

# Roaring to the Finish

**Speedy Wildcat sophomore sprints to success**

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Elinor Purrier '17 is fast. Really fast. The sophomore distance runner placed first among women at the New England Cross Country Championships in Boston recently; she was named “women’s performer of the week” by America East earlier this month, and just last week the U.S. Track & Field and Cross Country Coaches

Association [named](#) Purrier the Division I National Athlete of the Week, making her the first UNH student ever to receive that honor.

Add those accomplishments to a long list of “firsts” and “bests” Purrier grabbed as a UNH freshman and a high school runner in her home state of Vermont, and you might understand why this past spring she sought a new challenge—the 3,000-meter steeplechase.

The 3,000-meter steeplechase could be considered the Everest of track and field events. At 1.85 miles, it’s one of the longest track races. And the runner must clear four hurdles and a 12-foot water jump on each lap. It’s not for the faint of heart, but Robert Hoppler, head coach of the UNH women’s cross-country team, thought Purrier’s particular athleticism made her a good match. “Elle is a very good athlete,” says Hoppler. “She was a high school basketball player and has really good feet, really good athleticism, and very good strength.” He encouraged her to give it a try, and so she did—winning the 3,000-meter run event at the New Balance Boston Twilight Meet in May. That qualified her for USA Junior National Championships on July 6, which she also won, earning a spot at the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) World Junior Championships in Eugene, Oregon later that month.

Add to Purrier’s list of strengths a little Yankee ingenuity, and you’ve got a contender. Home on break for several weeks before the world championships, Purrier turned her family’s Montgomery, Vermont, farm into steeplechase training grounds—rising at 5 a.m. each day to jump bales of hay before regular farm chores began. “I was fortunate to have a coach who let me train at home,” Purrier says. “So I used the resources that I had.”

Hoppler says that’s the thing about Purrier. “She’s motivated. She didn’t have steeplechase barriers, but she had hay bales and a very open mind. That’s refreshing.”

### **Another first**

At the end of July, Purrier became the first UNH runner ever to compete in the IAAF World Junior Championships, where she placed ninth among 15 runners in the 3,000-meter steeplechase. “It was really exciting” Purrier says. “I didn’t know what to expect, so I didn’t put a lot of pressure on myself. I knew it was a lot like cross country, so I just had a positive attitude going into it.”

### **Staying on track**

“Keeping up” has never been a problem for Purrier on the track, but how does the sophomore nutrition major balance practice and meets and academics? She says each day begins and ends with her studies, and having a consistent practice schedule helps her manage her time. “You value your time and it helps you to focus,” she says. “As an athlete, you spend your free time doing homework.”

Hoppler says that, for Purrier, it’s not just about winning or losing, it’s about getting a great education and making a great future. “Elle has been able to manage being both an All-American athlete and a successful student. She’s a role model for the team for that.”

As for the steeplechase, Purrier will stick with it. She says she'll run it again during the coming spring season.

[Video of Purrier at the IAAF World Junior Championships](#)

### Stay on track

The UNH women's cross country team has five more events this season. [See schedule](#)

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