

# Helpful hurdlers

*A competitive yet playful spirit with one another defines Oregon's hurdlers*

By Alex Tam  
Sports Reporter

Four women with one goal in mind: To be the best.

They compete with — and against — each other. It's not mean-spirited by any means, but the competition is enough to want to be the best.

"I definitely want my teammates to do well," junior hurdler Kayla Mellott said. "I know what their goals are and I always want them to be achieving them. I know they want the same for me, but you always want to do really well for yourself. It's friendly competition."

**"You want to beat people and you want to beat your teammates. But it's just all in fun — to get better as a group and bring each other up to the same level."**

**C'Rel McAllister**  
Oregon hurdler

The 21-year-old Mellott is one of four Oregon 400-meter hurdlers slated to compete at the 18th annual Women's Pacific-10 Conference Track and Field Championships in Tucson, Ariz., beginning today.

Two other hurdlers, seniors C'Rel McAllister and Abby Andrus, are the elders of the unit. Both are 23 and share the same passion to outdo their opponents and teammates as their final season on the Oregon track team winds down.

"You want to beat people and you want to beat your teammates," McAllister said. "But it's just all in fun — to get better as a group and bring each other up to the same level."

The final member of the group is the youngest and receives the most grief because she's a freshman. Amanda Santana, 18, is referred to as the "baby of the bunch," according to McAllister.

"You have to hold her hand and be there for her," McAllister said. "She's just so naive."

During one practice, the group recalls Santana not even knowing the number of hurdles within her own event — the 400 hurdles.

"You kind of need to know that when you do it," McAllister said. "But on the track, she's all business, she works hard and she's got a great work ethic."

However, that need to support one another represents a strong emphasis on the team this season. Each of the four athletes is fairly new to the 400 event. As a result, there is no clear leader among the hurdlers.

And that is not a problem.

"I actually don't think there's a

leader," Mellott said. "There's not really someone that has been doing it for a really long time, so I think we all just help each other out."

Mellott, a Bellingham, Wash. native, did not seriously start running the hurdles until her senior year in high school. Her first experience with the event was not a positive one during her years in middle school. She competed in the shortened 80-meter hurdle race and came out of it dejected.

"I bit it," Mellott said. "I fell so hard on the track and scratched myself up and didn't finish the race. I swore I'd never hurdle again."

But her track coach, Mark Kerr of Sehome High School, encouraged her to try again and Mellott has never looked back. She claimed a league title in the 300 hurdles her senior year and was one of the top sprinters in Washington. At the Oregon Twilight two weeks ago, Mellott earned a personal best of 1 minute, .08 seconds in the 400 hurdles.

Being one of the more experienced hurdlers, Mellott is looked upon to teach and advise the other hurdlers. Because McAllister started running the hurdles last season, she and Mellott have developed a close relationship as training partners.

"I had no clue last year what was going on," McAllister said. "Now I'm a little more confident, but still, I ask Kayla a lot of questions and she's more like the person who guides me through races. She's probably the person I look to the most for track-wise."

McAllister showed her own leadership skills when she had served as a guide for Andrus on her recruiting trip. An odd impression was left as the soft-spoken Andrus barely said a word on the entire visit to Eugene. The two finally became close around one year ago at the Pac-10 Championships.

**"C'Rel is pretty loud. She talks a lot and she has a comment for anything. She was a good little host. When you go on recruiting trips, you're kind of nervous, but she was really nice."**

**Abby Andrus**  
Oregon hurdler

"Just looking at her, you think she's a really quiet, really reserved person but she's not," McAllister said. "Abby's got a great personality. She loves to laugh, she loves to make people laugh."

Andrus admits she is shy. She remembers her trip to Oregon and the initial encounter with her future teammate that had an impact on her decision to be a Duck.

"C'Rel is pretty loud," Andrus



Erik R. Bishoff Photographer

Freshman Amanda Santana is the Oregon track and field team's "baby of the bunch." Oregon's hurdlers are heading to the Pacific-10 Championships this weekend, and achieve success as a team by being supportive of each other while still being competitive.

said. "She talks a lot and she has a comment for anything. She was a good little host. When you go on recruiting trips, you're kind of nervous, but she was really nice."

Andrus now ranks among the top women athletes in Oregon history. She owns the fifth-best heptathlon score at 5,325 points, achieved last Saturday at the Pac-10 Championships. She will also compete in the 400 hurdles this weekend.

Even though there is no defined no leader, the younger Ducks look up to Andrus as a model for what it takes to be successful at the collegiate level.

"Abby's just an amazing athlete," Santana said. "She's very modest and

she is so amazingly strong and just able to fight through anything. She's very good and I idol that big time."

This quartet is a close-knit group with a mix of youth and experience. Santana, a Eugene native, added that it is a joy to be able to practice with her fellow hurdlers everyday.

"It's awesome because we all are wanting the same goals and have the same mindset," Santana said. "It's nice to all help each other out with our weaknesses and strengths. Because we're all about the same, we all feed off each other."

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