

Not too bad, considering Wednesday's race was just her second attempt at 10,000 meters. Not too bad, considering the 10,000 was an event Hayes never dreamed of running before the season began. Not too bad, considering the stress fracture had Hayes questioning whether she could run at all.

"One or two weeks ago, I had hardly any speed at all during my workouts," said Hayes, who was expected to run in the 5,000 meters, not the 10,000. "So I decided to run the 10,000."

That meant drifting from the 5,000, where Hayes was second a year ago at NCAAs. But the longer distance suited Hayes well. Extremely well.

"I think this will be my race in

the future," she said. "Especially if it ever gets into the Olympics."

Other Oregon women had fine performances Wednesday, as Claudette Groenendaal, Ranza Clark and Kim Roth all qualified for Friday's final in the 1,500 meters.

But the story of the day was Hayes. She was content to sit in the middle of a pack for much of the 24-lap race before making her move. The beginning group of 21 runners soon broke into a lead group, with Hayes running comfortably in sixth place.

She cruised through the 5,000 in 16:36.8, then broke free of Wisconsin's Kathleen Ishmael with a lap and one-half to go. Hayes finished in style — running her last mile in 4:56.7 and

her final lap in 68.7 seconds as she left Ishmael and Carey May of Brigham Young University in her wake.

Now Hayes will probably be a spectator at the 5,000. She shook her head no when asked if she would double back for more Oregon points.

"Probably not," she said of the 5,000. "I really want to stay fresh for the Trials."

Senior Eryn Forbes, also in the 10,000, ran strongly for almost half of the race before settling for a non-scoring 13th place in 33:52.7.

Groenendaal, Clark and Roth all looked smooth in qualifying for the 1,500 final. Groenendaal won the first heat with a clocking of 4:18.81, while Clark tied for second in the next heat with a 4:19.02. Roth qualified seventh in that same heat in 4:22.11.

Groenendaal, who decided to run an NCAA 800-1,500 double less than a week ago, took the lead from the start and never relinquished it.

"I was overly concerned this year because the last two years I was the last person to qualify for the finals in the 1,500," said Groenendaal, who will run an 800 heat this evening. "I didn't want to wait this year while they called the times."

Clark led for much of her race

before falling back, while Roth qualified for the final by less than a second.

In the 3,000 meters, Oregon had three non-qualifying finishers — Birgit Petersen, Deanna Schiedler and Brenda Bushnell. It was the first NCAA competition for all three.

With Hayes' first-place finish, unheralded Oregon moved into a tie for the team lead with University of Nevada-Las Vegas with 15 points apiece.

"15 points? 'We're in the lead (actually tied with UNLV),' joked Heinonen. 'We'll be in the lead for half of this meet.'"

Unfortunately, the Ducks are not expected to be near the top of the leader board for very long. The meet is shaping up as a dual between Tennessee and Florida State.

Today's event schedule for the women includes the 800 meters, which features Groenendaal and Clark.

Wednesday went just about as expected for the Oregon men — except for sophomore Ken Flax, who fouled twice in the hammer before slipping into Friday's finals on his last throw.

Flax's near disaster in the hammer was the only dark cloud on an otherwise sunny day for the Ducks, who moved four of five competitors entered in Wednesday's qualifying races into their respective finals.

The only Duck who didn't move into the next round was Don Ward, who finished a non-qualifying 11th in his 400-meter hurdle heat in 51.01. But Ward's finish will be worth two points when the 400-meter hurdle final is run Friday, since the four fastest non-qualifiers scored points Wednesday.

More good news came the Ducks' way when pre-meet favorite Joaquim Cruz easily won his 800 meter heat in the day's fastest time — 1:46.34 — and then sophomores Matt McGuirk and Harold Kuphaldt both finished fourth in their steeplechase heats to qualify for Friday night's final. McGuirk clocked 8:41.68 and Kuphaldt ran 8:40.48 to make it into the 14-man final.

The fact that he almost missed the finals — after being given a good shot at finishing in the top six before the meet began — left Flax a bit shaken.

"Is my hair gray?" deadpanned Flax after his final throw of 207-3 settled down into fair

territory.

"My keys weren't there today," said Flax, referring to his hammer-throwing technique. "It was just a matter of finding them, which I did on the last throw."

Flax, who won the Pacific 10 Conference meet with a heave of 229-9, said he moved over in the ring a little for his last throw and thus shifted his throwing position enough to make sure he wouldn't foul.

"I'll take that last throw, although it's not as good a position as I wanted," Flax said.

"He wasn't going flat out today," said Oregon weights coach Stewart Togher. "There was still more there — you could see that on his fouls (which were further than his legal throw)."

While Flax seemed on the edge of not making the final — until his last throw — Kuphaldt and McGuirk looked solid throughout each of their respective steeplechase heats.

Neither was given much of a chance before the season began to even make the NCAA championships. But McGuirk, based on a strong 8:36.63 at the Oregon Pepsi Relay in early May, was picked by Track and Field News last week to finish 11th in Friday's final.

Kuphaldt, however, almost didn't make the NCAA meet. He couldn't run a qualifying mark during Oregon's regular dual and relay meet season, so last week he entered the Oregon State Twilight Meet's steeplechase and clocked an 8:40.94, good enough to qualify. Wednesday, he ran a lifetime best, clocking 8:40.48.

The battle for the team title between pre-meet favorite Washington State and Oregon tightened up a bit when the Cougars' Brent Harken failed to make the qualifying height in the high jump for Friday's final. Harken had been expected to finish in the top two. Another Cougar expected to score big points, Richard Tuwei, struggled in his steeplechase heat and barely managed to qualify in 8:43.23.

The Cougars' title hopes did receive a boost Tuesday when freshman Carlos Gambetta finished seventh in the decathlon. That gave WSU six points in an event they hadn't expected to earn more than one point from.

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