

Looking to bloom in Bloomington

Kim Roth has gone a long way in the past year. Far enough, in fact, that she will be leaving Saturday for the NCAA cross country championships.

Only a year ago she was en route to the Oregon AAA high school championship. The state cross country title Roth won there was an indication of what lay ahead for the Oregon freshman.

Roth will be chasing another title Monday when she and seven teammates run at Bloomington, Ind. with the hope of returning with the largest trophy offered.

The Ducks, ranked third nationally by Harrier Magazine, assured themselves a spot in the 16-team championship with a runner-up finish to second-rated Stanford in the District 8 championship Nov. 13.

Roth contributed her share with a seventh place finish in the 70-runner field, and was second for the Ducks behind Kathy Hayes.

Not bad for a girl who was attending Sprague High School in Salem six months ago. Roth not only won the state prep cross country title as a senior, but doubled up to take the 3,000 and 5,000-meter medals in the state track meet.

This made Roth hot property in recruiter's eyes, and Oregon coach Tom Heinonen has 20/20 vision.

"When we were recruiting Claudette (Groenendaal), Rosa (Gutierrez) and Kathy (Hayes) there was only one other runner who could compete with them. Kim was the only underclassmen to challenge them. Naturally we took a long look at Kim. She was an ideal prospect," Heinonen says.

The Oregon AAA state cross country champion the past eight years has chosen the nationally-ranked Oregon long distance program, and Roth was not about to break the string.

"When you look at schools, you do look at records," Roth says. "But I came here because I liked the school and the program Tom had. He's a good coach and I knew this is a place where I could improve."

A freshman in college has a lot of adjusting to do without the added pressure of athletics. For Roth, the adjustment was twofold.

"The thing I feared most about college was the size of the school and being away from home. I was really scared about that," Roth says.

But what about running? The last time she had run a 5,000-meter race (high school races are 3,000 meters)

was in December of 1981 at the Kinney prep national cross country championships in Orlando, Fla. In only her second competitive attempt at the distance she finished 10th.



"The 5,000 is a lot different race. It takes a lot more endurance. It took a long time to adjust and Saturday (at the district race) was the first time I felt comfortable," Roth says.

Feeling comfortable doesn't win NCAA trophies, but feeling comfortable is a start. Roth has steadily improved her performance since the Ducks began workouts in September.

"I knew I could improve, but I didn't think this fast," she says. "The reason for that is I have more competition and a team to work out with. I'd work out with the boys in high school and when it came time to race I had no one to run against."

Heinonen attributes Roth's success to her "pure foot speed," and her ability to conform to college running.

"The hardest thing she encountered from high school to college is the speed and intensity of workouts," Heinonen says of the 55 training miles the Ducks log a week. "She's really tough because she doesn't get competitive in workouts so you don't see it (ability) until the race. She saves all the racing for the right time, which is what a coach hopes for."

Roth says she is, once again, saving everything for the race. Monday she will line up with 136 of the best runners in the country.

"I know for sure I will be nervous. I know it will be an exciting race. I didn't expect to be as high as I am right now and that's what makes it exciting. Just thinking, 'I can run against the best in the United States,' is pretty exciting," she says.

If Monday morning follows the pattern of this season, Roth should make an impression at the national level. Her transition from high school to college has been a smooth one for her and Heinonen sums it up in one sentence.

"Her strongest asset as a person and a runner is her level-head and the ease with which she handles everything new around her."

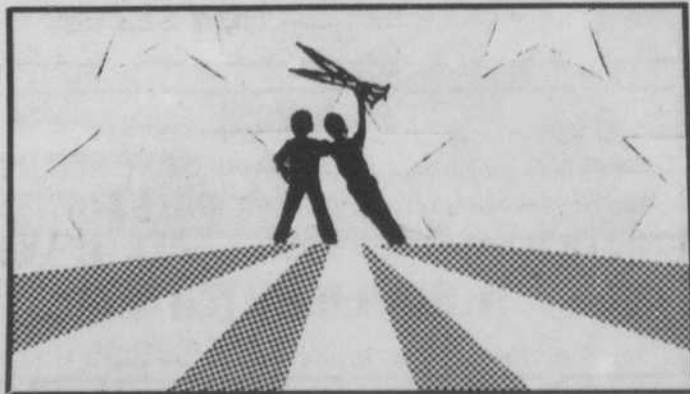
Bloomington and the NCAA championship will be new to Roth, and, if Heinonen is right, she will handle it with ease.

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