

Cross country: CU Buffs' Jake Hurysz ready to take on nationals

By Brian Howell Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

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Jake Hurysz got to the starting line at the 2011 NCAA cross country national championships in Terre Haute, Indiana, and wondered what he was doing there.

"I was like, 'What's the point of me being here? I'm not going to be All-American, I don't have a team here,' " said Hurysz, now a junior on the Colorado cross country team. "It's another week where I could have gotten better toward track season."

A year later, Hurysz has a much different perspective on the nationals and a greater appreciation for his trip to Terre Haute.

"Nationals last year helped me prepare myself for this race, even though the course is different," said Hurysz, who will lead the Buffs into nationals on Saturday in Louisville, Kentucky. "I think over the past year I've grown to be able to take these big races and be able to relax more and have fun with it and not necessarily get freaked out before every national race."

Quite a bit has changed for Hurysz since last year.

A native of Chapel Hill, N.C., Hurysz was a sophomore at the University of North Carolina last year, becoming the first Tar Heel to qualify for nationals since 1997.

It wasn't long after last season that Hurysz made the decision that North Carolina wasn't right for him. He talked with a few schools and chose Colorado.

"He arrived here last January and was immediately a great fit for the culture of our team, respected and well liked within two weeks of being here," CU head coach Mark Wetmore said.

Right away, Hurysz proved himself as an elite runner who could make a difference for CU.

"He's been our little beacon of light," senior Aric Van Halen said. "He's been heading all the workouts, he's been fit since the summer and he's really stepped up."

While the Buffs were impressed with Hurysz, he was immediately drawn to his new teammates.

"Everyone here likes to work hard, and so do I," said Hurysz, who was 62nd at nationals last year. "Everyone here supports everybody and works hard. That's why I feel like it was a really good fit."

Although Hurysz leads the way, the Buffs are strong throughout the roster. That's why they go into Saturday's national championships with a legitimate shot at a championship. The Buffs are ranked No. 7, but were No. 2 before slipping at regionals last week.

"I think we're just going to keep doing what we've been doing all year," Hurysz said.

On a personal level, Hurysz feels a whole lot better going into nationals this time around.

"I have more confidence than I did last year," he said. "I know where I can finish, I know where I want to finish. That's a lot better than what I thought going into nationals last year."

Wetmore knows what Hurysz can do, too, but said his new standout runner has more to give.

"We haven't seen his perfect race yet," Wetmore said. "I think his confidence is catching up to his fitness. I'm ready when he is and I wouldn't mind if it was this Saturday.

"If not this cross country season, this coming track season he will be a very formidable runner."

Hurysz is hoping for his best in Louisville, but ultimately hopes for CU's best as a team.

"The main goal is obviously to run really well as a team and individual goals will take care of themselves," he said.

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CU Buffs head to NCAA cross country championships with blue-collar team

By John Meyer The Denver Post The Denver Post
Posted:

DenverPost.com

BOULDER — The men's team that Colorado coach Mark Wetmore will take to the NCAA cross country championships Saturday may not be his most talented, but it has been one of his most rewarding.

A team without a returning scorer from last year's Pac-12 champions won the conference title again and was ranked No. 2 in the country for most of the season. The Buffaloes slipped to seventh in the final ranking, after a subpar day put them third at last week's regional in Fort Collins, but they figure to be one of four or five teams that could win Saturday in Louisville, Ky., if heavily favored Oklahoma State stumbles.

The CU men are seeking their fourth NCAA title since 2001.

"Having done this as long as I have, it takes something, if not unique, special, to make one year more exciting than the last two or three or four or 20," said Wetmore, who is in his 21st year at CU, his 18th as head coach. "The fact that none of last year's scoring five returned this year, and we won the conference championship again, was special."

None of the CU men were stars in high school. None are collegiate stars yet, although sophomore Blake Theroux may become one next year. CU lost its top returning runner, Joe Bosshard, to hip surgery in October.

"It's more of a working-man's team, but it's very young and there may be stars of the future in there," Wetmore said. "For the time being, it needs to be a team that finishes in a tight pack, a team that lives off its fourth and fifth men. Unlike many — maybe most — of our teams in the past, we're relatively deep. Our 10th man is better this year than ever before."

"It's a little deeper and it's very young, so it'll be a good team this year, better next and better next."

It was huge last year for the CU men and women to win Pac-12 titles their first year in a conference that includes heavyweights Oregon and Stanford. It was even bigger for the men to do it again this year with all new faces.

"It gives testimony to how strong a program Mark Wetmore has built," said senior captain Martin Medina. "You take a bunch of blue-collar guys and have them work really hard, and the payoff's there. You see how hard work has progressed and it shows. It just shows what we've built together, and I think it's great how this year's team is completely different from last year's team."

The CU women go into Saturday's meet ranked 23rd. Olympian Shalaya Kipp, the reigning NCAA steeplechase champion, took time off to recover after the London Games. Wetmore said he will be happy if she improves on her 19th-place finish from last year.

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