

Forbes smart by any label

By Marcus Prater
Of the Emerald

Eryn Forbes started running with the label, "best pre-high school runner in the nation." The label changed to "washed up and burned out," as a senior in high school. Finally, it has changed to "the second fastest American collegiate woman at 10,000 meters."

The Oregon cross country and track runner has worn a tag ever since she was a 13-year-old eighth grader who shocked Portland-area runners with her racing prowess.

But with the cross country national championships this fall, the track nationals in the spring and the Olympics in 1984, there is room for still more labels. Right now call Eryn Forbes, "the most experienced and steadiest competitor," in Oregon's long distance running program.

"We have no team captain, but she is the mainstay of the team," Oregon track and cross country coach Tom Heinonen said of Forbes. "She's the most experienced and steadiest competitor we have. She leads by simply being herself and approaching running low key and intelligently."

Both Heinonen and Forbes agree intelligence is a big factor in all forms of running, but especially long distance running.

"My team doesn't run on emotion, it runs on intelligence, and she's the best example," Heinonen said.

"I'd say that experience leads to intelligence. You experience everything instead of hearing about it," Forbes, a senior, said. "As long as you keep an open mind you will learn and an intelligent program is good for improvement."

If improvement comes with an intelligent program, Forbes certainly has been attached to one of the smartest in the country.

The 21-year-old has improved at a steady rate since coming to Oregon from Sunset High School in Portland. Forbes ran the 3,000 meters in 9:40 as a high school senior, 9:31 as a Oregon freshman, 9:22 as a sophomore and 9:07 as a junior. She ran a 16:33 5,000 meters in high school, a 16:29 as a freshman at Oregon, 16:07 as a sophomore and — one year later — a 15:37.

"Individual improvement is



Eryn Forbes

very important to me," she said.

The freshman Forbes finished 10th in the 5,000 track finals, sixth as a sophomore and third last season. She is a four-time All-American (three times in track, once in cross country), and holds the Oregon record for 5,000 (15:37.1) and 10,000 (33:31.7) meters.

Not bad for someone who was once labeled burned out.

Forbes picked up the label after a long and successful high school career. She picked up seven state track titles and three state cross country crowns, but lost the 1,500 to Claudette Groenendaal (then a sophomore from North Salem High School, now an Oregon runner) as a senior. She was beaten and all of a sudden the question of, "Is she burned out?" came up. "The phrase 'burned out' started popping up," Heinonen said. "But she wasn't. She was having problems. She had outgrown her high school competition and needed to go another step up. She also had gained some weight through natural maturity.

"Some people saw her as being washed up, because she got beat after being untouchable as an age-grouper," he said.

"High school was really hard for me," Forbes said. "I made the mistake of winning the state title in my freshman year. All I could do after that was do what was expected — win.

"There is a lot of different kinds of pressure," she said, hesitantly using that word. "There are friends, the general

people you don't know, the media, the public and your family. Lucky enough, my family helped more than hindered."

The family is where Forbes picked up the sport of running. She started joining her father, an avid runner and coach at Portland State, on his daily jaunts. She soon was going to organized races, or "social things," as Forbes called them.

"Age-groupers are pretty competitive. But when you're 10 years old, you don't think that much about them. You're still fairly sheltered," she said.

However, Forbes proved that being socially sheltered didn't keep her from winning age group races. She was basically unbeatable.

"She is an unique athlete, because she wasn't pushed hard as an age-grouper," Heinonen said. "Also, most of who are successful before high school, fail in high school."

She didn't fail as a prep, and hasn't in college. This cross country season, however, with Oregon's top runner Leann Warren out with an injury, has been different for Forbes.

"It's hard not having Leann around. We share a lot together — running and not running," Forbes said. "It's a lot more serious. Nothing against anybody on the team, but everything is so intense. When you've been running for 12 years you can't be intense.

"Leann was my escape route. She relieved the intensity, which is important for me. It's just not the same (without Leann)."

There are still a lot of decisions Forbes must make about her running future. There is the Los Angeles Olympics in two years, but the women's 5,000 or 10,000 meters, her specialty, is not an event.

Long distance women runners have a choice between the 3,000 meters or the marathon, a situation Forbes called "an injustice." But the Olympics is not the only thing Forbes is thinking about.

"A lot depends on what I do this year. Running for clubs obviously helps financially and there is an Olympic year coming up, but I tend to get bored easily and I might work," she said. "I definitely want to keep running. I don't think I've tapped my potential."

When she does, she won't have to worry about a label.

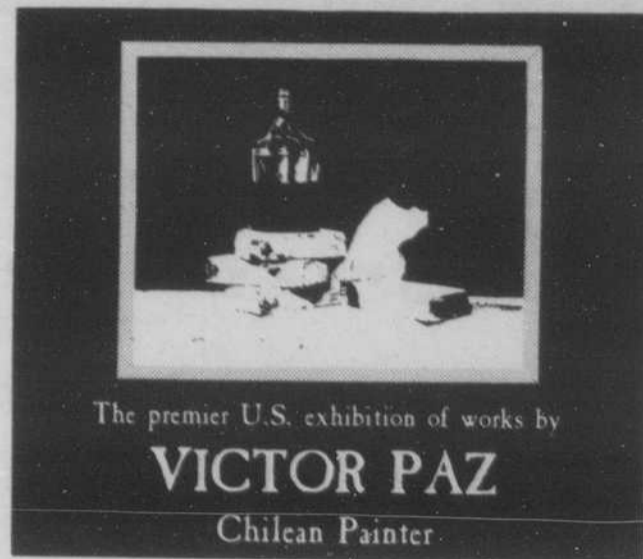


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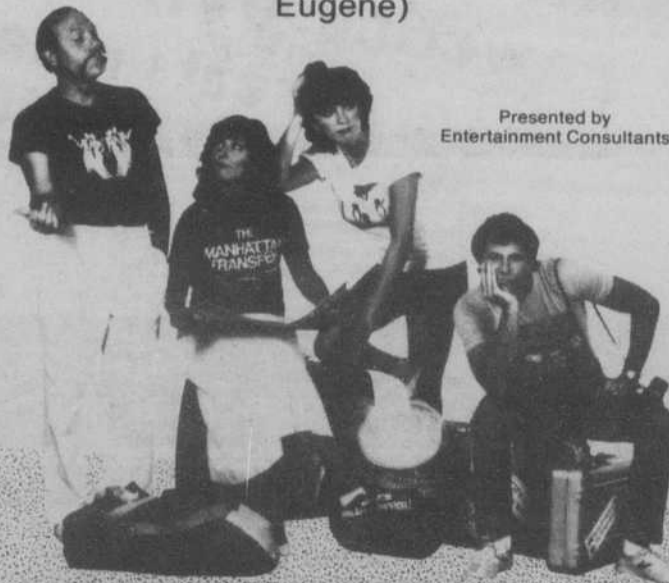
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