their debut at the inaugural Pac-12 track and field championships.

While Colorado won't be involved in the men's or women's title chase, the Bufs are favored to sweep the 3,000-meter steeplechase, even without the redshirting Emma Coburn.

Coburn, the reigning NCAA and U.S. steeplechase champion, is skipping the collegiate season to train for the U.S. Olympic Trials.

All that means is that her teammate, junior Shalaya Kipp, will be the one to beat in the women's steeplechase in today's final.

Kipp, out of Salt Lake City, comes in with the nation's leading time among collegians at 9 minutes, 43.09 seconds.

On the men's side, CU junior Aric VanHalen is the Pac-12 steeplechase leader at 8:42.79.

Another top Colorado performer on the women's side is Jessica (Pixler) Tebo.

Granted a sixth-year of eligibility, the former Seattle Pacific standout is entered in the 1,500 and 5,000 at the Pac-12 meet, and is expected to finish top-three in each.

— *Curtis Anderson*

Copyright © 2012 — The Register-Guard, Eugene, Oregon, USA