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Going places

CU's Barringer taking aim at world steeplechase title this weekend

By Patrick Ridgell
The Daily Times-Call

BOULDER — Jenny Barringer is bracing for an eye-opening experience.

Barringer, the national champion in the 3,000-meter steeplechase and a University of Colorado athlete who harbors Olympic aspirations, will represent the United States this week at the International Association of Athletics Federations' World Championships in Osaka, Japan.

Barringer earned the right to compete for a steeplechase world title by winning the event June 23 at the USA Track and Field Championships in Indianapolis. On Saturday in Osaka, she'll don her country's uniform and, under the brightest lights she's ever seen, face off against the best in the world.

Is all of this a big deal? You better believe it — especially for someone who is 21 years old as of today.

"It's definitely intimidating thinking I'm a baby in this sport," Barringer said last week before she left for Osaka. "I'm not even 21, and I'm going to race in the world championships.

"I'm looking forward to this being a huge growing experience. And I want to go and experience racing on the largest level there is in my sport, in a huge stadium, among all of these professional, seasoned athletes. But I don't want to feel trumped. I want to do well. ... So I don't feel like I have any less of a responsibility because I'm young."

Where she places among the world's best, and how her performance prepares her for CU's upcoming cross-country season, are almost secondary concerns to the growth Barringer seeks.

CU cross country coach Mark Wetmore predicts she'll be in awe of her surroundings. And according to Wetmore, no one should blame her.

"She is a pretty calm customer," Wetmore said. "But who could stand in the stadium of the world championships two years and two months after high school and not be impressed, and not be nervous?"

"Our main goal for this competition is for her to execute her tasks in the face of nervousness, in the face of the hype and excitement."

Barringer did not intend to make this trip until an unexpected series of events unfolded in recent months.

Barringer won the 2006 NCAA steeplechase title. When she tried to defend her title at the NCAA championships in June, another runner clipped her shoe midway through the race, forcing Barringer to stop and put it back on. She lost several seconds and fell to the back of the pack before managing a seventh-place finish.



University of Colorado athlete Jenny Barringer won the 3,000-meter steeplechase at the USA Track and Field Outdoor Championships in June. Barringer finished in 9 minutes, 34.64 seconds — the second-fastest time ever recorded in the event by an American woman. **Photo courtesy the University of Colorado**

Barringer's plans changed after the NCAAs.

"Because of the shoe thing, we said 'let's keep going,'" Wetmore said. "And the world championships are a pretty big thing to turn down."

This week's results in Japan can not guarantee Barringer a spot in next summer's Beijing Olympics. Instead of the national championships next summer, there will be Olympic trials in June in Eugene, Ore.

The United States will take three women to Beijing to compete in the 3,000 steeplechase.

They can qualify in Eugene, or by owning one of the top three marks among all women in the event who have posted a time that meets the A standard, which, according to the IAAF, is 9 minutes, 46 seconds.

Barringer became one of a few American women to meet it when she ran a 9:34.64 in Indianapolis.

"There are four or five women in America that have the A standard right now," Wetmore said. "So they'll all be duking it out for the top three at the Olympic trials 10 months from now in Eugene."

Barringer's time at Indianapolis was the second fastest ever recorded by an American woman.

Barringer is scheduled to compete in the preliminaries on Saturday in Osaka, which actually will be Friday night in Colorado. If she advances, the finals are early Monday morning, Colorado time.

After Osaka, Barringer will remain busy.

She plans to head to Paris for another event before returning to Boulder in September. Barringer, who interned in the athletic department and took classes this summer, had to coordinate her studies with her fall professors before she could go to Osaka.

Barringer majors in political science and plans to graduate in May 2009.

The Olympics remain a topic she's reluctant to discuss. Barringer acknowledges her interest, but remembers the difficulty a distance runner faces to remain healthy and chooses not to get too far ahead of herself.

"I would love to have that opportunity," she said. "Barring an injury or something, as long as I'm healthy, I definitely would like to aspire for that."

"But I also have an appreciation for how difficult that is and how many women want to achieve that."

Wetmore said he's cautious of "presuming" that the Olympics are in the future. He calls them a "tall order," and stresses lots can happen between now and next August.

But he also sees the value this trip to Osaka, complete with its hype and the chance to go against the world's best, can provide Barringer.

"It's all just brand-new stuff," Wetmore said. "It's bigger and faster and scarier than anything she's ever been in before. Having done this will make further competitions of this level more business-like for her."

"All of this just makes her world bigger, and makes her stronger."

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