

Track and field ends season strong

By John William Howard
Associate Sports Editor

With track and field being the last of Clackamas' sports finishing up its season, now is a good time to look back at the difficult path that the athletes took to get to where they are now. The whole team had ups and downs but eventually peaked just in time for the championships.

"They've struggled a little bit during the season, but they've taken care of business," said Head Coach Keoni McHone. "When it came to this meet we did what was needed to be done."

Earlier in the season, McHone mentioned the struggles that the team was going through with and training remaining healthy. One such athlete that had a midseason trip-up was sophomore mid-distance runner Mary Botsford, who runs the 800- and 1500-meter races. A motivated and competitive athlete, she said that her biggest difficulty is "finding the line between training as hard as I could and staying injury free."

Around the middle of April, something went wrong. Botsford's 1500-meter time slowed by 30 seconds between the April 1 Willamette Invitational and the April 22 Oregon Relays. She remarked that she had felt as though something wasn't right, and it was affecting her races.

Whatever it was, it shook off in a hurry. After the low point of the Oregon Relays, Botsford set a new personal record every time she laced up to run the 1500-meter race, and ended up improving her career record by 16 seconds in one year. In addition to that, Botsford moved up into second place in the school's top 10 list for the women's 800-meter run, took third overall at the NWAACC championship meet and achieved All-American status.

"I am very happy with my season. I finally broke into a new level of fast with some big PRs and I was very excited to make All-American at the championships) and I felt like I made a good contribution to our team," said Botsford, who also said that she thought the team met the

expectations set out for them. "Everyone gave a really good performance when it counted at (the championships) and you could see the heart and desire for success in the faces."

Another strong contributor is Venezuelan sophomore Keisa Monterola, who won the 2005 South American Junior Championships in the pole vault at age 17. Monterola's story is an interesting one: She began as a gymnast, but outgrew her sport and turned to pole vaulting.

"Jumping made me scared and excited at the same time, but the latter emotion won through as I was even beating the male vaulters way back then," Monterola told the International Association of Athletics Federations' official website.

In 2009, Monterola looked to attend a university in the United States but was held back from attending a four-year institution because

of a lack of English competency. Instead, she made the decision to come to Clackamas, where, despite some difficulties, she has made progress.

"She was a 14 feet 1 inch pole vaulter back when she was a world junior (champion) when she was 17," said McHone. "Some setbacks happened and now she's getting back into things. It took a little over a year to get adapted to living here in the United States, being a college student and figuring out how to live on basically nothing. She's figured out how to train at the level that she needs to while staying healthy and handling the stressors of both the academic stuff and meeting the expectations of what they want her to do back at home (in Venezuela)."

Monterola began the season slowly but turned on the afterburners to finish her

Clackamas career. Not only did she win the NWAACC pole vault competition, she blew the nearest runner-up out of the sky, vaulting 14 feet 2.5 inches for first place, compared to the second place vault of 11 feet 7 inches. That vault was good for second place on the Clackamas top 10 list just behind the NWAACC record holder Becky Holladay's 14 feet 4 inches.

Holladay went on to win an NCAA title at the University of Oregon in 2003 and finished sixth at the 2008 Olympic trials. It would seem that Monterola is headed the same direction. Earlier this month, she signed with Eastern Washington University on a full-ride scholarship, something that will surely be her next step to stardom.

While many athletes found success, there is perhaps none that dealt with more adversity than sophomore Dominik Walker. Walker suffered a hamstring injury in the second meet of the season and was sent back to square one.

"When I pulled my (hamstring) the second meet of the season it was really hard for me to be positive because I knew that I didn't have a lot of time to shake my injury," said Walker, who also spoke about the value of McHone's input and support.

"Athletically, he's our top male athlete, but because of his injuries, he's been struggling with his events and it has been WW psychologically tough on him," said McHone. "We sat down and talked about what he needed to do at the NWAACC championships, and he did just above what he needed him to do. If he hadn't done that, we probably would have taken third."

These three stories show not only the grit and resilience of the athletes themselves, but the ability of McHone to take failure stories and turn them into success stories, despite overwhelming odds. Presented with a crumbling track and aging equipment, McHone has built a strong program and outpaced heavyweights such as Lane Community College, who boast in their brand new facility. Just imagine what the program will look like as time goes on.



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Track Coach Keoni McHone goes over the results of his athletes during the Pacific Northwest Relays on April 8 at the Oregon City High School Stadium.

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