

World champion Jenny Simpson back in Boulder, training with CU coaches

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SUPERIOR — Two-time Olympian Jenny Simpson is back training in Boulder, reunited with coach Mark Wetmore after a three-year absence and helping coach the University of Colorado track team as a volunteer assistant.

Simpson left Wetmore and Boulder in 2010, moving to Monument to train under Air Force coach Juli Benson. Simpson became a world champion in the 1,500 meters but failed to make the finals of the event at the London Olympics.

"I thought back to the years I spent at CU. It was just a really special chemistry — coach and athlete — between Mark and Heather (Burroughs) and myself," said Simpson, who opens her 2013 season Friday at the Drake Relays. "You can't expect that everywhere, and sometimes it just can't be replicated. Sometimes there's just this peace you can't define, and a method to training, that I think I definitely have at CU."

Simpson said she believes Wetmore's coaching method works better for her than Benson's.

"I just think his method maximizes my strengths," Simpson said. "Part of the reason I left Juli is because I don't think the method there was maximizing my strengths, but I don't think it's because she's less of a coach. I think it's because she's a different type of coach. Mark just has a method that is perfect for my talent set."

When she was coached by Wetmore and Burroughs, a CU assistant, Simpson set the American record in the steeplechase and broke six collegiate records. She ran her personal best time in the 1,500 (3 minutes, 59.9 seconds) in 2009 but hasn't run that fast since, not even when she won her world championships gold medal in 2011.

She needed to run faster than 4:03 to make the finals in London but finished her semifinal heat in 4:06.89.

There were other reasons for moving back. Simpson's husband, Jason, works in Boulder, 80 miles from Monument. Boulder also is a place that understands and supports elite runners in a way few places can match.

"I moved to Monument, I thought, 'Oh my gosh, I have all the trails to myself and no one is going to be peeking at what I'm doing,' " Simpson said. "But you miss the synergy and the camaraderie. You miss walking into Southern Sun (a south Boulder pub) and seeing other people you know, and talking about runs. It's really good to be back. We belong here."

Simpson also can mentor CU steeplechasers Emma Coburn and Shalaya Kipp, both of whom ran the event at the London Olympics. Simpson no longer runs that event, but she ran it at the 2008 Beijing Olympics and her American record still stands.

Coburn, a CU senior, won the U.S. steeplechase title the past two years and finished ninth at the Olympics. She was a freshman when Simpson finished her CU career.

"I'm really happy to have her back," Coburn said. "She's been a great person to chase on the track, to have someone ahead of me to strive after. And as an assistant coach, she's been really encouraging and supportive."

Simpson won NCAA steeplechase titles in 2006, 2008 and 2009.

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