



Pake Benthin, left, and Alan Ekanger practice for upcoming championships on the CCC track on Oct. 21.

Photo by Liz Gomes

# Cross country team aims to finish strong

by Blake Thomason

Once again, the Clackamas Cougars cross country team will be heading to Lewisville Park in Battle-ground, Wash. This time around, the stakes are much higher.

The Cougars return for the NWAC Championship two months from their last visit. The first visit was unimpressive, and the Cougars hope to rebound as a team.

Back in late September the Cougars competed in the NWAC Preview at Lewisville Park. Both Cougar

teams underwhelmed at the meet, finishing near the bottom in their respective groups.

The men's team didn't have anyone finish higher than 19th, and as a team they placed second to last out of eight teams. The women's team didn't have anyone finish higher than 24th and the team placed last out of six teams.

Granted, it was just a warm-up for the season. The Cougars have improved throughout the season, and one of the top performers expects a different result this time around.

"I'm hoping to place in the top ten or five," freshman Jocelyn Barber said. "I think we can hopefully be in the top three. A lot of girls have come back from being injured and we're getting really strong."

According to the Clackamas athletics site, the cross country teams are "always ones to contend for a top three finish at the NWAC Championships." They have the third best co-ed conference finishes over the last decade. The team has been peaking at the right time; in their last big event, the Southern Regional Championships, the men's and women's team finished second and third, respectively.

"Our women ran exceptional," coach Drew Wasmund said. "From our top women to our last, I really don't think I could have asked for more. The men came within a point of beating a very good Lane team. A couple of kids could have ran better, but that's the nature of the sport. Our two sophomores, Pake Benthin and Alan Ekanger, ran very, very well, which was great to see."

In order for the Cougars to finish where they expect, they'll have to continue to run exceptionally. Wasmund has high expectations.

"I expect them to run up to their potential," Wasmund said. "That always has to be the goal. You can't outrace your fitness level and you can't control what other teams do. I expect both squads to get out intelligently, have their eyes up and pass people one at a time. If they do that and finish hard, I'll be content."

This is the last and most important event of the season. Unlike other sports, the events before the championship don't really matter. The season is essentially defined by the NWAC.

"Both genders have trained for one meet and one meet only — and that's the NWAC," Wasmund said. "My job is to get these kids ready for this one particular meet. What place we are is less important than running up to our potential. Like I said before, we can't outrace what we are. But the results of [the NWAC Championship] will be completely indicative of how intelligent and courageous we are on Nov. 8. It will be exciting to see what they can do finally rested. We've taken some lumps throughout the season. [But] it's all about performing well on one weekend."