

Lady Miners plan national races

Age, injuries motivate duo

By RICHARD LUNA
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Rochelle Collins and Charmaine Crooks are at a crossroad in their collegiate track careers, a crossroad each is eagerly awaiting.

For Collins, the National Collegiate Athletic Association meet next week in Provo, Utah, will be the last time the halfmiler competes in a UTEP uniform.

And for Crooks, the outstanding sophomore quartermiler from Canada, the NCAA meet marks her return after an injury prevented her from competing in the national finals last season.

The two are part of a 10-member Lady Miner contingent that will begin competition Wednesday on the BYU campus.

The 21-year-old Collins, who will graduate in July with a degree in marketing, is confident of her chances in the 800 meters, which features defending champion Leann Warren of Oregon.

Collins hopes to run under 2 minutes, 6 seconds, about two steps faster than her lifetime best of 2:07.5. She also is expected to join Crooks on UTEP's 4x400 relay.

The national meet has been on Collins' mind since last season when she barely failed to qualify for the AIAW outdoor finals.

"After nationals last year, I started thinking about this year because I knew it would be my last one," Collins says. "Every year I would leave nationals disappointed and I felt I didn't want to go through my life feel-



Charmaine Crooks



Rochelle Collins

ing disappointed about my last year.

"My attitude has changed a lot... If I can run well at nationals, then I'll be pleased with my whole track career."

One thing the Detroit native admits she'll have to avoid is a slow third 200 meters. She usually runs a strong 400 meters at the outset, "but then I would hear my time and relax to save some for the final 200," Collins says.

"I have to keep my third 200 strong... I've found I can run a relaxed first quarter and be strong enough to come through at the end."

Collins is pleased with her workouts the past two weeks and admits a positive attitude helps.

"I feel real confident," she says. "It's my last year and probably my last race ever. I'm so excited about it. Everything is coming to an end. When it's over, I know I'll feel kind of down... I'm going to miss it, but right now, I just want to go and run my best."

Crooks, who has a personal best of 52.30 in the 400 meters, hopes injuries will not stand in the way this time, like the pulled hamstring that prevented her from competing in last year's 400 finals.

"I have an old knee injury that's been plaguing me a bit, but that shouldn't bother me at nationals. In a way, this will be a new experience for me since I didn't get the opportunity to run last year."

Crooks says improving her strength has been a major factor in having a successful season.

"I'm definitely a lot stronger this year," she says. "I'm more experienced. The quarter is a type of race that you mature in. The older you get, the better you should get... It's just going to be a matter of who can handle the pressure."

Crooks hasn't had too many problems with her race strategy, staying with the pack the first 200 meters, then picking up the pace the last 150 meters.

Crooks claims: "I'm a kicker-type runner, so I try to use as much kick as I can. Some people run so hard the first 200 they don't have enough strength for the end. I think I'll be able to run the kind of race I want."

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