

Mike Sandrock: Bring your running shoes to the Pac-12 cross country championships

By Mike Sandrock, For the Camera Boulder Daily Camera

Posted:

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If you go

What: 2013 Pac-12 cross country championships

When: Nov. 2; Men's 8K starts at 10:40 a.m., women's 6K at 11:40 a.m.

Where: Coal Creek Golf Course, Louisville

Cost: Free

More info: cubuffs.com

Jenny Simpson has some advice for the many fans expected at Louisville's Coal Creek Golf Course on Nov. 2 when the University of Colorado hosts the Pac-12 cross country championships: Bring your running shoes.

The best way to watch this high-level meet is to run around the course cheering on the CU runners, according to Simpson, the former Buff star and world championship gold and silver 1,500-meter medalist.

"Pac-12s is going to be amazing," she said. "There are few sports where you can do the same thing as the athletes (during their competition). My best advice is to wear running shoes and to run to different points on the course.

"The course is designed with spectators in mind. Runners will be visible for the majority of the race."

Another former Buff, Bret Schoolmeester, said the conference meet is a big deal -- especially because the Colorado men have won the first two Pac-12 titles since moving from the Big 12.

Despite living in Oregon, where he works for Nike, Schoolmeester remains true to CU.

"Hands down, I will be rooting for the Buffaloes," Schoolmeester said Friday. "I still keep my (NCAA team) championship ring on my desk."

Simpson, a CU assistant to Colorado coaches Mark Wetmore and Heather Burroughs, said her years running cross country for the Buffs laid a foundation for her successful post-collegiate career.

"Cross country is huge for middle-distance development," Simpson, 27, said Friday over a pot of tea at a café. "Cross country really teaches a runner how to judge effort over a whole race and to pay attention to sensory data -- how you feel in the moment."

That's what Simpson did during the August world championship 1,500 meters, when she led from the start, running a great final lap to get the silver medal to go along with her 2011 gold.

"Cross country trains you to watch people in the race, footing, terrain and what the heck is going on," she said, "and in the midst of it, wondering if you can beat the person in front of you.

"Learning to consider all the variables is a big part of developing as a runner."

It took years for Simpson to develop to the point where she is now among the best in the world. In college, she was chasing Sally Kipyego of Texas Tech, recalling how she trained every day for three years to beat her, finally doing it in their final race together, the NCAA indoor mile.

Sara Slattery -- like Simpson, an NCAA track champion for CU -- said the team aspect is what she remembers most from her years in Boulder.

"My best memories of CU cross country were winning championships as a team and working together as a team," Slattery said in an email from her home in Phoenix. "I don't consider myself a great cross country runner, but I always wanted to do well for my teammates.

"The most memorable win was in 2000 (at the Big 12 meet) at Buffalo Ranch. We had a great crowd cheering us on our home course, and we dominated the race."

According to Simpson, "Cross country is so special that way. In large track stadiums you can't parse the individual voices, like you can in cross country; it is more of a primal group effort and just a lot of fun."

Some fans, Simpson said, will be bringing cowbells and flags to the Coal Creek Golf Course and will paint themselves in school colors. "It is just a festive environment."

Which is why, she added, "The team aspect in college is special."

"That is why I am happy to be at the University of Colorado," Simpson said. "It is a privilege to be back and to be part of what I know will be a very successful team."