

## **2008 Cal State Fullerton Cross Country – Season Preview**

### **WOMEN**

Riding the momentum of a record setting track & field season this past spring, the Cal State Fullerton women's 2008 cross country team looks to improve significantly on its sixth place Big West Conference finish of 2007.

The Lady Titans are led by arguably the strongest duo in the conference in Carolyn Ellis and Grace Gonzales. As a sophomore, Ellis had a break-out track season last spring, setting school records in the 5000m (16:39.28) and the 3000m steeplechase (10:26.62). She won the 3000m steeplechase and placed third in the 5000m at the Big West Conference Championships and qualified for NCAA competition in both events. As a freshman, Gonzales set a school record in the 10000m (35:02.16), ran personal bests of 9:46.30 for 3000m and 16:49.22 for 5000m and qualified for NCAA competition in the 5000m.

Other top returnees include sophomores Erin Griffith and Yomaira Hernandez and juniors Andrea Aguilar and Gail Munoz. Griffith, a top runner in Orange Country (Capo Valley HS) as a prep, ran 17:37 for 5000m last spring and looks to make a big impact on this year's team. Hernandez is probably the most improved Titan and placed seventh in the 10000m at the 2008 Big West Track & Field Championships. Aguilar has shown flashes of brilliance during her first two years and looks to be a more consistent performer for the team this year. Munoz sat out the spring track season with an injury but may be one the most talented runners in the group.

Meredith Robie leads the list of newcomers this year. She ran impressive personal bests last year while at Redlands High School, completing the Woodbridge course in 17:35 and the Mt. SAC course in 17:55. She was the 22<sup>nd</sup> best senior at the California State Cross Country Championships, running the Woodward Park 5K course in 18:37. In addition, she shows great promise as a middle-distance runner in track, posting a 5:07 for 1600m. Other incoming freshmen who could impact this year's team are Gaby Ponce (Bolsa Grande HS of Garden Grove) and Amanda Robles (Rialto HS). They ran identical personal bests on the Mt. SAC course of 18:32 and similar personal bests on the Woodbridge course at 18:15 and 18:06, respectively.

“Our women's distance program has really stepped up this past year, and this group has the opportunity to be the most successful team in school history,” said Head Coach John Elders, who is entering his 21<sup>st</sup> year as CSF's coach.

“It will be a battle for the top spots in the Big West Conference, and we can't take anything for granted. If we continue to work hard and improve, it could be a great year.”

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## MEN

Although eight of the 12 squad members are underclassmen, the Titan men also have reason to be optimistic about this season.

Leading the way are sophomores Brent Handa and Jeff Mackay. Despite a disappointing freshman season, Handa brings an abundance of talent to the table. He posted a time of 9:11 for 3200m while competing for Fall River High School, the fastest time ever by a Titan recruit.

“Brent is a tremendous talent and a very hard worker,” said Elders. “He had some difficulty adjusting to the training and racing at the college level, but I believe he will improve significantly this year.”

Mackay led the team in cross country as a freshman and really came on strong at the end of the spring track season. He finished his freshman campaign by placing seventh in the 1500m at the Big West Championships with a personal best of 3:54.75. Another top returnee is junior Eddie Perez. He has improved significantly each year during his Titan career, and looks to continue that trend this season. He finished last year by qualifying to run in the Big West Track & Field Championships, running a personal best of 9:30.80.

The team’s success level will require a significant contribution from the freshmen class. Leading that group of youngsters is Joey Divizia from Glendora High School. Divizia came on strong at the end of his prep career, posting personal bests of 4:17 for 1600m and 14:56 for 5000m. Other promising freshmen include Phillip Brown (Laguna Hills HS), who posted a time of 15:33 on the Mt. SAC course and placed seventh in the O.C. track championships in the 3200m; Joshua McCarty (West Torrance HS), who ran 15:00 on the Woodbridge course and 4:22 for 1600m; and Michael Sanchez (Canyon Springs HS in Moreno Valley), who could be the sleeper of the bunch.

Another promising newcomer is Erik Estrada, a transfer at Mt. SAC. Estrada has one cross country and two track seasons of eligibility remaining and will likely red-shirt the 2008 cross country season. He is a strong middle-distance runner, posting personal bests of 1:54 for 800m and 3:55 for 1500m while at Mt. SAC,. He is improving rapidly in the longer distances.

“This is a really important year for our men’s distance program,” said Elders. “We have a talented young group that appears to have a bright future in the Big West Conference. It’s very important that these guys come together, work hard, and develop that foundation for the future.”

The Titan squads open their season Aug. 30 by hosting the Fullerton Season Opener at Carbon Canyon Regional Park in Brea. Key mid-season meets will be the Stanford Invitation on Sept. 27<sup>1</sup> for the men and the Bill Dellinger Invitational in Eugene, Oregon, on Oct. 4 for the women. The Big West Championships are slated for Nov. 1 at UC Riverside.