



Kim Conley at the High Performance Meet in May, 2012, where she won her 1500M heat.
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Conley's perseverance leads to Olympic Trials

*Sacramento Running Association helps
former UC Davis 5,000-meter standout*

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Kim Conley graduated from UC Davis three years ago facing a dilemma shared by many post-collegiate runners.

She was fast, but not fast enough for anyone to provide the financial support required to train full-time.

So Conley thought about walking away from competitive running. But her coach, Drew Wartenburg, the Aggies' director of track and field and cross country, encouraged her to keep racing.

Conley's glad she kept going. After earning her spot among the nation's elite distance runners with a series of strong performances last year, she heads to Eugene, Ore. this week for the U.S. Olympic Track and Field Trials with a chance to contend for a spot on the Olympic team in the women's 5,000 meters.

"This has been a three-year project for me," said Conley, who lives in West Sacramento. "I can put a lot of stock in all of the work I've done.

"I'm grateful to Drew, who inspired me to stick with it."

Conley, 26, found some financial backing from the Sacramento Running Association, enabling her to step back from her coaching duties as a UC Davis assistant and focus solely on training.

"The SRA giving me support, I appreciate," she said. "It's really hard, when you don't have any financial support graduating from college. There's not a lot of options at that level, just a lot of pressure graduating college to have it all figured out.

"SRA, it's awesome what they're doing for athletes."

Conley delivered several impressive road-racing efforts in 2011. She finished second in the USA 5K Championships (15:47:20), placed third in the USA 10K Championships (33:34.80) and was fifth in the seven-mile Falmouth Road Race (37:47).

She continued to improve in 2012, setting personal bests in the 5,000 at the Mt. SAC Relays (15:24.89) and the 10,000 at the Payton Jordan Invitational (32:00.94). Both efforts earned her qualifying times for the U.S. Olympic Trials.

That's a big step forward from her UC Davis career, when she set a school record of 16:17.51 in the 5,000 in 2009.

"I'm very happy with the progress I've made," she said.

Conley heads to the Trials with the 13th fastest time in the field. But she's within striking distance of a top three spot, trailing the third-fastest qualifier by just 14 seconds.

“To make the team I’m going to have to run 15:20 and finish in the top three,” said Conley, alluding to the ‘A’ qualifying standard needed to compete at the Olympic Games in London.

“A number of women can do that. I’m just trying to put myself in the race.”

Conley, who has been working out in Corvallis, Ore. the past few weeks, is scheduled to run in the 5,000 qualifying round on June 25. The 5,000 final is set for June 28.

To prepare for Eugene, Conley ran a tough double at the Portland Track Festival on June 8 and 9, setting the pace for the first four miles of the 10,000 and then coming back the next night to win the 1,500 in 4:12.53, close to her personal best.

“I was just trying to simulate the rounds of the Trials for the 5k,” she said. “I was trying to race with heavy legs. I felt pretty good.”

Conley said she considered running the 10,000 – the final is on June 22, with no qualifying rounds – but opted to focus on the 5,000.

“The 10 was a possibility for awhile,” she said. “It seemed like the difference between me and the leaders was greater than in the 5k.”

Conley said she’s prepared for all possible tactics in Eugene.

“I have the ability to close,” she said. “If it’s more tactical and it comes down to a kick, I fare all right.

“I’m happy to run fast.”

The Sacramento Running Association is a non-profit organization dedicated to finding ways to encourage people of all ages and abilities to run. The SRA is committed to developing new, quality running events that appeal to a broad variety of runners.

SRA events include the California International Marathon, which celebrates its 30th anniversary on Dec. 2. More than 3,000 runners have already registered for the race.

Other SRA events include the Lake Natoma Four Bridges Half Marathon, The Super Bowl Sunday 10k Run and the Credit Union SACTOWN Ten-Mile Run.

SRA beneficiaries include the American River Parkway, youth fitness programs, local running venues and aspiring young runners.