

IN THE RUNNING FOR FRIENDSHIP

By Mackenzie Lobby | Aug 9, 2013
espnW.com

Jenny Simpson was probably the last kid on the playground anyone would have picked to become a world champion runner.

Although she was active and full of energy, she struggled with a series of respiratory illnesses throughout her childhood. She took to equestrian pursuits early on, competing in everything from dressage to show jumping to western pleasure.

It took a move from Missouri to Florida in third grade to ignite her running career. Coming to a new school mid-year, a physical education teacher suggested she get involved in an after-school cross country program to make friends.

Most of her memories of the club involve running laps around the schoolyard and eating popsicles.

"That third grade physical education teacher had no idea what he was starting," said Simpson, the reigning world champion in the 1,500 meters.

Despite the relaxed nature of the program, at the end of the school year all the children competed in a 1-mile time trial. That race set a series of events into motion that would define Simpson's existence.

"I ended up getting second place and my parents always thought that was the spark that made me want to continue to run," said Simpson, who will be competing at the world championships, which begin Saturday in Moscow. "I wanted to come back and win the next year and that got the ball rolling."

That spark ended up making way for a slow burning flame that wasn't fully ablaze until years later. It was a high school coach with an eye for talent, named Jay Getty, who put the bug in her

Girl Meets Game

Remember when you fell in love? Stars recall the moment they knew their sport would become a lifetime companion.

Jenny Simpson:

Michelle Kinney:

Paula Creamer:

Kendall Coyne:

Cristie Kerr:

Candace Parker:

ear that she could truly be one of the best.

"Having someone other than your parents reach out to you and tell you that you could be great was a big turning point for me," she said.

Indeed, Simpson's first win finally came her sophomore year at Oviedo High School on the track of Astronaut High School in nearby Titusville, Fla.

That is when Simpson fell hard for running.

"After that I wanted to win the conference meet and then the state meet and then run against athletes from all over the country at Foot Locker Championships," she said. "Running was really the first place I identified a positive competitive outlet."

For Simpson, it was a complex relationship with the sport from the very beginning.

"There wasn't one day or one run, I just learned to love the different aspects of the sport over time," said Simpson, who set numerous NCAA records on the track at Colorado. "The days I didn't want to get out and lace up my shoes, it was the camaraderie of my teammates. ... Other days, I'd revel in the hard physical work."

Those are the same things she loves about running today.

"I sometimes think to myself, 'Who would have ever guessed I'd be here,' " she said. "I didn't come from a family of athletes and I wasn't that kid who said I wanted to be a professional athlete when I grew up. I was just looking for a way to make friends in third grade and it ended up being a huge part of my identity."

Share this story

Tale of two seasons for Packers rookie offensive linemen Bakhtiari, Tretter

Written by Weston Hodkiewicz

Aug. 9, 2013 |

greenbaypressgazette.com

J.C. Tretter didn't need any X-rays or medical scans to know his situation was dire.

The surge of pain jolting through his ankle served as more than enough confirmation as he fell haplessly to the ground during his first organized team activity practice as a professional football player in May.

Along with Colorado's David Bakhtiari, the 23-year-old Tretter was one of two rookie offensive linemen the Green Bay Packers selected in the fourth round of April's NFL draft.

Thus far, that first NFL season has been reduced to team meetings, shuttle rides and hotel

 delivery after getting his cleat stuck in the ground and breaking his ankle during a fumble recovery drill.

The incident led to ambulance ride, emergency surgery and hospital visits from the entire Packers' rookie offensive line, head coach Mike McCarthy, and position coaches James Campen and Joel Hilgenberg.

It also postponed the 6-foot-4, 307-pound rookie's arrival to the NFL after being just the 31st player out of Cornell to be drafted into the league and first since 2005.

"I could do that drill a million more times and it never would happen," Tretter said. "It's the game of football. Some fluky things happen, you just have to roll with it, you have to stay positive and keep moving and moving forward."

For the past two months, the only thing Tretter could do is press on, pushing himself through physical therapy treatments to regain his full range of motion while trying to keep his head in his playbook.

However, the successes haven't come without hurdles. The first came when Tretter left the hospital and was given a pair of ordinary crutches that stressed to sustain his weight before the team equipped him with a sturdier model.

Fortunately, the individuals surrounding the rookie lineman have been far more dependable

 .

He formed a fast friendship with the entire rookie class

 of offensive linemen, especially roommate and fellow fourth-round selection David Bakhtiari, who was one of the first to visit him in the hospital and his most reliable driver when running errands around town.