

2000 NCAA CHAMPIONS



2000 Colorado Women

(left to right) Jodie Hughes, Lesley Higgins, Tera Moody, Kara Grgas-Wheeler, Catherine Wright, Sarah Gorton, Assistant Coach Jason Drake, Jen Fazioli

The 2000 women's cross country team upended the defending national champion to claim the program's first national title, the 18th overall at CU.

Coming off back-to-back team titles at the Big 12 and NCAA Mountain Region Championships, Colorado was the top-ranked team in the country entering the biggest race of the year. As is its goal each year, Colorado wanted to better its ranking, which would now be the biggest challenge in the program's history.

Up for the challenge in wind-chill conditions that brought the late Midwest November temperature to 19-degrees below zero, Colorado methodically worked its way from the back of the pack to the front for the title. With a program-best 117 points, the Buffs finished 50 ahead of defending national champion Brigham Young.

Kara Grgas-Wheeler won the program's first individual crown while freshman Sara Gorton became the second-highest finishing freshman in the race and highest in program history with an eighth place effort. Jodie Hughes locked up All-American honors with a 30th-place effort while Lesley Higgins (52nd) and Tera Moody (71st) rounded out the CU scoring.

In the championship sweep, Grgas-Wheeler won CU's first individual title sans AIAW to complete the nation's only undefeated campaign. With the title, Grgas-Wheeler capped off a 1,035-0 season repeating her Big 12 Conference and Mountain Region titles before capturing her third national title, first in the fall. Her win marked the first time since 1994 that the individual national champion was represented on the NCAA Championship team.

2001 NCAA CHAMPIONS



2001 Colorado Men

(left to right) Jorge Torres, Ed Torres, Sean Smith, Aaron Blondeau,
Dathan Ritzenhein, Jon Severy, Steve Slattery

The No. 1 ranked team in the country from the preseason polls to the national championship podium, the 2001 men's season came to a crescendo with a one-point national championship victory over nemesis Stanford in Greenville, S.C. to bring home to the University its 19th national championship, the last remaining title that had previously eluded Colorado's storied distance program.

The Buffs' successful run at the national title capped off the program's first undefeated season in which they were uncontested at the Rocky Mountain Shootout in Boulder, won their sixth straight Big 12 Conference title in Norman, Okla., claimed their ninth national qualifying race in 10 seasons and improved from their runner-up finish in 2000 at the national championships.

The one-point difference, 90-91, in the final score was the tightest in race history, tying the Villanova men's 1970 85-86 win over Oregon.

The Buffs were paced by a pair of top-10 individual performances in the run to the title. Among the favorites to win the individual national title, junior Jorge Torres made no secret about his intentions to sacrifice an individual crown for the team title, and finished as the individual runner-up in his quest. Big 12 Conference Newcomer of the Year Dathan Ritzenhein finished fourth and was the highest finishing freshman in a national championship race since Adam Goucher's second-place finish in 1994.

Junior Ed Torres improved 12 places from the previous year's national runner-up race to finish 15th for his second All-American certificate. Steve Slattery battled back from a mid-season injury before going on to score as the Buffs' fourth runner, 28th overall. Senior captain Sean Smith, was the final factor in clinching the title as CU's No. 5 runner, 56th overall.

Fifth-year senior Aaron Blondeau who had competed in four NCAA Championship races since his 1997 freshman year, sat out the first two meets of the season due to injury before marking his return five weeks before the NCAA Championships where he came in as CU's sixth runner in the national championship win.

Redshirt freshman Jon Severy reaped the benefits of his redshirt season in 2000 solidifying his role on the NCAA Championship travel squad where he came in as the Buffs' final runner.

With his fourth NCAA cross country title since becoming head coach in 1995, head coach Mark Wetmore became the first coach in the history of the championship to win a men's individual title (Adam Goucher, 1997), women's individual title (Kara Grgas-Wheeler in 2000), women's team title (2000) and men's team crown at one school.

2004 NCAA CHAMPIONS



2004 Colorado Women

(left to right) Amber Smith, Renee Metivier, Jackie Zeigle, Liza Pasciuto, Natalie Florence, Sara Slattery, Laura Zeigle, Christine Bolf

In a championship where the team needed to run a perfect race, the Colorado women got the ball rolling when the then third-ranked Buffs did just that to claim the first of two titles on the day, their first since the 2000 season.

The women, paced by Renee Metivier's second career national runner-up finish, placed all five runners in the top-30, to score a program best 63 points (it took 117 to win in '00), 81 points ahead of runner-up Duke (144), Providence (164), Notre Dame (170) and pre-race favorite Stanford (175). The margin was the fourth largest in championship history.

An already damp and slightly heavy course on Sunday was worsened by overnight and early morning rains that subsided by the start of the women's race and the skies were clear for the start of the men's, conditions that obviously played in favor of the Buffs.

With Kim Smith (Providence) in control of the individual title, the team title was up for grabs as early as the halfway mark. Smith was running a 9:52.7 pace at the 3k mark, followed by Metivier (10:05) and BYU's Laura Turner (10:14), with just four points separating the Buffs and Stanford at that mark, with Slattery in 16th and Bolf in 18th, followed by Duke and Providence.

The pleasant surprise for the day on the women's team was that of freshman Liza Pasciuto. Pasciuto finished as CU's No. 2 runner for the first time in her career, and her 13th place finish is the second best by a CU freshman in program history, second only to Sara (Gorton) Slattery's eighth place freshman effort in '00.

"Coming in I was trying my best to try and score and help the team achieve the goals that we set at the beginning of the season," said Pasciuto. "But I'm definitely thrilled with my finish. I couldn't have asked for more. I hope to come back next year and do it again."

Christine Bolf (20:48.1) ran to her first All-American title in the fall with a 14th place finish, a career best for the junior that finished 63rd a year ago. In the final race of her collegiate career, fifth-year senior Sara Slattery finished 28th and came away as an All-American for the third time in her career, just the second CU harrier to do so, following current assistant coach Heather Burroughs (1994, 95, 98). She is also now the only runner in the program's storied history to be a member of two national championship teams, as she was a freshman on that 2000 squad.

Natalie Florence (21:07.2) rounded out CU's scoring, finishing 30th overall for her second All-American title. In her first national championship, freshman Amber Smith (21:44.3) finished 78th overall. Laura Zeigle (23:18.1) finished 224th.

"Our race plan was to try and be patient and not fight the conditions (which changed dramatically overnight). By the 600-m mark they had over-ruled my plan and my hope was that they held on. They kept going, so I'm glad that they overlooked my instructions," said Wetmore.

2004 NCAA CHAMPIONS



2004 Colorado Men

(left to right) Austin Baillie, James Strang, Stephen Pifer, Brent Vaughn, Bradley Harkrader, Jared Scott, Jon Severy, Bret Schoolmeester

Not to be outdone by their counterparts, the Colorado men capped what would be the best day in the program's storied history with their second title in four years.

The men's race was a battle for both the individual and team titles from the start of the race. At the halfway mark, a lead pack of 10-plus runners were separated by one second with Arkansas' Josphat Boit in the lead at 15:16.1 and the 10th place runner at 15:17.1, with Vaughn (15:25) in 15th and Schoolmeester (15:26) in 19th. Vaughn had taken sole possession of fourth place at the 8k turn, having caught 13 runners in a 3k span, while Schoolmeester chased down 12. At that point, Wisconsin had control of the team race with 80 points to Arkansas' 160, followed by Colorado.

Senior Jon Severy became the first men's runner in the program's history to have run on two national title teams. Classmate Jared Scott was on the team that season, but did not run at nationals. He was also a freshman in '01 and ran the final cross country race of his career here this afternoon. It happen to be the best of his career, covering the 10k loop in 31:26.9 to finish 21st.

Severy made up as much ground as anyone Monday, as he was 39th at the halfway mark, and 25th at 8k, running down 18 in his final race.

"It was an incredible note to start on," said Severy. "I was carried through a little bit on that 2001 team and it gave me a false sense of what it meant to be on a good team. Since then, I've sunk pretty low and learned an incredible amount of what is necessary to sacrifice for your team and carry it out. Today was just so perfect that I can't describe it."

Newcomers Stephen Pifer and James Strang rounded out the scoring for the CU men, with Pifer running 31:56.8 to finish 44th while Strang ran 31:59.9 to finish 49th. Jared Scott, also running in the last cross country race of his career, was off his junior year pace, but finished 80th in 32:25.0. Freshman Bradley Harkrader, who had scored during the season as CU's third, fourth and fifth runner, finished 121st in 32:50.7 in his first national championship event. While five native Coloradoans ran in the men's race, three scored.

"The front two ran as well as I thought they possibly could and Jon ran way better than I would have expected. All of the five scorers ran better than my most optimistic aspirations. And with Stephen, James and Bradley, all freshmen, the sky is the limit," said Wetmore.

2006 NCAA CHAMPIONS



2006 Colorado Men

(left to right) Bradley Harkrader, Pete Janson, Erik Heinonen, Stephen Pifer, Billy Nelson, James Strang, Brent Vaughn and Kenyon Neuman

The second-ranked Colorado men headed into the 2006 championship knowing the race was theirs to lose. The muddy conditions were just like those two years before when the Buffs captured their second national title and gave Colorado extra confidence as the race approached.

The field got out to a quicker start than CU normally likes and was led most of the way by Brent Vaughn. Vaughn finished 12th overall (31:13.0), earning his second straight top-15 finish at nationals and the second straight time he was CU's first harrier across the finish.

While Vaughn ran a steady race, the men's win can be traced to Pifer's performance over the second 5,000-meters. At the 5k split, he had 52 runners ahead of him, but streaked past 32 of them to nab the 20th spot overall (31:24.2) in the individual standings and his second All-American title.

"I knew in the second half I had to come back and catch a lot of guys," Pifer said. "So I paid attention to sensory data, which is something that Mark Wetmore has been preaching to us all year, checking your heart rate and breathing and things like that to make sure you are comfortable. The race doesn't really start until the last 3k, so you really have to get going."

Erik Heinonen had a story book year after receiving a sixth-year of eligibility from the NCAA for the season. He was the third Buff to cross the line, placing a personal best 28th overall (31:34.7), and earning his first All-American honor.

James Strang took 47th (31:54.5) and Billy Nelson, who passed over 15 in the last 1,000-meters, took 56th (32:02.7). Bradley Harkrader came in at 152nd (33:05.3) and Pete Janson was 213th (33:56.5) as Colorado's non-scorers.

CU's five scorers all finished in the top 56 overall, and in the top 34 of those attached to full teams. CU and Wisconsin were the only schools to have three place in the top 15 in the scoring column.

The Buffaloes recorded 94 points, soundly defeating defending champion and overwhelming favorite Wisconsin by 48 points. Iona (172), Stanford (195) and Oregon (196) rounded out the top five.

"I think the race was very fast for us," head coach Mark Wetmore said. "Every coach has to know their team and how fast they can go. If other teams ran our way, it would certainly hurt them, like if would if we ran another team's plan. We don't talk a lot about expectations, its aspirations for us. We equaled our aspirations today."

"We did well here a couple of years ago too and everyone was telling me that the mud was perfect for us, but Boulder is like a desert and isn't very muddy."

Vaughn, Harkrader, Pifer and Strang joined Jon Severy as the only Buffs to win two national titles.

2013 NCAA CHAMPIONS



2013 Colorado Men

(left to right) Dillon Shije, Ben Saarel, Zach Perrin, Blake Theroux, Connor Winter, Pierce Murphy, Ammar Moussa and Morgan Pearson

Through cold, windy and muddy conditions, the No. 3 ranked University of Colorado men's cross country team once again proved to be the top team in the land as they claimed the 2013 NCAA Cross Country team title, their fourth since 2001.

The Buffs soundly defeated top-ranked Northern Arizona (149-169) for the team crown after losing to NAU just eight days ago at the regional meet by eight points. Oklahoma State, the reigning NCAA Champions and ranked second team, was an overwhelming favorite heading into the race, and placed third with 230 points. BYU was fourth (267) and Oregon took fifth overall (274).

"I like it that people said that we were over ranked after the conference meet and after regionals," head coach Mark Wetmore said. "That adds a little bit to the enjoyment of winning today."

The team took a conservative start to the race and was 10th overall after the first 3,000-meters, but that didn't last long as the Buffs jumped up seven positions to third at the midway point behind NAU and BYU. CU kept moving up and by the 8k was only 19 points behind NAU. Over the course of the remaining 2k, the Buffs overtook NAU for the win.

CU was led by true freshman Ben Saarel with an eighth-place finish, finishing in 30:14.1. It is the highest finish for a Buff since Richard Medina placed eighth in 2011. With the finish, Saarel became the first true freshman to earn All-American honors since assistant coach and Olympian Billy Nelson at the 2002 championship. That year Nelson placed 42nd overall.

"Ben was one of the best high school runners in American just six months ago," Wetmore said. "We knew he was a big talent, but the NCAA Cross Country Championship is a killer race with a lot of mature, developed young men. For him to be eighth overall is indicative of his talent."

Colorado did quite well in the unfriendly conditions, placing four of its five scorers in the top-40, which earned each of them All-American honors. Morgan Pearson was CU's No. 2 scorer, coming in at 17th overall (30:35.0). Theroux finished 23rd overall, improving from a 39th-place finish in 2012, to record his second All-American cross country honor (30:34.6). Pierce Murphy was the fourth runner for the Buffs and he was 39th (30:44.9); improving from 45th place last year. This was Pearson and Murphy's first All-American honor.

Rounding out the team scoring and clinching the team title for CU was Ammar Moussa, who placed 95th overall as CU's fifth runner. He finished in 31:17.1. Moussa also won a national championship with his high school team in 2010 to become one of the first men to win a high school and collegiate national championship.

Although they didn't score, Zach Perrin and Connor Winter also raced for CU at the meet. Perrin placed 107th (31:23.3) and Winter was 177th (32:02.2). Oregon's Edward Chesarek was the individual winner, finishing in 29:41.1.

2014 NCAA CHAMPIONS



2014 Colorado Men

(left to right) Ben Saarel, Adam Peterman, Ammar Moussa, Jake Hurysz, Pierce Murphy, Connor Winter and Blake Theroux

The University of Colorado entered the NCAA Championship as the top team in the country and lived up to the hype as it did all year. The Buffs put together a score of 65, placing all five of its scorers in the top 40, three in the top 10, to earn All-American honors. The team score is the lowest score since 2005 when Wisconsin won with 37 points. The team runner-up, Stanford, tallied 98 points and Portland was third with 175. Oregon's Edward Cheserek won his second straight individual title in 30:19.4.

"This is probably our best team ever," head coach Mark Wetmore said. "Again, I had the team that came here with Jorge [Torres] who won and the team that followed it and great other individuals who were followed by good teams but not winners. Certainly, this is the best third, fourth and fifth we've ever had and certainly I think it's the best team score that we've ever had. So, they are real good and they belong in the pantheon.

"I'm really proud of those guys," Wetmore went on to say. "It's hard to be the favorites, it's so hard to have the attention. It's so hard for nine or ten 21-year-old men to keep their egos in check and they really did it. They were talking each other up the whole time. I think any one would have sacrificed his day to have a bad day if it would have meant six good days for his teammates. So, that's the biggest feeling I have. Pride, not for me but pride for them."

Only four teams have won the NCAA Championship in the last 10 years and three of those schools have now won back-to-back titles. Oregon won the title in 2007 and 08, and Oklahoma State took home back-to-back titles in 2009 and 10.

Junior Ammar Moussa led CU with a top-five finish to earn his first All-American honor, finishing in 30:29.6. Two other Buffs have top-10 positions. Sophomore Ben Saarel was seventh (30:30.7) and senior Blake Theroux was ninth (30:31.3).

CU's other two scorers were junior Connor Winter (24th, 30:45.0) and junior Pierce Murphy (35th, 30:51.7). Senior Jake Hurysz finished just behind those two, finishing 41st overall (32:57.6). Redshirt freshman Adam Peterman also ran for CU and placed 202nd (32:36.8).

"It went how I wanted," Wetmore said. "We started out a little slower than I would have guessed but our fellas put themselves in a good position and were smart and patient. As I said yesterday, they were willing to sacrifice individual races for the team goal and some of them may have today. Ammar did amazing. I think that was a wonderful race for Ammar [Moussa]. Ben [Saarel] has had a difficult season trying to get completely healthy and I think he had a great race today. Blake was good. Everybody was good. Out of the men and the women, I can't think of a disappointing race which is so hard to do here."

Moussa and Winter earned their first All-American honors with the finish, while this is the second honor for Saarel and Murphy. Theroux became just the 11th Buff in CU history to earn the honor three times.