

# Steeplechaser Lopez faces high expectations

## Fulfills goal of running in Eugene

By Ashley Conklin  
Emerald Sports Reporter

Sometimes in life you just know that somebody will end up in a certain situation.

Oregon distance runner Danny Lopez definitely fits that bill, and considering all the scenarios involved, it would have been surprising if he had ended up anywhere else.

Lopez, a senior, has become one of the nation's best steeplechasers under coach Bill Dellinger, after spending his first two seasons at Central Arizona learning the rigors of the 3,000-meter event from George Young.

It was a lifelong goal of Lopez to come to Eugene and train under Dellinger.

"It was dream of mine to come to Oregon since it was the running capital of the world at that time," Lopez said.

Lopez said he came to Oregon through Dellinger. "He and George Young are pretty close friends, and so they were keeping in touch on how I was doing through my first year and my second year."

The friendship between Dellinger and Young goes back 30 years to when they were teammates on the 1960 and 1964 Olympic Teams.

Dellinger won a bronze medal in the 5,000 meters in the 1964 Tokyo Games. Young also competed in the '68 and '72 Games and won a bronze medal in the steeplechase in 1968 at Mexico City.

The relationship between Dellinger and Young, and Lopez's goal to run for the Ducks, aren't the only things that brought Lopez to Oregon though.

In 1987, Oregon's Dan Nelson won the NCAA steeplechase, went on to graduate and Dellinger knew he had to find another steeplechaser.

"It was a priority for us," Dellinger said. "Danny was one of the people we looked at two years ago and knew we needed."

Dellinger had high expectations for Lopez after he won the national junior college steeplechase title his freshman year and placed second his sophomore season.

He didn't disappoint last season, losing only once before the Pacific-10 Conference meet. At the Pac-10 finals he finished second to Washington State's

Marty Stroschein but ran a personal record of 8:39.73.

However, things didn't go as well at the NCAA meet in Provo, Utah.

The steeplechase final was run at night, and Lopez fell at the water jump barrier with three laps to go. At the time he was running third in the race; although he did finish the race, he placed a non-scoring 11th.

"He has eyesight problems and doesn't have very good depth perception," Dellinger said. "That race was run at night and that makes it more difficult. I think he certainly would have scored."

"I was feeling pretty good during the race," Lopez said, "and I thought I had a good shot of at least the top four."

"It hurts," he said, "but that's something that happens and it can happen at any time."

A fall over a barrier or into the water jump is not uncommon and definitely sets steeplechasers apart from other distance runners.

"It's a skilled event," Dellinger said. "You have to not be afraid of the barriers, if you knock it down or it knocks you down. You can dislocate a knee or suffer a broken leg."

"It takes a certain amount of daring to run the steeplechase," he said.

Lopez had the daring when he showed up at Central Arizona, but found out he was alone in that regard.

"I got there and we had no steeplechasers whatsoever and nobody who wanted to try the event," he said.

Lopez kept asking Young about the steeplechase during the fall and got his chance when spring rolled around.

"He told me I'd get my chance at the first meet," Lopez added, "and so a week before the first meet, I started working on the hurdles and that's how it all started."

This season Lopez is looking for an NCAA title. He has already qualified for a return trip to the NCAAs, to be held in Durham, N.C., this year, with a time of 8:42.35 almost a month ago.

Saturday's dual meet between Oregon and Nebraska could be a preview of the NCAA steeplechase race.

On hand will be the Cornhuskers' Joe



Photo by Sean Poston

Danny Lopez, who arrived at Oregon as if he were compelled to compete here, hopes for a strong performance Saturday.

Kirby, third at the NCAAs last year, and Harold Graham, who placed seventh, to battle Lopez and teammate Rick Mestler, eighth in last year's NCAA meet.

Lopez hasn't run the steeplechase since the Pepsi Team Invitational on April 14 and thinks the break will help him Saturday.

"It's almost been a month Saturday

since I've ran a steeple and I think it will be a good performance," he said.

After his college career ends next month, Lopez is looking forward to taking a shot at training for the 1992 Olympic Games. With the Dellinger-Young coaching connection, the Olympics would seem to be a certainty for someone like Lopez.

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