

Cross country: CU Buffs finish third at regionals; awarded NCAA spots

By Brian Howell Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

FORT COLLINS -- Coming into regionals ranked No. 2 in the nation, the Colorado men's cross country team treated Friday's meet as a training run for nationals.

The Buffaloes took it a little too easy, however.

CU finished a stunning third at the Mountain Regional at Collindale Golf Course. Only the top two teams earned automatic qualifying bids to nationals, and those went to 18th-ranked Northern Arizona (first, 56 points) and No. 7 Brigham Young (second, 68). CU scored 69 points.

"Maybe the No. 2 ranking had them a little bit excited and a little puffed up," CU head coach Mark Wetmore said. "I don't know."

The CU women, ranked No. 24 nationally, also finished third, but that was to be expected. No. 13 Weber State won the title, with No. 17 New Mexico placing second. CU's Shalaya Kipp had her best run of the season, finishing second.

While neither team automatically qualified, the NCAA announced on Friday night that both teams earned at-large berths to the nationals.

For the men, this is the first time since a fifth-place finish in 1991 -- and the first time in Wetmore's 18-year tenure as head coach -- that the Buffs have finished outside of the top two in regionals.

"I don't think our minds were necessarily really prepared for this race," said junior Jake Hurysz, who led the Buffs with a sixth-place individual finish. "Maybe it had to do with it only being 40 minutes away and everyone telling us how good we are, but we found out today we're not that good."

The 10K race was tightly packed throughout the first half. Northern Arizona gained a little separation during the final stretch of the course, but the race for the second qualifying spot came down to the fifth runners of BYU and CU. BYU's Conner Peloquin finished 21st, while CU's Aric VanHalen made a late push to finish 23rd, just 3.8 seconds behind.

"We laid back a little too much today, I think," Hurysz said. "We took Mark's words and really kind of constructed them on our own; we didn't really follow his plan necessarily as we should have and we paid for it. We'll make nationals, but we've got a lot of work to do this next week."

CU's women knew they would need a great effort to break into the top two, but the Buffs, who won the regional last year, nearly did it. They finished just 12 points behind second-place New Mexico.

"I'm pretty happy with what they did today," Wetmore said. "They ran about what I hoped for and a little better, probably, than the form chart."

Kipp, who was fourth at regionals last year, made a strong push at the end on Friday to place second. She finished the 6K course in 20 minutes, 18.1 seconds, just 0.3 of a second ahead of Weber State's Amber Henry.

"I was just thinking about our team," she said. "One of the girls in front of me was from Weber State and I know that's one of the teams we're after right now.

"Individually, I'm glad to see I'm getting healthy and back into shape. It kind of makes me more optimistic for eight days from now at the nationals."

Kipp is pleased to have her team joining her. Teams that did not earn a top-two spot at the nine regionals around the country had to wait until a points system sorted out the at-large berths. Based on its results throughout the season, CU got in.

"I know every girl on our team went out there and gave it their hardest," Kipp said after the race.

Freshman Carrie Verdon, who finished seventh individually, was also pleased with the Buffs' performance.

"We had some people who weren't really happy with their races, but I think overall we did OK," she said. "I think we did what we kind of were expected to do."

Although the men's team did not do what was expected, it is hoping this will be a bit of a wake-up call.

"It's a little bit of a matter of focus and maybe I was mistaken in talking this down a little too much," Wetmore said after the men's race. "But ... there won't be any talking down in the last eight days (before nationals)."

Notable

Nationals will be held Nov. 17 in Louisville, Kentucky. ... The men will be making their 21st straight nationals appearance, while the women will go for the 19th time in the past 20 years (missing in 2008). ... This is just the fifth time since 1980 that the men's team finished out of the top two. Their only other third-place finish came in 1988. ... This is the 22nd top-three regional finish for the women since 1980.

Follow Brian on Twitter: @BrianHowell33.

NCAA Mountain Regional Cross Country

At Collindale Golf Course, Fort Collins

Men's 10K

Team scores -- Northern Arizona 56, Brigham Young 68, Colorado 69, New Mexico 108, Weber State 196, Air Force 231, Utah Valley 235, Southern Utah 257, Colorado State 265, Texas-El Paso

267, Texas Tech 275, Montana State 280, Wyoming 283, Utah State 315, New Mexico State 389, Idaho State 434, Montana 513, Northern Colorado 570.

Top 5 individuals -- 1. Kennedy Kithuka, Texas Tech, 29:36.8; 2. Anthony Rotich, Texas-El Paso, 29:55.9; 3. Jared Ward, Brigham Young, 30:06.3; 4. Futsum Zienasellassie, Northern Arizona, 30:06.8; 5. Brian Shrader, Northern Arizona, 30:09.5.

Colorado results -- 6. Jake Hurysz, 30:13.2; 7. Martin Medina, 30:14.0; 14. Blake Theroux, 30:30.3; 19. Pierce Murphy, 30:36.6; 23. Aric VanHalen, 30:50.7; 34. Morgan Pearson, 31:05.1; 53. Hugh Dowdy, 31:46.6.

CSU results -- 43. Andrew Goodman, 31:30.2; 45. Andrew Lesser, 31:31.5; 54. Jacob Morgan, 31:48.0; 58. Alex Balsiger, 31:53.0; 65. Christian Meyer, 32:08.8; 73. Ben Larson, 32:22.4; 79. Alex Muntefering, 32:36.2.

Air Force results -- 36. Matt Bell, 31:12.0; 37. Jeremy Drenckhahn, 31:19.6; 47. Riley Coates, 31:38.1; 55. Isaiah Bragg, 31:49.3; 56. Lance Wolfsmith, 31:50.4; 62. Andrew Quallio, 32:02.7; 75. Elliot Myers, 32:25.4.

Northern Colorado results -- 106. Evan Bekes, 33:55.9; 108. John McCarthy, 34:00.5; 117. Alex Holm, 34:51.1; 119. David McClland, 36:10.7; 120. Kyle Kusmik, 36:37.6; 121. Derek Schneider, 37:07.3.

Women's 6K

Team scores -- Weber State 63, New Mexico 95, Colorado 107, Southern Utah 132, Colorado State 173, Utah 198, Brigham Young 210, Northern Arizona 225, Utah Valley 230, Utah State 326, Air Force 328, Idaho State 343, Nevada 361, Wyoming 364, Montana State 382, New Mexico State 382, Texas-El Paso 433, Northern Colorado 456, Montana 555, Texas Tech 561.

Top 5 individuals -- 1. Risper Kimaiyo, Texas-El Paso, 20:10.8; 2. Shalaya Kipp, Colorado, 20:18.1; 3. Amber Henry, Weber State, 20:18.4; 4. Amanda Mergaert, Utah, 20:18.7; 5. Josephine Moultrie, New Mexico, 20:25.1.

Other Colorado results -- 7. Carrie Verdon, 20:41.1; 27. Elizabeth Tremblay, 21:21.1; 31. Rachel Viger, 21:29.3; 40. Courtney Bouchet, 21:40.6; 45. Camille Logan, 21:43.5; 55. Jana Stolting, 21:57.7.

CSU results -- 20. Whitney Henderson, 21:10.0; 26. Holly Keeper, 21:18.8; 33. Sarah Heuer, 21:30.5; 41. Kaitlin Hanenburg, 21:40.9; 53. Jennifer Tave, 21:55.2; 63. Hannah Pensack-Rinehart, 22:10.7; 76. Marina Roberts, 22:33.7.

Air Force results -- 32. Jennifer Bremser, 21:29.4; 49. Morgan Mosby, 21:49.3; 70. Heather Connick, 22:21.2; 87. Kate Kanetzky, 22:51.8; 90. Annette Eichenberger, 23:00.5; 94. Rebecca Esselstein, 23:04.5.

Northern Colorado results -- 23. Rikki Gonzales, 21:11.9; 104. McKayla Grey, 23:22.4; 108. Megan Horsch, 23:25.1; 109. Ashley Atkin, 23:32.9; 112. Stephanie Clark, 23:37.5; 116. Caroline Braun, 23:49.0; 127. Bridget Tiernan, 24:47.7.