



CU steeplechasers Emma Coburn (right) and Shalaya Kipp (left) are London-bound.  
Photo Courtesy: Associated Press



## Brooks: Buffs Hit A Very Rare Olympic Double

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**BOULDER** - It's a rare and wonderful thing for a school to produce an Olympian. It's even rarer and more wonderful for a school to produce a pair. But it gets even better.

The University of Colorado has placed two student-athletes in the London Olympics - and in the same event no less.

How does veteran CU track and field coach Mark Wetmore explain it? Before that, hear this: "I've never seen it before," Wetmore said Monday over the noon hour at a press conference for CU steeplechasers Emma Coburn and Shalaya Kipp. "There were maybe five collegians on the 2008 Beijing team; I've never seen two from the same event."

Now he has - and from his team, to boot. As for Wetmore's explanation of why Coburn and Kipp are bound for London Town later this month as first-time members of Team USA: "It's a confluence of luck, talent and environment . . . a lot of things came together to make it happen. Two people - I won't say equally talented because talent packages can vary greatly - but in the end it adds up to Olympic level talent."

Coburn, of Crested Butte, and Kipp, of Salt Lake City, qualified for the 2012 Summer Games by finishing first and

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third, respectively, last month in the U.S. Olympic Trials in Eugene, Ore. Coburn might be an Olympic newbie, but she's not new to the international stage. Kipp, on the other hand, is a first-timer in practically all areas of international competition.

But the common denominator here is that both are Olympians - Buffs Olympians - and both couldn't be prouder about putting their patriotism on display in what will be the trip of an athletic lifetime.

The sheer red, white and blue magnitude of it all, said Kipp, registered during her victory lap at Eugene's historic Hayward Field: "You have the American flag and you realize you're going overseas and represent your country. That was pretty cool. In the airport little kids ask you for your autographs. That's kind of when it started to sink in, that you're going to do something really special."

Many steeplechasers evolve, and Kipp can be counted in this group. Believe it or don't, but she says she arrived at CU believing the steeplechase "was a horse event." Wetmore approached her about trying this non-horse event, she complied and now calls the torturous 3,000-meter race "a pretty good fit . . . it's different than any other race but it's been really fun."

The real fun comes in winning, and both Coburn and Kipp are NCAA steeplechase champions - Coburn in 2011, Kipp in 2012. They are different strains of steepplers, Coburn nearly flawless in her form while Kipp could be classified as a power runner, maybe even a grinder.

Wetmore might or might not be a gear-head, but when I asked him what each of his steepplers needed to tune up before they answer the boarding call for Heathrow, here's how he answered:

"Despite the fact that they are both Olympians, and at the trials they ran within three seconds of each other, every athlete is a unique talent package and each has to be developed uniquely. Emma has her strengths in the event which are different from Shalaya's. While they do have some similar workouts, they will also have some different workouts, they will have different focuses to each workout. More importantly, different focuses in the workout. I've been quoted as comparing them to different generations of Formula One racing cars. In the early '90's, Formula One cars had 12 cylinders and at least 1,000 horsepower engines. Safety regulations and cost-cutting regulations have dialed that back to V8s and 750 horsepower, but the cars are just as fast with aerodynamic changes. So, Emma's impeccable technically and Shalaya has a 1,200 horsepower engine. There's a difference, they come in different talent packages and they need different workouts. While we're working on Shalaya's aerodynamics, we're working on Emma's horsepower."

Vroom, vroom . . .

While Coburn redshirted the past indoor and outdoor seasons to train for an Olympic run, Kipp has been running full tilt. Over the past two months, she has competed in eight races - a full load by any standard in such a grueling event.

But she smiled and didn't hesitate Monday when asked if the tank was still full. "The tank is still full," she said. "The coaches have been very careful with me; they've made sure I've recovered after the races. I trust them to know what they're doing. I think we're going to be fine with two more steeples coming up."

Kipp didn't grow up with the Summer Games racing through her dreams. Rather, it was the Winter Games. She was a grade-schooler when Salt Lake City hosted the Winter Olympiad in 2002 and could see herself as a ski racer in some future Olympiad.

"But slowly as I morphed into a runner and started running in college, the Summer Olympics looked a little more appealing," she said. "The dream to go represent your country is probably the same in every sport in every season."

Coburn's exposure to the international track scene might give her a hint of what to expect on her sport's grandest stage, but she isn't convinced that the spotlight will necessarily find her. Which is fine with her. Her

success last summer in the IAAF World Championships in Daegu, South Korea offered a taste, but truth be told it's a taste she doesn't crave.

"To be very honest, I'm a very small fish in a big pond, even with the USA athletes," Coburn said. "I'm not an Allyson Felix (U.S. sprinter), I'm not someone who's favored to win gold. To be honest, I think I'm just going to skate by under the radar. I think the Colorado community cares about me; I think USATF cares about me. I'm fine . . .

"Eventually I'd like to be favored for a medal, but this time around I'm fine being under the radar, being the little fish in the big pond and having my other buddy fish with me to swim along. I'm fine with that."

Kipp is a junior and will return to CU for her final season under Wetmore and Burroughs. There has been speculation about Coburn's future, but she said Monday she plans to be running alongside her "buddy fish" next season.

"What I want and what would make the most happy is if I come back and compete in the 2013 indoor season and then the 2013 outdoor track season - and that's the plan now," Coburn said. "I'm looking forward to that. I want to have this Colorado on my chest (she's standing in a Dal Ward hallway conveniently in front of a picture of her running) as long as I can. That's the plan now."

Coburn took a couple days last weekend to return to Crested Butte and decompress from all that's happened since the Olympic Trials. But she didn't escape training; Friday featured a long run (seven miles) up Slate River Road, Saturday was a shorter jaunt around a loop on Crested Butte's west side.

It might happen on the flight to Great Britain or it might not happen until the return flight has landed, but Coburn and Kipp haven't talked about what it's taken to get them both this far and what it might mean to their futures.

"I think we're still so involved in it that we can't take ourselves away from it to look at it from the outside," Coburn said. "We haven't talked much; we've chit-chatted about our races, our practices, how our weekends have gone, boyfriends - normal, boring life things.

"But we haven't talked about the importance of being an Olympian. We're still very focused on what we're doing tomorrow for practice. We haven't had a chance to step back and really talk about it - which we might not get a chance to do until afterward."

Both Coburn's and Kipp's parents are London-bound, and Coburn also will have her three siblings in attendance. After Kipp rumbled into third place in Eugene, reaching the Olympic gold standard and qualifying for Team USA, she said her parents were "like OK, 'I think we can do this.'"

Of course, you would expect them to do it if at all possible. This isn't something that happens every summer for parents - or a university for that matter. As Wetmore said, it's among the rarest of rarities. And it's a genuine feel-good time for CU.

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SHOW MENU



## Track and field: CU Buffs Coburn, Kipp temper Olympic expectations

By Kyle Ringo Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

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Colorado distance runners Emma Coburn and Shalaya Kipp won't allow themselves to dream of an Olympic medal being placed around their necks just yet, even though both will have a chance to earn one next month in London.

The two Buffs chose the realistic route in discussing their historic achievement and their goals for the games at a press conference on campus Monday. They are only the third and fourth CU athletes with remaining eligibility to become Olympians, but neither has come close at this early stage in their careers to running times that would earn them a medal.

"I'm trying to stay focused on what I know I can achieve and I think if either of us were to dream beyond what is attainable it wouldn't work out," Coburn said. "I think we would both fail. We're just focused on what we know we can do and what we've done in the past and I think that is the best way to go into it."

Coburn, the top U.S., qualifier, would likely have to trim at least 20 seconds off her qualifying time to be in contention for a medal. Kipp would need to cut even more off her time. Coburn, of Crested Butte, finished first at the Olympic trials earlier this month in 9:32.78 and Kipp, of Salt Lake City, was three seconds behind her in third place finishing in 9:35.73.

Gulnara Galkina-Samitova set the world and Olympic records in the 3,000-meter steeplechase at 8:58.81 four years ago in the Beijing Olympics. Former Buff Jenny Simpson participated in that race, finishing ninth in 9:22.26.

The two current Buffs realize their best shot at an Olympic medal might be four years from now in Brazil. They're both hoping to take a big step toward making that happen by doing their best with this opportunity. Both have targeted a spot in the final and personal best times as their goal for their first Olympics.

"That is my primary goal is to make the final," Coburn said. "After that, a personal best would be nice and just race my guts out and see what happens. I think if you look at the descending order list, a medal is way too far in the distance for that to be a goal of ours in the coming months."

Coburn redshirted during the track season in order to be well-rested for a run at the Olympics and possibly earning a spot in the finals. Coach Mark Wetmore dialed back the number of races Kipp participated in during the indoor season, believing that added rest might help her make a run at the Olympics. The strategy worked and allowed the Buffs to be the only college teammates Wetmore has ever heard of to qualify for the same Olympic team. The fact that they run the same event made the accomplishment even more rare.

"A confluence of luck, talent and environment that two people -- I won't say equally talented because talent packages can vary greatly but in the end it adds up to Olympic-level talent -- two people with that talent at the same school at the same time is pretty rare," Wetmore said. "Then of course Boulder and CU are excellent for a person to become a distance runner. So a lot of things came together for that to happen, but it's that rare. It's a rare, rare combination."

Kipp said the summer games weren't even on her radar until Wetmore pulled her aside late last fall and suggested it might be possible for her to make it.

"When I came to Colorado, I didn't really know what the steeplechase was," she joked. "I still thought it was a horse event."

Kipp won her first NCAA title in the steeplechase to conclude her outdoor season in early June. Both women helped the CU women's cross country team win the Pac-12 Conference title in the fall, and it has made for a long journey to the games for them.

"Our goal for Shalaya will be to be ready to run a personal best and be in contention of making the finals," CU associate head coach Heather Burroughs said. "That would be an enormous achievement for her. Probably on paper

right now, she wouldn't make the finals. So our goal will be to upset those rankings and have her ready to come close or make it."

Coburn and Kipp will compete in the first week of the games and will be able to participate in the opening ceremonies. They have continued training hard in the days since they qualified and say they are feeling strong.

"Emma is impeccable technically and Shalaya has a 1,200 horsepower engine," Wetmore said. "... They come in different talent packages and they need different developments. While we're working on Shalaya's aerodynamics, we're working on Emma's horsepower."

Coburn went home to Crested Butte last weekend to decompress and relax and also do a long run at 9,000 feet. She described the Olympic trials as a business trip where she did what she was expected to last month. She will be in a decidedly different position on this next trip, trying to surprise.

"I've never been to Las Vegas, but I keep telling people it feels like I went to Vegas for the weekend and I'm kind of in daze and woke up," she said. "It's kind of been a blur so far. What I think people forget is we still have a lot of work ahead of us, and we still have races to do and training to be done. It's not just this big celebratory time in our lives right now. We both are happy and appreciative of the fact that we made it, but it's still business for us."