

Published September 9th, 2015

Rapid Rise Continues for Former Campo XC Star Toni Finnane at Notre Dame

By Karl Buscheck



Toni Finnane Photo Gint Federas

Toni Finnane has come an awfully long way in just over a year. Last August, Finnane, who was then a senior at Campolindo, joined the cross country program after spending three years playing for the soccer squad. Now, she's running for Notre Dame, the No. 21 team in the nation.

"It's definitely been very crazy," Finnane said. "It's a very cool experience for me just seeing myself be able to push beyond my limits and really go out and try something new and succeed at it."

Her transformation from midfielder to cross-country standout occurred naturally, as running had always been a part of Finnane's life.

"I had been running just to stay in shape. I sort of started falling in love with it and liked it more and more and was running more often and farther. So, I just decided my heart was in running. I had lost my love for soccer and I wanted to establish something that I really loved doing."

It didn't take Finnane long to establish that she had an extremely bright future in her new sport. Last September, she placed No. 11 in a field of 200 at the prestigious Stanford Invitational 5K.

"The Stanford meet in the end of September was kind of my first big meet where I was running against faster teams and faster people and I realized that I really had some potential."

It was the kind of potential that would translate to the collegiate ranks.

"My performance there was kind of what led me to start the whole college process with recruiting and everything."

Her sudden emergence in cross country meant that she had to shift her approach to the college planning process.

"It was crazy. I had the whole list put together," Finnane explained. "So, I just started talking to a whole bunch of different schools -

pretty much all the schools I was already applying to. I just wanted to kind of hear about the programs and went from there."

Finnane liked what she heard from Notre Dame.

"I think definitely the team and the coaches were a huge part of [the decision to chose Notre Dame] - just how welcomed I felt when I came and visited and talked to all of them."

But it wasn't just the chance to join a prominent program - the women's team was tabbed in a coaches' poll as the favorites to win the Atlantic Coast Conference - that attracted Finnane to South Bend, Indiana.

"Notre Dame in general is just a very special place. It has everything I was looking for in a school, from the academics to the big-school spirit but the smaller class size and academic support that I wanted."

At Notre Dame, the freshman is running with best of the best. In fact, the school's 2015 recruitment class has been billed as one of the most talented in the country.

"It's definitely been a step up running at the college level - especially after only running for a year."

Finnane only has one season of cross country experience on her resume, but she accomplished a lot in that lone campaign. She capped off her remarkable senior season at Campolindo by placing 22nd at the Foot Locker National Championships in San Diego in December. In the process, she was the first Campolindo runner to reach the biggest race in the country since 2010.

Now, she's competing with athletes who have logged significantly more miles. But as Finnane sees it, that just means she's in the perfect situation to learn as much as possible.

"Everyone is super helpful and super supportive." She continued, "I love having everyone as a role model. Everyone shares their experience with me and helps me through my inexperience."

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA