

Track and field: CU Buffs' Mark Jones feels calm going into nationals

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Having never before been to the NCAA championships, Mark Jones isn't entirely sure what to expect.

The Colorado sophomore isn't too worried about it, however.

Whatever happens at the meet, held Thursday through Saturday at Hayward Field in Eugene, Ore., will be a bonus for Jones.

"I'm just happy to go," he said.

Jones is one of five Buffaloes who will participate in the national championship this week. He will compete in the men's high jump, while Aric Van Halen (3,000-meter steeplechase) and Joe Morris (100 meters, 200 meters) also compete for the men. Emma Coburn (3,000-meter steeplechase) and Emily Hunsucker (hammer throw) will compete for the CU women.

Jones had to win a jump-off at the NCAA West Prelims on May 23 to get in to nationals. He will be the first CU high jumper at nationals since Jason Dudley in 1990.

"I was pretty psyched," he said. "I was getting a little nervous during the jump-off, but the culmination of all that my coaches taught me, all the hard practice this year, I think I deserve it."

A product of Summit, N.J., the 6-foot-8 Jones has put in a lot of work and produced solid results since he got to CU. He won the Potts Invite on Jan. 21, 2012 and then cleared 7 feet for the first time a week later. He tied for 12th at the 2012 Pac-12 championships.

This season, Jones has won two meets and finished second three other times, including at the Pac-12 Championships last month. During that meet, he set his personal best with a leap of 7 feet, 2.5 inches. That was the third-best jump in CU history and the best since Dudley cleared 7-3 on March 24, 1990.

With the results he has produced, Jones went into the prelims with high hopes of reaching nationals.

"I was hoping for it this year, so I'm really glad I got there," he said. "It's just been sincere dedication."

Because he has two years ahead of him, Jones can take the approach of just being happy to qualify. He's a competitor, though, so he's looking to beat as many of his 23 competitors as possible.

"I think the ultimate goal is All-American; that's top 6," said Jones, who competes Friday. "I definitely think it's possible. If I have a good day, I should get there."

"I'm shooting for that goal, but you never know what happens. You can't be mad at whatever you do."

Morris is just the second CU athlete to qualify for the 100 and 200 at nationals, joining Devlon Dunn in 1988. He will compete in the 100-meter semifinals on Wednesday and 200-meter semifinals on Thursday. The finals are on Friday (100) and Saturday (200).

Van Halen is looking to improve upon his 10th-place finish in the steeplechase at nationals a year ago. He won the Pac-12 title last month. He will compete in the semifinals Wednesday, with the finals scheduled for Friday.

Hunsucker is making her first trip to nationals. The school-record holder in the hammer throw, she will compete in the finals on Wednesday.

Coburn will compete in nationals for the fourth time, and she's looking for her second steeplechase title. She was national runner-up in 2010 and won the championship in 2011. She redshirted a year ago. Coburn will compete in the semifinals Thursday, with the finals slated for Saturday.

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