

# NAIA NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS

**Vancouver, WA**

**Sat., Nov. 21, 2009**

Vancouver, WA was the site of the 2009 NAIA National Cross Country Championships on Saturday, Nov. 21, the first time in the history of the meet it was held on the west coast. With Nike sponsorship and plenty of national meet experience, the meet hosts put on a great championship meet. It rained off and on most of the time we were there, leaving the course soft, muddy, and slow, but the atmosphere was tremendous, the crowd big and supportive, and it was a truly exciting experience for runners and spectators alike.

32 teams and approximately 120 individuals, for a total of around 330 runners in each race, qualified for the national championships. 24 of the top 25 ranked men's teams in the final national poll were there, and 8 teams not ranked in the top 25 qualified by winning their conference meets. Our men were ranked 23<sup>rd</sup> in the final poll, and our team goal was to finish higher than ranked and higher than last year (21<sup>st</sup>). Amy Pierson qualified as an individual, and based on her outstanding junior season the goal for her was to make a run at All-American (top 30 finishers).

The race plan for Amy was for her to position herself in or close to the top 30 by the mile mark, and then to do her thing as she did so well all season. She was in great position 800M into the race, and then unfortunately developed a severe side stitch that slowed her to the point that she was just trying to survive and finish for the remainder of the race. She was fit, ready, prepared, and focused, and there is no doubt she would have been an All-American if she had been able to perform as she had in every other race this season. She was obviously disappointed, and we all were for her, but what happened in no detracts from her tremendous season – one of the best in the history of our program.

After our outstanding performance at the KCAC Championships 2 weeks earlier, we knew our men's team was ready for our best showing at the national meet in several years. We also knew it would take that same kind of performance, or better, in order for us to accomplish our goals. Returning All-American (27<sup>th</sup> in 2008) Andrew Topham ran another tremendous race to lead our team with a 25:58 in 36<sup>th</sup> place, moving up steadily throughout and simply running out of time at the end to move into the top 30. Frank Adelman ran an aggressive and courageous race and showed that he is a national class runner as a freshman. He was 16<sup>th</sup> at the 1 mile mark, 14<sup>th</sup> at 2 miles, and then struggled but held on well to finish 66<sup>th</sup> in 26:16, the 3<sup>rd</sup> highest freshman finish at nationals in the history of our program. Conner Drendel competed very well to finish 168<sup>th</sup> in 27:05, and then we had a big gap back to a tight pack including Zack Conroy (27:43/231<sup>st</sup>), Clint Kessler (27:48/236<sup>th</sup>), Jimmy Bryant (27:59/248<sup>th</sup>), and Carrington Crum (28:00/251<sup>st</sup>). The effort was there, but overall it was not the quality of performance we needed to beat many teams in a 32 team national championship field. We did beat the 9<sup>th</sup> ranked team and 2 others teams that had beaten us earlier in the season, and although it wasn't what we were aiming for, getting to the national championships and finishing 26<sup>th</sup> in the nation out of 207 NAIA schools with cross country teams is a great accomplishment for our program.