STUDENT SHOWCASE

STHM’s Blanca Fernandez achieves success with Temple’s cross-country program

Relocating across the Atlantic Ocean. Enrolling in a graduate-degree program. And creating a cross-country legacy at Temple University.

It’s safe to say that Blanca Fernandez’s first 10 months in the United States have been a whirlwind experience. A native of Leon, Spain, Fernandez has excelled in and out of the classroom as a student in the Master of Science in Sport Business program at Temple’s School of Tourism and Hospitality Management.

Competing against 254 other runners, Fernandez finished 29th at the NCAA women’s cross-country championship, held Nov. 21 in Louisville. It’s the only race this season in which Fernandez, Temple University’s first women’s cross-country All-American athlete, did not take first place. She was undefeated in all six of her prior races this season, while earning American Athletic Conference and NCAA Mid-Atlantic Regional championships.

“I won six races in a row, and was thinking, ‘Oh, this looks easy,’” Fernandez said, laughing. “It’s not easy.”

Now, Fernandez has her eyes set on earning a spot with Spain’s Olympic team.

Last July she placed third in the Spanish National Championships, making her eligible to compete in the July 2016 trials for the Summer Olympic games to be held this August in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Though qualifying for the Olympics has been a longtime goal for Fernandez, to see the opportunity before her has proven overwhelming.

“I try not to think about it a lot because I’ll obsess,” she said. “But I know if I want to go all the way, I have to train hard every day.”

Fernandez has time to prepare. She intends to compete in the 5,000-meter race in Spain’s Olympic-qualifying competition, hoping to clock sub-16-minute finishes. She views her previous finish at the Spanish National Championships as a vote of confidence that it’s possible.

Unwilling to rest on her laurels, however, Fernandez has upped her training regimen. She took just two weeks off this summer before she began training for the Spanish National Championships. She hasn’t stopped since. Working with the women’s track and field team at Temple, Fernandez set aside last season’s 35-mile weekly benchmark. She’s now pushing herself to maintain 45-to-50 miles each week.

“T have to work like a beast, like never before in my life,” she said.

In the midst of her training, Fernandez is nearing the completion of her MS in Sport Business program at STHM and is exploring possible career paths in either event organization or sport marketing. With only two semesters until she attains her degree, she said she looks forward to completing her senior internship and finding her niche in the industry.

“I love marketing because it’s so innovative. It’s all about developing new ideas to make your business successful,” Fernandez said.

Exploring job opportunities in her native Spain, as well as in the United States, Fernandez isn’t sure which country appeals to her more. Though she misses her family, the job market isn’t ideal in Spain, she said, and she’s found herself falling in love with her adopted home in Philadelphia. Learning the colloquialisms and nuances of English while conversing with her teammates has helped bridge a language barrier that she first experienced upon her arrival here.

“While living in the states, I’ve been forced to express myself,” Fernandez said of her growing grasp of the language and American culture. “I’ve discovered things I had no idea about.”

That journey of self-exploration continues, not only on the track, but also at STHM.

–Lora Strum