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Campolindo's Verdon Competes in Nationals

By Lou Fancher



(L to R): senior Sara Mostatabi, freshman Haley Shipway, junior Juliet Farnan, senior Grace Orders, junior Carrie Verdon, sophomore Megan McMillian, junior Rachel Meadows Photo provided

Campolindo High School's Carrie Verdon is the 19th fastest female high school runner in the country. She competed in the Foot Locker West Region Nationals in Southern California on December 11 to claim that title.

At 16, with only three years of cross country experience, she ran a 17:15 at the State Championship meet in November, making her also the 10th fastest Californian of all time.

In fact, it's hard to imagine a sentence about Verdon without the word "fastest".

"She's gifted," Coach Chuck Woolridge said. "Carrie has an aerobic capacity that predetermines her to be good at running. Mechanically she's also in the one percent of kids that have come into my program who has had few adjustments to make. She's able to maximize and improve because she's not fighting deficiencies."

Verdon's explanation for her commanding performance this season is equally straightforward: "I work on keeping my arm swing good. My hands stick out and waste energy. Just being conscious of my form is what fixes it," she said.

Verdon was afraid of Woolridge when she first joined the team.

"At practice, he expects a lot. I didn't know the level of intensity I had gotten myself into until I was in it. He taught me everything there is to know. We would get videos of running form and technique to study. Former athletes came to talk to us. We got information about what to eat, where to practice and I think that's what shaped me into who I am today," Verdon said of the experience.

Coach Woolridge commented on his practice experience: "Carrie is the athlete that makes coaches do their research and look to improve their skills. It's precious to have someone with her talent and willingness. She's kept me motivated to improve."

Verdon ran close to 60 miles a week, instead of the 45 miles senior runners used to put in. While upping the overall mileage, Woolridge has reduced the team's high-intensity training.

"She's the first generation of kids who have run that much. The injuries have gone down. We found it's not the volume that is the issue. It's the race-paced work that was the issue," Woolridge explained.

Concentrating on the mechanical aspect reduced the stress on his runners' bones, ligaments and joints.

"Run with guts," Verdon said, revealing her mantra for the year.

And she needed it, after taking an early fall during the race at the Nationals.

"The course was pretty technical: you had to run on grass, dirt and gravel and there were no flat sections. My race plan was to not get caught going out too fast. I imagined myself falling before the race, which was weird because I don't customarily do that. So it was really strange when I fell, but I got up right away. I was kind of freaking out, but I just looked at the girls in front of me and picked them off one by one for the rest of the race," Verdon said.

Coach Woolridge spoke of Verdon's incident in terms of her personality. He said, "She's even-keeled and I actually told her just recently that as a runner she's a pretty normal kid. There's a lot of obsessiveness that goes along with being a great athlete and it's to her credit that she's pretty laid back. I was proud of how poised she was and how she kept her composure. She came back in the second half of the race. That says a lot about how she manages her stress in a national competition."

Verdon said she wants to get the team on the podium again next year. "I want to win state and make it to Nationals and try to get in the top ten."

"She's going to be the number three returning athlete, so a top ten finish at the national meet would definitely be an attainable goal," Woolridge predicted. "For the team, I'd like to challenge the girls to repeat as State Champions. They are losing two of our top leaders, Grace Orders and Sara Mostatabi, but Carrie is making cross country at Campolindo a very high profile sport."

Definition of "Team"

Verdon:

"The first thing that comes to mind is a group that really works together. They put others before them to work towards a common goal. They motivate each other. They call each other out and they tell each other to step it up. People only see the number one finisher, but there's all the other girls out there putting themselves out for you."

Woolridge:

"A team is a group of athletes willing to share the burden of what it takes to achieve a goal. We take pride in making every kid in our program feel responsible for the team. When you have a group of kids all motivated to work at that level, you get an incredible synergy. Practices are electric. It's 85 kids enjoying that suffering."

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