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Dathan Ritzenhein takes his first look at Olympic wonderland

BY JO-ANN BARNAS*Detroit Free Press***Published:** Today

When Dathan Ritzenhein arrived in England on Tuesday — 17 days before the opening ceremonies for the Summer Games - it took only moments for him to feel the excitement.

“You see it on TV back home, and every time you open up a magazine, but to be here right now is awesome,” the Rockford, Mich., native said by phone Wednesday from London. “Even at the airport there were people greeting you.”

Ritzenhein, 29, is a three-time Olympian, thanks to his magnificent performance when he raced under the Olympic ‘A’ standard and placed third in the 10,000 meters at the U.S. Olympic Track & Field Trials at Hayward Field.

In the pouring rain, Ritzenhein worked for the first 5,000 with Galen Rupp, who won the race in Olympic Trials record time (27 minutes, 25.33 seconds). Matt Tegenkamp was second (27:33.94), followed by Ritzenhein (27:36.09).

Ritzenhein and Rupp are teammates at the Nike Oregon Project in Portland, where Ritzenhein lives with his wife, Kalin, and their two children.

The finish was sweet redemption for Ritzenhein, who said he was fortunate to have been able to get another shot at making it to the Olympics after his failed attempt in the marathon at the U.S. trials in January in Houston.

Ritzenhein, who qualified for his first Olympic team in the 10,000 at the 2004 Athens Games, was the top American men’s marathoner in 2008 in Beijing (ninth).

He arrived in Europe before many of his U.S. teammates in order to race the 5,000 at Friday’s Diamond League meet in London. Ritzenhein placed fifth (13:15.91) in the tune-up race and planned to head to France after the event for altitude training.

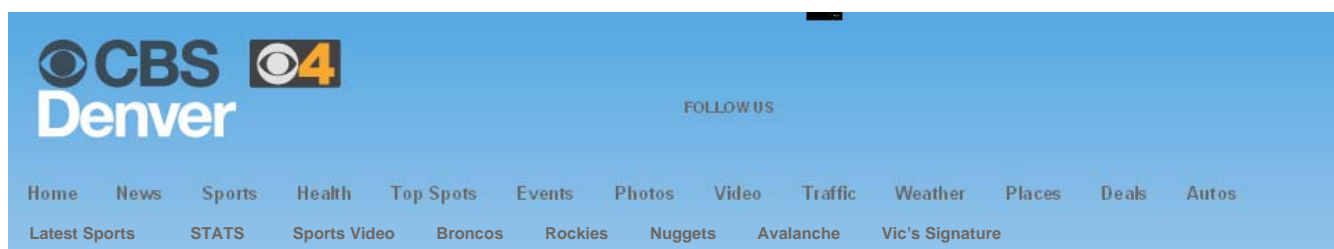
The date of his Olympic 10,000 race is Aug. 4. His family will be arriving from Michigan on Aug. 2, he said.

“It’s hard enough to make one Olympic team, let alone three, so to make three, I’m blessed,” Ritzenhein said. “I’m looking forward to it. I’m healthy, and being back on the

track again has been really terrific for me.”

He'll hit the road, though, a couple of months after London: In October, Ritzenhein will run his first marathon since the Olympic trials — in which he ran a personal best 2:09:55 — at the Bank of America Chicago Marathon.

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LATEST SPORTS

Speedy Simpson Gets Set For Olympics

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Jenny Simpson leads the pack in the Women's 1500 Meter semi-final on day 8 of the 2012 U.S. Olympic Track & Field Team Trials at Hayward Field on June 29, 2012 in Eugene, Oregon. (Photo by Andy Lyons/Getty Images)

MONUMENT, Colo. (CBS4) – Former University of Colorado running star Jenny Simpson is headed to London later this month to compete in the Summer Olympics, and she thinks she's got a good shot at a medal.

It will be the second Olympiad for Simpson, who ran in the steeplechase in Beijing four years ago and finished ninth. She won't have any hurdles to clear this time around; she's running in the 1500 Meters.

Two weeks ago at the Olympics trials Simpson finished third in the 1500.

"Being a competitor, sometimes it stings a little bit later, because you always want to be the best. But certainly top three was the priority and I have no complaints, I'm really happy with outcome," Simpson told CBS4.



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Jenny Simpson comes in third and Morgan Uceny celebrates as she crosses the finish line to win the Women's 1500 Meter Run Final on day ten of the U.S. Olympic Track & Field Team Trials at the Hayward Field on July 1, 2012 in Eugene, Ore. (Photo by Christian Petersen/Getty Images)

During the trials, Simpson's entire focus wasn't on the race. When being interviewed after one of the heats she asked that everyone take a moment to pray for the Waldo Canyon Fire victims."

"I'm from there and excited to go home and be able to help out," Simpson said on the broadcast.

Simpson lives in Monument and trains at the Air Force Academy, so while the Waldo Canyon Fire was forcing evacuations, Simpson was obviously distracted.

"I felt like there was something significant and tragic going on in my community and I felt like I should be here. It was definitely hard to be away from home. It was hard to be away from my neighbors and it was hard that I couldn't make my home available to people who needed it. So there was definitely a sense of wishing I was here. But running is my job, and training and competing is something that I do every year and I try to do at a really high level so I learn how to cope with distractions and how to really focus even when other things are on your mind," she said.

As a Colorado Buffalo, Simpson was the top American steeplechase competitor. She even set the American record in the race at the 2009 world championships.

So why the switch?

"As an athlete I was developing a lot into the middle distance range. The steeplechase is a grueling event and it made me really tough. So that toughness combined with the leg speed that I've gained over the years — I really think I'm a much better 1500 Meter runner.

"I think they are both hard in different ways but definitely there's an advantage to knowing that the 1500 meters is going to be around four minutes, so no matter how hard it is, it's over sooner than the steeplechase is."

Simpson so far is every bit as good at the 1500 Meters as she was in the steeplechase. In 2009 she recorded a sub-4 minute 1500 Meters. And last year she shocked the track and field world — and herself — by winning the world championships in South Korea.

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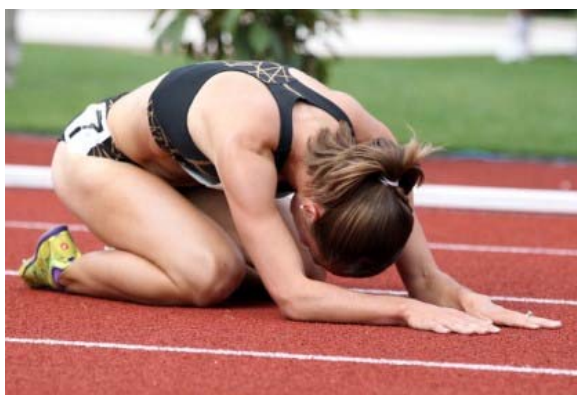
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Jenny Simpson reacts after finishing third in the Women's 1500 Meter Run Final on day ten of the U.S. Olympic Track & Field Team Trials at the Hayward Field on July 1, 2012, in Eugene, Ore. (Photo by Christian Petersen/Getty Images)

Even though she was competing in a different event at the last Olympics, Simpson says she the experience last time around is helping her as she prepares for this year's games.

"I was kind of naive, and everything was brand new. So coming back as a veteran, I feel like that experience really gave me a lot and gave me a huge opportunity to learn and to grow," she said. "The first time I was really just happy to be there and happy to be in the group going to the games."

"And this time I'm happy to be there and I'm really going with the intention of making the final and hopefully coming home with medal," she said.

A lot of former CU athletes have competed in the Summer Olympics but only one has ever medaled in track and field. Bill Toomey took gold in the decathlon in 1968.



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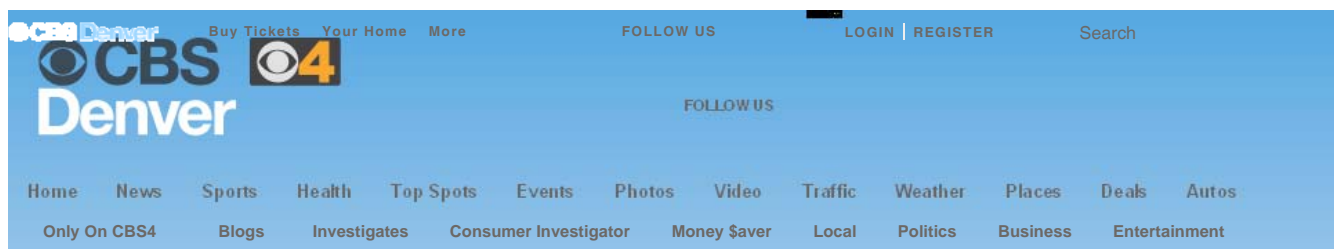
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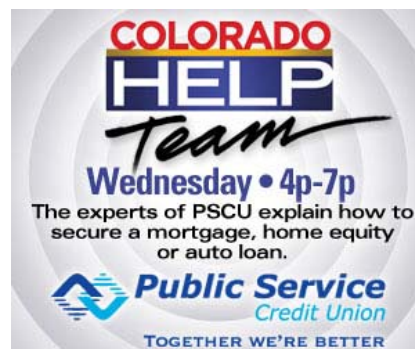
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DENVER (CBS4) – Former Olympic skier, University of Colorado football star, and successful businessman Jeremy Bloom helped raise over \$100,000 at his "Wish of a Lifetime" gala over the weekend.

Bloom started his charity four years ago, granting wishes for senior citizens. Saturday night he invited several members of the 1948 Olympic team to attend his gala. Like this year, those Olympics were also held in London shortly after World War II when the city was still recuperating.

Frank Havens won gold and silver in canoeing in 1948 and he showed off his medals at the gala.

"Dad recognized that I was good at distances, so when he heard it was 10,000 meters, that's what he worked me on," Havens said. "He was the best paddler in the world in 1924 but stayed home because that's the year I was born, and he never let me forget it."

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Harrison Dillard, a four-time gold medalist in the 100-meter and 110-meter hurdles, was also at the gala.

"Back then my winning time was 10.3. I think that was 1/10th of a second off the world record at that time," Dillard said.

Bloom will be working as a correspondent at the London games.

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Tuesday, July 17, 2012

Clippers build unmatched locker room

By Arash Markazi

LOS ANGELES -- **Chauncey Billups** stood on the Los Angeles Clippers' practice floor Monday afternoon, smiling at how much had changed over the past seven months.

Back in December, when the New York Knicks waived Billups under the NBA's amnesty clause, he was furious that the Clippers had claimed him. He wanted to decide where he would finish his career and the Clippers were probably the last team he wanted to be on after everything he had heard about the organization during his 15-year career.

"All I knew before I came in through amnesty was the reputation that the Clippers once had," Billups said. "It was something that I didn't really want to be a part of at the time. But me being here, being able to meet the people here and seeing how they do business here and how they treat the players and how the team is received in the public here, it's just different."

Last week, Billups, who had the opportunity to sign elsewhere as a free agent, decided to re-sign with the Clippers. It is the continuation of a surprising trend that started a year ago when **Caron Butler** left the Dallas Mavericks following their championship run as a free agent to sign with the Clippers, **Chris Paul** opted into another year on his deal in order to be traded to the Clippers and **Blake Griffin** re-upped with the team for the next five years.

This offseason, **Lamar Odom** sang the praises of the franchise after being traded back to the Clippers, the team that drafted him in 1999, **Jamal Crawford** signed as a free agent despite having no shortage of other suitors and in perhaps the most surprising move, **Grant Hill** spurned interest from the Los Angeles Lakers (and his friend Steve Nash) and the New York Knicks to join the Clippers on Tuesday.

Suddenly, the Clippers have become a destination franchise and in the process have built one of the deepest, most talented teams in the league going into next season.

"It's two whole different worlds in not a lot of time," Billups said. "I see something special with what we have."

Not only have the Clippers built a talented team, but their locker room, which two seasons ago was filled with young, inexperienced players, is now probably unmatched character-wise, offering the perfect mix of veteran leadership and youthful athleticism.

While Odom is in the midst of repairing his fractured image following a forgettable stint in Dallas last season, he was still the heart and soul of the Lakers when they won back-to-back championships in 2009 and 2010. He was the player in the center of the huddle before games as the entire team circled around him and jumped around. He was so integral to the team's success that **Phil Jackson** personally lobbied Lakers owner **Jerry Buss** to re-sign him when it looked like he would let him walk.

No one knows Odom's leadership skills better than Billups, who saw it firsthand during the 2010 FIBA World Championships in Turkey when Billups and Odom co-captained a young Team USA to the gold medal.

"I'm very excited about getting Lamar here," Billups said. "I had a chance to play with him a couple of years ago in the World Championships, and have a greater appreciation for him as a teammate, a leader and a veteran. What he can bring will really help this team."

Billups' leadership skills were on full display with the Clippers last season as he was a coach on the floor before being forced to be a coach on the sideline after rupturing his Achilles tendon. He was such an instrumental figure in the Clippers' locker room that the team continued to hang his uniform up before every game, home and away, in his absence and each player on the team called him regularly for advice.

In fact, when Griffin was forced to miss the Olympics this summer following knee surgery on Monday, one of the first players he called was Billups, who was also forced to miss the Summer Games following his injury.

Add to the mix Butler and now Hill, two of the most respected players in the league with war stories on and off the court that are unmatched, and it would be hard to find another locker room in the NBA you'd rather be a part of.

"I think we got better on the court and off the court as well," Billups said. "I'm excited about the moves."
