



ZACHARY KAUFMAN/The Columbian

Clark College freshman Janae Larson inadvertently discovered her talent for running three years ago.

The Accidental Runner

Janae Larson turns into a record-setter at Clark College

By **SOMER BREEZE**
Columbian staff writer

Clark College freshman Janae Larson had a hidden talent. She didn't know she had the ability to run long distances in a short time.

Once that talent was discovered a few years ago, it led to some life-altering decisions.

Three years ago, while being home-schooled, Larson participated in a physical

education program at a YMCA near her Spanaway home. One of the exercises was to run the mile, which Larson finished in 5 minutes, 40 seconds.

She told a friend who attended Bethel High School, and her time was relayed to the track coaches. It was good news for the Braves, who had not had a runner finish the 1,600 meters — the metric equivalent to the mile — in less than six minutes in quite some time.

The problem was, Larson did not think of herself as a runner.

"I'm not doing track," Larson recalled about being approached by Bethel coaches. "Yeah right. I'm not an athlete whatsoever. I don't run at all."

Despite her reservations, Larson turned out for Bethel's track and field season and found she liked it. She was successful in the 1,600 meters, but her Bethel coaches wanted her to run the 3,200.

"I was like, 'No way. Eight laps around the track?'" Larson said. "I thought the mile was long."

It turned out the 3,200 was her race. Three years later she is running even longer

paces.

Larson has set three school records at Clark and has come close to a fourth.

"I didn't even know I'd get anywhere near the school records," Larson said. "I never even really knew what they were."

Larson broke three of the five records set by Battle Ground graduate Crystal Glenn in 2000: The 3,000 (10:15), 5,000 (17:54.08), and 10,000 (37:48.69).

She is about 10 seconds shy of the record in the 1,500, but

Runner:

From Page B1

Clark coach Dave Caldwell believes Larson will get there soon, perhaps today at the Mt. Hood/Concordia Invitational at Gresham.

"She has yet to be even close to her potential," Caldwell said. "When you watch her run, she's holding back two-thirds of the race, and then she goes."

Caldwell was recruiting Larson's friend, Matt Smith, a distance runner from Graham-Kapowsin, when he learned of the Bethel runner.

Larson wanted to attend a four-year university, but after receiving attention from community colleges, she reconsidered. When Smith made the move to Vancouver, along with his brother Nick, Larson moved, too.

"Once she came we had no background (on her training)," Caldwell said. "We started from scratch. She had a difficult fall. Getting used to the mileage, apartment living, living in Vancouver. It was stressful for her, but she's settled in now and running really well."

Larson has lost once this spring, a close defeat in the 3,000 at the University of Oregon preview meet in March.

After this weekend, Larson has the Southern Region Championships and the Northwest Athletic Association of Community College Championships to try for her fourth record. But Larson wants more.

She wants to get her time in the 5,000 down to the low 17 minutes. She also wants to strive for the junior college record in the 10,000, although she is roughly 90 seconds off that mark. Larson also said she wants to set personal bests in every race she runs from now until the season ends.

It's a long to-do list, but with the way things have gone for Larson, none of it seems too far off.

After her challenging cross country season, Larson changed her diet, as well as her mentality.

"In my mind, I can do this," she said. "I need to stop focusing on, 'Oh, that's really far out of reach.' I can reach that."