

Cross Country: CU Buffs women vying for nationals spot

By Brian Howell Buffzone.com Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

Buffzone.com

There are a lot of years when the regional championships aren't much more than a workout for the Colorado cross country team.

In some ways, that's true for the men's team this year. The Buffaloes are ranked No. 2 in the country, No. 1 in the Mountain Region. Just one other team -- No. 7 BYU -- is ranked in the top 15 nationally, so the Buffs should have no problem snagging one of the two automatic berths to the NCAA championships.

The Colorado women, on the other hand, have a lot of work ahead Friday at the Mountain Regional championships at Collindale Golf Course in Fort Collins.

"It's going to be more intense this year," senior Shalaya Kipp said. "There's going to be more pressure on us. We're really going to have to race it. In the past, we've kind of just cruised through it like a work out. This year, we're going to have to take it a lot more seriously."

Led by Kipp, CU comes into the race as the No. 3 team in the region (No. 24 nationally). Weber State (No. 13 nationally) and New Mexico (No. 17) are favored to take the top two spots. Finish third, and the Buffs need to rely upon a complicated NCAA points system and hope they get an at-large bid to nationals.

"If we got second and got the automatic, that would be an excellent day for us," Kipp said. "But just moving forward is what we really need."

"I don't know if confident is the right word; we're feeling optimistic. A lot of things can't go wrong on Friday."

Not a lot has gone wrong for Kipp this year. In the spring, she won a Pac-12 title and a national title in the steeplechase. Then, she competed at the summer Olympics in London in the steeplechase.

"It was absolutely amazing. It was a dream come true," she said of competing in London, where she finished 12th out of 15 competitors. "Yeah, I wish I had done better, but I left with a smile on my face and I felt like I gained a lot, I learned a lot and hopefully in the future I can build upon that and improve."

She's hoping to add to her great year Friday by earning a spot at nationals.

"That would be quite a year," she said.

Since competing in the Olympics, Kipp has been working to get herself in peak form for cross country. She's only competed twice this fall, placing 21st at the pre-national meet on Oct. 13 and placing 11th at the Pac-12 championships on Oct. 27.

"I'm going to tell myself I'm there," she said. "I'm going to be in the mindset that I am ready for cross country and I am ready for these races."

Kipp may not be at top form, but she's got plenty of motivation: her teammates.

"I definitely know when I'm finishing, I won't be thinking about myself," she said. "I'll be thinking about six other girls that also want to go to Louisville with me."

Simply getting to Louisville -- site of the NCAA championships on Nov. 17 -- would be a huge accomplishment for Kipp and the Buffaloes' women's team.

"This year it's a pretty big deal," Kipp said. "That's what the girls have been thinking about all summer is getting to nationals and performing well there."

NCAA Mountain Regional

FRIDAY: The Colorado Buffaloes will compete at the NCAA Mountain Regional at Collindale Golf Course in Fort Collins. The women's race begins at noon, the men's race begins at 1 p.m.

STORY LINES: The top two teams in each race will automatically qualify for the NCAA championships in Louisville on Nov. 17. Other teams could qualify for at-large bids. ... The Buffs men's team has been second at regionals in each of the past three seasons and has not finished lower than second since 1991 (fifth). ... The CU women's team is the defending regional champ. ... The top five teams in the men's rankings are CU, Brigham Young, New Mexico, Northern Arizona and Air Force. The top five women's teams are Weber State, New Mexico, CU, Colorado State and Southern Utah. ... CU senior Shalaya Kipp was fourth individually at the 2011 regionals.

KEY STAT: Since 1980, the CU men's team has won 19 regional titles, while the women's team has won 11 regional championships.

COLORADO RUNNERS: Men (7 of these 10 will run) -- Matt Biegner, Sr.; Hugh Dowdy, So.; Jake Hurysz, Jr.; Martin Medina, Sr.; Pierce Murphy, Fr.; Morgan Pearson, So.; Jonny Stevens, Sr.; Blake Theroux, So.; Aric VanHalen, Sr.; Connor Winter, Fr. Women (7 of these 9 will run) -- Courtney Bouchet, Sr.; Diana George, Sr.; Shalaya Kipp, Sr.; Camille Logan, Jr.; Catrina McAlister, So.; Jana Stolting, Jr.; Elizabeth Tremblay, Sr.; Carrie Verdon, Fr.; Rachel Viger, So.

Follow Brian on Twitter: @BrianHowell33.