



RAMSEY: Jenny Simpson and coach hope for London medal after trials

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Juli Benson has spent dozens of hours working with Jenny Simpson. She's not spent a single hour worrying about Simpson.

It's easy to be confident about Simpson's future. She competes Sunday in the 1,500 finals at the Olympic trials in Eugene, Ore. Simpson, a Monument resident, and Benson, Air Force Academy's cross country coach and assistant track coach, are laboring together on a quest for an Olympic medal in the 1,500. Simpson hopes to continue this quest Sunday with a top-three finish at the trials.

No doubt, Simpson is blessed with abundant talent. She won the 1,500 at the World Championships in September at South Korea. She broke the 4-minute barrier (3:59.90) for the 1,500 as a Colorado senior in 2009.

But what makes Simpson special, Benson said, is her attitude. Benson, who competed in the 1,500 in the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, also works as Simpson's personal coach. Simpson competes and trains with a rare blend of intensity and relaxation. She's not driven by fear. She refuses to be overwhelmed by pressure.

Yes, Simpson is confident. She never could have climbed this far without a deep sense of belief.

"She just really has an innate self-confidence," Benson said. "She's very cerebral about her running. She recognizes she has a gift and she works as intelligently as she can. She's not afraid to take on the best in the world.

"That might sound easy, but it's not. Many runners have a lot of God-given talent but don't have the confidence. Others have the confidence but don't have the physical gifts to back it up. She's just the complete package. She really is."

What might be most remarkable about Simpson is her blissful approach. She's determined, no doubt, but she's not haunted.

Her victory in South Korea, Simpson told me in June, liberated her. When she crossed the finish line, she ranked as the best in the world in her event. If she earns a trip to London, she will not be burdened by her world title. She will be lifted.

"I feel I've already reached the top," Simpson said while drinking coffee in a Monument diner. "I've been to the pinnacle of our sport. And that gives me a little bit of freedom."

This approach makes Benson's job much easier. She pushes Simpson; after all, that's her job. But Benson doesn't have to worry about constantly feeding Simpson's ego.

Benson has few regrets from her own career as a runner, but she does regret her tendency to overtrain. By working too diligently, she limited her career. It's a contradiction many runners fail to completely figure

out.

"I made some pretty rookie mistakes as an athlete," Benson said. "I spent a lot of my career overtraining. I got into coaching because I saw all the mistakes that I made. It's so preventable."

On Saturday, Benson worked on prevention. Hours before one of the biggest races of their lives, Simpson and Benson planned to play miniature golf and take a car ride to the Pacific Ocean, where they could watch the waves, consider the immensity of all that endless water and relax.

"Anything to take her mind off running," Benson said.

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