Clark College women’s cross country six set sights on NWAC title by PAUL DANZER Colombus state writer

Two-by-two-by-two.
For the women who run cross country for Clark College, those are the dimensions of a championship team. Saturday at Clackamas Community College in Oregon City, the Penguins hope to cap a successful season with a team title at the Northwest Athletic Conference Community College championship meet.

This has already been a rewarding season for the ladies, Clark captured the NWAC South Region title without top runner Holly McRae, who sat out because of injury. At an early-season meet in California, the Penguins placed second, finishing just seven points behind Orange Coast, the top-ranked California community college.

These results are certainly a reflection of the talent on coach Ryan Hodge’s team. But the results are also about chemistry as much as they are about speed.

The team motto is “stay with your sister.” With three pairs of runners running similar times, it is more than a motto — it is the strategy.

Out for the Penguins are McRae, a 2020 Columbia River grad, and Brielle Thome, a 25-year-old who is racing competitively for the first time. Carrying the third and fourth spots in the lineup are Tanaka Kullia from La Center and Mountain View graduate Katarina Muehler. The third wave is Heritage grad Angela Gula and Prairie grad Shelly Beaudoin.

“Works out perfect,” Hodge said. “We tell them, ‘If you see your sister, get up on her and her and her and her and her and her.’ That all six runners stay from Clark County makes it that much better for Hods.

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Penguins’ team goal is top three
Clark College cross country coach Ryan Hodge said he hopes that both his men’s and women’s teams collect enough points for a podium finish at the NWAC Championships on Saturday at Clackamas Community College.
Both teams won the Southern Region title the week before.

Cameron Fales, Nathan Richards, Jason Althen, Oliver Black, and Nathan Penny all finished in the top 10 as Clark ran away with the men’s team title at regionals. All of the men are from Southeast Washington.

Paul Dancer

Green stepping up to next level with pro boxing debut

Vancouver boxer fights Saturday at Emerald Queen Casino by PAUL DANZER Colombus state writer
At times over the past six years, boxing has been front and center in Virgil Green’s life.
And at times, the sport has been on the back burner for the 22-year-old Vancouver resident.

But there is nothing halfway about the step Green is taking now. On Saturday at the Emerald Queen Casino in Tacoma, Green is going all in.

Green will make his professional boxing debut in a 141-pound four-round match against Miguel Garcia of Arlington.
It is the first undercard bout on the main event of the Boat 79 card, expected to go the distance.

Leonard Gabriel, who coaches Green at Fisticuffs Gym in Vancouver, has known the fighter since Green started with the Vancouver Police Activities League boxing program as a 14-year-old.

Trivia Time

Who did the Cleveland Cavaliers beat for the franchise’s first NBA victory?

Revolution B2

Quote of the Day

“Jerry will never change. Jerry wants to be right in the middle of it. That’s why he paid all that money to buy them.” — Jimmy Johnson
Riley’s been playing really well the last three weeks, but just hasn’t been rewarded with points,” Johnston said. “He’s been working very hard.”

Today’s game at Saskatoon figures to be a highlight of the season for the team building,” the captain said. “We’re already a really close group. We’ve been playing well together.”

Of course, Ponich added, winning is always fun.

Holly Meler, left, and Brie Thoone, foreground center, and their Clark teammates get in their workout Wednesday. The team will be at the NWAACC Championships on Saturday in Oregon City.

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But this tight-knit team didn’t exactly form according to plan. Thoone is perhaps the best example of the serendipity of it all.

In March, after she placed 15th in the 24-km race in Arkansas at the 15-kilometer Shamrock Run, she sent an e-mail to Howle with her time (1:05:58).

The coach responded with a training regimen. When Thoone improved her 5-kilometer time by several minutes, Howle offered a scholarship.

Thoone — who had never seen a cross country race before this season — decided to go for it. She quit her job as an intern banker for a local credit union and enrolled at Clark.

“I was too busy to quit my job,” Thoone said, “but the adventure was very intriguing.”

The season went from intriguing to exciting when Meler decided to start her college career at Clark rather than Portland State. Money was the big factor in that decision, she said.

Howle hadn’t recruited Meler, but welcomed the accomplished runner to the fold and raised the expectations for his team.

Meler (18:38) and Thoone (18:38) have two of the top five times in the NWAACC Championships, and all six Penguins are on the top-25 list for this NWAACC season. Meler (19:14) has the 11th fastest NWAACC time (Kulla (19:19) ranks 14th.

Thoone admits to being quite nervous before races. She said she and her teammates were “blown away” by their success at the first meet of the season — a fourth place finish at the University of Portland’s West Coast Conference preview meet.

Meler — primarily a middle distance runner on the track at Mountain View — and Kulla both credit Howle’s direction and encouragement for their quick adjustment to college-level racing.

“I didn’t think I’d improve this much, this fast,” Meler said.

“(Hodie) believes in us,” Kulla said. “He knows we can all run faster than we have been. He’s always encouraging us.”

The fact that all six Penguins are freshmen certainly hasn’t slowed down the team. That’s because they are all competitors, according to Meler.

“We train like we’re racing,” Meler said. “We are constantly chasing after one another.”

On Saturday, the Penguins women expect to compete with Spokane and Everett for the NWAACC title. Two by two by two, they just might wind up No. 1.

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