

Nixa alum chases Olympic dream

By: Steve Casson, sports editor sports@ccheadliner.com | Posted: Tuesday, July 29, 2014 11:32 am

Competing in the Olympics never crossed Courtney Frerichs' mind when she was in high school, but neither did running. Now, just a few seconds separate the Nixa alum and University of Missouri at Kansas City runner from qualifying for the Olympics in the 3,000-meter Steeplechase.

Frerichs, a former soccer player and gymnast, didn't run track or cross-country until her senior year at Nixa. She was on the 4x800 relay team that set a Lady Eagles school record, held the triple-jump record until Meghan Wickersham broke it in 2013 and retains the 5K cross-country record. It's the accolades and state qualifications that keep her on the track.

"Believe it or not, I really didn't run when I was (at Nixa). I had one season of cross-country," Frerichs said. "I had some really good times at state, and that's what made me decide to run in college."

Deriving its name from the steeplechase in horse racing, the 2-mile event is long-distance hurdling with five obstacles per lap, including wooden barriers and one water pit in front, Frerichs said.

"You don't have a steeplechase in girls high school track in Missouri," Nixa girls track coach Jim Middleton said. "A coach in college would have a good idea of a runner's profile and what their mindset would be. It's just perfect for her."

Scouts observed Frerichs at a track summer camp during her senior year at Nixa. When she started setting high school records a few months later, Division I schools started to notice and contact her.

"I thought, 'Oh my gosh, maybe I should explore this,'" Frerichs said. "I was getting Division I offers at schools I wanted to go to even if I wasn't going to do a sport."

Frerichs is a junior redshirt this year at UMKC and was named an NCAA All-American in the steeplechase last year. She uses time away from the college beat to shave off qualification times. Frerichs qualified for the Olympic trial standard and needed to drop seven seconds before July 2016 to qualify for the Olympic standard of 9:43.

But Frerichs finish sixth at the USA Track and Field Outdoor Nationals June 26-29 in 9:43.36. It's



Courtney Frerichs

Nixa alum and University of Missouri at Kansas City runner Courtney Frerichs, left, is seconds away from an Olympic qualifying time of 9:43.

the lowest finish for an unattached runner — not sponsored and a college redshirt — at the competition.

“She wants to be the best at what she does, whether it’s school or sports,” father Scott Frerichs said. “She’s parlayed this into something that, so far, has been a very successful career.”

Courtney stunned runners with a first-place finish in the 3,000 steeplechase at the USA Track and Field High Performance Distance Classic June 15 in California with a time of 9:53.61. Courtney was caught in the middle of the pack midway through the race during a hot, 97-degree day. Even though her time was slower than expected, she felt good.

“With 400 to 600 yards left, I just took off, and it was huge shock. It was also intimidating, because you go there and all these girls have sponsors. I’m still running in college,” Courtney said. “I wanted to be able to put myself in it and realize that if I want to try and make the Olympics, I need to consider myself one of these girls.”

Courtney is progressing farther than she thought. She reached her goal, a personal best time, as sophomore at UMKC and hadn’t planned on running that fast until finishing college.

“A year ago, we said to just try and make the Olympic trials, because there is a difference between making it and actually being a contender,” Courtney said. “When I hit 9:55, we decided to go for it. I think I’ve got a 9:40 in me.”

Qualifying for the USA Under-23 team is a consideration for Courtney, who wants to immerse herself in the heat of competition before the Olympic trials. Everything she’s doing, from the races to training, is shaving seconds.

Kathy Frerichs said it was balancing school work and the gym during high school that taught Courtney and sister Lindsay to be responsible.

“I would pick them up from school, and they would be in the gym for four hours a day, 20 hours a week,” Kathy said. “Then, they would have to come home and do homework. So, there was no procrastination, and that’s taught them a great work ethic.”

Courtney’s next race takes her to Kamloops, British Columbia, Canada, where she will represent the United States Aug. 9 at the Under 23 Track and Field Championships in the 3,000 steeplechase.

Getting into the right meet is important for runners, and Courtney looks for races that will allow her to post a qualifying time. Anything from wind, track temperature or altitude can slow a race, Courtney said. It’s a juggling act, but she’s determined to win.

“At this level, it’s hard to find races that go this fast. There are really fast ones and 10-minute races,” Courtney said. “That’s what we are going to keep working for, is that low time and to have more experience by the time I reach (the Olympic trial time). That’s every athletes dream: To make the

Olympics.”

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