

Pixler Earns Third NCAA Cross Country Title

EVANSVILLE, Ind. (Nov. 21) – Jessica Pixler has done it again.

The Seattle Pacific senior proved it again on Saturday as she ran to her history-making third straight NCAA Division II women's cross country championship. Pixler cruised along the 6-kilometer University of Southern Indiana Cross Country Course in 20 minutes, 22.6 seconds. It was the closest of her three title victories, as Western Washington junior Sarah Porter was second in 20:30.1.

"Neely Spence (of Shippensburg State, last year's runner-up to Pixler) was with me until about the 4K mark, but then she kind of died," Pixler said. "It was just kind of me finishing. It put a surge on the hill, and I think that helped. That was kind of a turning point."

And in keeping with that theme of threes, the Falcon women captured their third straight team trophy. As the case last year, this was the fourth-place model, and SPU claimed it by beating West Region rivals Alaska Anchorage and Chico State. Seattle Pacific finished with 151 points.

Pixler (Sammamish, Wash./Eastlake HS) joined an elite group of three-time NCAA cross country champions, and is the first in Division II to win that many. The other three-time winners were Sally Kipeygo of Texas Tech (2006-07-08 in Division I) and Missy Buttry of Wartburg (2002-03-04 in Division III). She now has nine NCAA championships: three in cross country, four in indoor track and two in outdoor track.

Prior to nationals, Pixler completed a four-year sweep of the GNAC and the West Region championships.

"It's kind of funny after having it happen -- you realize more and more it wasn't about winning the title," Pixler said. "So much of the journey was about spending time with teammates and family and coaches."

Added SPU coach Erika Daligcon, "To go out there and make (D-2) history, that's pretty special. It just speaks to the work. She's definitely talented, but she has put in all those hours of work."

Adams State of Colorado won its seventh straight title, posting the day's low total of 73 points. Grand Valley State of Michigan was second with 81, followed by Missouri Southern in third with 104. Alaska Anchorage, which dominated both the Great Northwest Athletic Conference and the West Region championships, wound up fifth with 158. Chico State, the top-ranked team in the country for a stretch of the season, placed sixth with 172.

The Falcons packed three runners within one second of each other. Seniors Suzie Strickler (Richland, Wash./Richland HS) and Jane Larson (Fall City, Wash./Cedar Park Christian HS) were the Nos. 2 and 3 Falcon finishers in their final career cross country races. Strickler was 46th overall in 22:11.5, and Larson was 47th, just half a second back. Sophomore Natty Plunkett (Bellevue, Wash./Newport HS) was right with them, taking 49th in 22:12.5.

Senior Kate Harline (Orem, Utah) rounded out the SPU scoring by finishing 62nd in 22:24.8.