

Skiing: CU Buffs won't be satisfied without national title

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After winning every single competition they've entered this year, the Colorado ski team has plenty of reason to believe it'll win another this week.

From Wednesday through Saturday, the Buffaloes will compete at the NCAA championships in Middlebury, Vermont. Their goal is simple: Win the title.

"Isn't that always how you're supposed to go into a national championship?," said freshman Brooke Wales, one of the Buffs' top Alpine skiers. "Just having the results we've had this year to back that up really gives us team confidence, both on the Alpine and the Nordic side, men's and women's.

"All-around, I think that we have the capabilities and the talent to for sure get it done."

Of course, nothing is in the bag at this point. But, CU has had a great season, sweeping the four regular season meets and then taking the Rocky Mountain Intercollegiate Skiing Association (RMISA) title on Feb. 24 in Bozeman, Mont.

"We've been good and strong all season and have won all the meets in the West," junior Nordic racer Rune Oedegaard said. "Now we have to show that we're also able to be best in the country."

In addition to CU, Utah and Denver bring strong teams from the West. Vermont, the defending national champion and East regional champ, will be in the hunt, as will Dartmouth, which finished second to Vermont in the regionals.

"We know that there's a lot of competitors here in the West who are really strong," Oedegaard said. "Now we have those and we have the East people, so it'll be exciting."

On the Alpine side of things, the Buffs are led by their young women's squad. Wales, Thea Grosvold and Jessica Honkonen are all freshmen, but have recorded exceptional results throughout the season. Wales has been top 10 in seven of her 12 races this season and top 13 in nine of the 12.

"Overall, I felt like it was a really good season," said Wales, who is from Sammamish, Wash. "Slalom is something I really haven't done much of or been able to train for much in the past and I was really happy with my performance in that this year. I'm looking to continue strong in giant slalom as well."

Junior Andreas Haug may be CU's top men's Alpine skier. He finished top-seven in both the slalom and giant slalom at regionals.

The women lead the way on the Nordic side, too. Joanne Reid has won eight of her 10 races this year and when she hasn't won, she has finished second to one of her teammates. Reid, Eliska Hajkova and Maria Nordstrom combined to take the top three spots in both the classic and freestyle races at regionals.

CU is sending three Scandinavian racers -- Oedegaard, Andreas Høy and Gustav Nordstrøm -- on the Nordic side. Oedegaard believes that will help CU, because all three are more comfortable racing at sea level.

"We all definitely like sea level more than we like altitude, which can be a big difference for us," he said.

Oedegaard leads a strong men's Nordic squad. He has three victories in 10 races this season, and he's been in the top four in nine of the 10. It hasn't been quite as good as his 2012 season, when he won five races, but that's by design.

"This year, I've been changing my schedule a little bit, training a lot more during the winter than what I've been doing previously to be saving my top shape for the NCAAs," he said. "I felt like my regular season was better last year than it has been this year, but hopefully I will be better in NCAAs this year.

"I'm feeling more confident going into NCAAs just because I know what I've been doing is all for being in my best shape at the NCAAs."

Oedegaard was top seven in both disciplines last year at nationals, but he's hoping to take home an individual title this week.

"That's what I'm aiming for, but a lot of skiers around other places think the same thing," he said. "Hopefully I can prove to be the best one there."

That's the mindset of the entire CU squad, as it looks for its 19th national title. The Buffs won their most recent title in 2011.

"Everyone definitely has the big goal of being crowned champions overall," Wales said. "It's at the front of everyone's minds for sure."

Follow Brian on Twitter: @BrianHowell33.

CU skiing nationals preview

WEDNESDAY-SATURDAY: The Colorado Buffaloes will compete at the NCAA Skiing Championships in Middlebury, Vermont.

SCHEDULE: Wednesday -- Alpine, giant slalom. Thursday -- Nordic, classic. Friday -- Alpine, slalom. Saturday -- Nordic, freestyle. **BROADCAST:** Online -- Live stream at NCAA.com.

STORYLINES: Colorado is seeking its 19th national championship in skiing. ... CU has won six national titles under current coach Richard Rokos, in 1991, 1995, 1998, 1999, 2006 and 2011. ... The Buffs have been first or second at nationals in five of the past seven seasons. ... CU has won each of the six events it has competed in this season, including the RMISA regionals, Feb. 22-24. ... Vermont comes in as the defending national champion. The Catamounts won the East regional last month. ... Utah has been runner-up the past two seasons. ... CU won the RMISA season points title, with Denver second and Utah third. ... CU's Joanne

Reid won the RMISA title in women's Nordic. ... Of the 12 skiers going to nationals for the Buffs, seven are freshmen. That includes five of the six Alpine skiers.

CU ALPINE QUALIFIERS: Men -- Henrik Gunnarsson, Fr.; Andreas Haug, Jr.; Kasper Hietanen, Fr.
Women -- Thea Grosvold, Fr.; Jessica Honkonen, Fr.; Brooke Wales, Fr.

CU NORDIC QUALIFIERS: Men -- Andreas Høy, Jr.; Gustav Nordstroem, Fr.; Rune Oedegaard, Jr.
Women -- Eliska Hajkova, Sr.; Maria Nordstrom, Fr.; Joanne Reid, Sr.