



Lauren Wimer Photographer

Colorado redshirt freshman Erik Heinonen (103) took fifth in the 3,000 at the Pepsi Invitational Saturday. Heinonen, son of former Oregon women's head coach Tom Heinonen, transferred to Colorado from Oregon before this season.

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So it comes as no surprise that Saturday was a big day for the younger Heinonen. He came back to Hayward for the first time after transferring to Colorado.

"There's so many people here and I was so nervous about the race," Erik Heinonen said.

The race on Saturday was in fact Heinonen's first as a collegiate athlete at Hayward. Had it come for Oregon, it might have been a sign of things to come.

Of the top four finishers in the 3,000, only one was an Oregon runner. Colorado's Ritzenhein easily took the event and was followed by Minnesota's duo of Andrew Carlson and Will McComb.

Both Golden Gophers finished more than eight seconds before Oregon's Brett Holts, who took fourth with a time of 8 minutes, 26.27 seconds. Heinonen was almost one second behind.

The 3,000 was the longest race of the day, but it did not hide, in any way, shape or form, Oregon's dearth of immediate talent in distance running. The thing is, that's been the program's staple in the past, from Steve Prefontaine to Bill McChesney Jr., Alberto Salazar to Karl Keska.

In the 1,500 you'd have to look as far as fifth to find Oregon's top runner, Eric Logsdon.

In the 800 — which is pushing it for serious distance running — Mike McGrath took second.

Heinonen would've been that perfect fit for the Ducks. He's proven in the past that he can handle the distances,

becoming one of the top runners in the Northwest while in high school.

While at South Eugene High School, Heinonen took fourth in the 3,000 at the 2001 Oregon 4A State Track Championships, finishing third the previous two years. In the 1,500, he finished fifth in 2001 and sixth in 1999.

Not all of those are stellar numbers, but figures that accentuate the notion that he would have been a nice piece of the puzzle in Oregon's attempts to win a Pacific-10 Championship.

But he won't be. After sitting out last season, he ultimately decided to transfer. He said it just didn't feel right in Eugene.

"I never really found my groove," Heinonen said. "Coach Smith is an incredible mentor, an incredible coach. But for some reason it just didn't click."

For now, Heinonen will run for the Buffaloes, hoping to recapture the magic on the track that he enjoyed in high school.

Ironically, he could be seeing more of the same starting Friday at the Mt. SAC Relays in Walnut Creek, Calif., where a number of Ducks are expected to compete. From there, he's set to compete at the Christensen Invitational in Fort Collins, Colo., on April 24.

That's followed by the Big 12 Conference Championships in Norman, Okla., during the final weekend of April.

"It's just good to be training hard again," Heinonen said. "I haven't done that since I was in high school, two years almost. It's nice to feel like I'm working again and the racing is going to be what it is. I'm going to keep on putting in the miles and the sessions."

On one beautiful Saturday, all of the hard work meant a return home. What could have been.

Contact the sports editor at hankhager@dailymerald.com. His opinions do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.

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660 in the spot where many of Bonds' home runs have fallen, including the single-season record 73rd in 2001 that wound up the subject of a bitter court feud.

All Crum got was wet, just before the ball did.

"I caught a couple beers," said Crum, glancing down at his soaked shirt and trousers. Not that he cared

much. He got to watch history soar above his head, and that was enough.

"With everything going on, him taking a lot of heat, it was nice to see him hit one. It was so sweet to see it," said Crum.

"I'll tell my pops, tell my daughter," he crowed. "I probably won't tell my girlfriend. She'll wonder why I'm not at work."

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