

Former state champ likes life in fast lane

Provancha finds new challenge hurdling

By Doug Vaughan
Of The Print

Yul Provancha has been an inspiration to the Clackamas Community College cross country team all year. Not necessarily by his performance, but by his enthusiasm for the team.

Once a premier distance runner in the Oregon prep field, Provancha turned to hurdles—an event in which he felt he had the skill to succeed. The switch came near the end of his high school years, after he had earned several state medals since his freshman year in distance races.

"I had natural ability and never really trained to my full potential," Provancha said. "I never hit a peak during high school because of it."

Provancha's talent anchored him a full-tuition scholarship in the big time—Washington State University. The steep step of competition gave Provancha a challenge that he was ready to face.

"Since I had gone to state as a freshman (in high school), the competition seemed almost too easy, and I lost my initiative to be a good athlete," Provancha said. "There was only one way to get that back—go 'big time'."

WSU provided the challenge. The one that Provancha was hoping would regain his initiative. He describes himself as a person who would rather be running behind someone than be number one.

Despite warnings from others that the four-year school would provide too tough of a competition, Provancha took a step into the big time.

His freshman year was regarded as a disappointment. For the first time in his life he suffered injuries which set him back. Walking pneumonia, chicken pox and torn ligaments in his ankles forced Provancha to 'red-shirt' the track season.

Since he 'red-shirted,' Provancha was only allowed to compete in WSU's home meets. Despite the limited action, he was able to pull off a 51.5 in the 400 meter intermediate hurdles. But he admits, he never reached his full potential.

Putting his first year of injuries behind, Provancha finds himself still running for the Cougars, but this time it is here at Clackamas, not Washington State.

"I did not like the environment



there (WSU)," Provancha said. "We had to train on the snow, and I just didn't like that. I wanted to go to California because I have a friend that runs down there."

Due to his accepting a scholarship, Provancha was under WSU's thumb. He had talked to the University of California at Los Angeles and they expressed interest, but they were not willing to recruit someone who would not be eligible right away.

The only way for Provancha to avoid the legal matters was to get a two-year degree then transfer to a four-year school. If he would have transferred to UCLA from Washington State, he would have lost two years of eligibility due to legal ramifications.

"This year is more or less a holding place for me until I complete my requirements for my degree," Provancha said. "Clackamas is the best junior college on the Coast for track, and this way I can get some national exposure instead of just going to UCLA and not being able to compete."

As a preparation for track, Provancha went out for cross country under the direction of Kelly Sullivan, head coach. Sullivan and Provancha have known each other since Provancha's reign in Oregon preps.

"I think of Kelly more as a friend than a coach," Provancha said. "A coach needs to communicate with his athletes and help them find who they are. I didn't find this at Washington State."

Even with lost interest in distance running, Provancha found himself improving throughout the year. To team members he was inspiring, not necessarily with his statistics, but with his attitude.

"My main objective with cross country was to get in shape, but half way through the season I popped a good race and really got enthused," Provancha said. "Then, I wanted to run the good distance race. I had a chance to help the team—I was doing it for the team, not trying to be a superstar."

The race that the track star referred to put the lost enthusiasm back in

him. That enthusiasm drove Provancha to shoot for Clackamas' top seven, and compete in the National meet, bearing that the team would win Regionals. It came down to the last meet of the year, the Pier Park Invitational.

"The only time I got down on myself the whole year was that last race," Provancha said. "I set high expectations, I wanted to make the top seven and go to Nationals, but I kind of fell apart."

Even though the trip to Nationals meant a lot to Provancha, he did not make the top seven. But on the other hand, he far surpassed what was expected from a runner 'just preparing for the track season.'

With the end of cross country, Provancha is concentrating on the hurdles, and as far as he can tell, things are falling in place.

"I did a 25.3 (second) 200 (meter) and everything felt like it was clicking," Provancha said. "All I have to do now is two of those back to back."

The hurdler's goal this year is a 49.7 second, 400 meter intermediate hurdles. The Olympic trials qualifying time is 50.5, but Provancha does not seem himself in the 1984 Olympics.

"The top three make it to the Olympics, but I do not see that—maybe four years down the road," Provancha said. "Right now UCLA already has two others who run it under 50."

Provancha's first workout on the track felt good—everything was in sync. But he knows it is only an indicator of what kind of form he is in.

"It says to myself, that I have got my steps down, so now all I have to work on is my form," Provancha said. "It comes easier the more relaxed you are. I wasn't trying to kill myself out there, but I wasn't taking it easy either. It just tells me what I have to work on."

With a year hampered by injuries behind him, Provancha is ready to attack the toughest competition in the nation. The injury-plagued year might have been an advantage to him, Provancha thinks.

"Last year everything kind of all killed me at once," Provancha said. "A lot of runners get burned out. I have been running since sixth grade, maybe I needed a year off to pull everything together."

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