

SPORTS & LEISURE

Driedger ready to race the world in Spain

By **EAMONN MAHER**
Staff Writer

Running around the playground area at Stewarttown Senior Public School, Emily Driedger never envisioned that she'd be sporting the Canadian singlet one day in an international race.

But the 18-year-old from Georgetown wore the red and white colours for the first time recently at the North American Central American & Caribbean Cross-Country Championships in Trinidad & Tobago, placing ninth individually in the 4-km event, while the Canadian junior women finished first out of 20 countries in the team standings.

That result means Driedger will be among 18 Canuck athletes in Umbria, Spain this Sunday competing at the World Cross Country Championship in the 6-km junior women's (under-19) race.

"I never thought that I'd get this far where I'm going to a world championships, especially after finishing 29th last (summer) at the nationals," said the 18-year-old Georgetown District High School graduate.

"Since I joined the team at Guelph, it has helped me a lot in my running. Just having a bunch of girls to train with really pushes you and makes it a lot more fun, even though you're still working hard."

The first-year University of Guelph English major has flourished under the tutelage of Gryphon head coach Dave Scott-Thomas, who also oversees her training with the Speed River Track & Field Club. She was selected for the national team after finishing fifth at the Canadian Inter-University Sport Championships in November, earning her both the Ontario and CIS rookie of the year awards, as well as All-Canadian honours.

"Emily's got everything together. She's a good communicator and a student of the sport, which you don't always see," said Scott-Thomas, whose Gryphons have captured the last five CIS overall team titles with dominant performances.

"She does have a long ways to go, but a lot of people have the physical tools but perhaps don't have the men-



Georgetown's Emily Driedger competed in her first-ever international cross-country race last month in Trinidad & Tobago, posting a ninth-place result, and the University of Guelph student will now run for Canada this Sunday at the world championships in Spain.

Submitted photo

tal mindset to be an elite-level runner and Emily's got a good analytical mind. She's aware what she needs to do. At the worlds, she'll be running against Olympians and world-championship-calibre competition and we're confident that she'll be fully prepared for that."

Scott-Thomas added that he foresees Driedger lengthening her specialty dis-

tance on the track to the 5,000m when she graduates from Guelph and that the steeplechase would also be well-suited for her.

"Right now her focus is on the 1,500 and the Pan-Am Juniors (in Florida in July) are going to be big for her," he said.

"We're building a foundation for her

development over the next three to four years to become an elite Canadian senior-level athlete. Her time in the 1,500 is at 4:36 now and I feel we can cut that down by 10 seconds by the end of the summer to set her up for next year. She'll get some rest after the Pan-Ams because it has to be fun and fulfilling for the athlete and you want to stay fresh."

Driedger was introduced to running in Stewarttown's Arctic Fox program under coach Kevin Hughes and progressed with the Rebels thanks to instruction from former U.S. collegiate middle-distance competitor Bruce Andrews.

In her final year at GDHS, Driedger placed 11th in Ontario in cross-country, then finished sixth at OFSAA track in the senior girls' 800m and seventh in the 1,500m. Having competed in a number of national championships in the past, she said that moving up to the international stage with a relatively small field was hardly an intimidating experience.

"When I first got to high school I was shocked by the OFSAA running scene and how intense it was," she said.

"I didn't think I'd do well after seeing that, but it just made me train harder. All you can do is focus on what it is that you're doing."

Driedger was also recently granted "carded" status on the Ontario Quest for Gold funding list, allowing her to receive financial support while studying at Guelph, thanks in part to first-place finishes at the 2010 Ontario Junior Track & Field Championships in both the 1,500m and 3,000m.

Mention of her representing Canada at the Olympics is probably premature as Driedger has put an emphasis on education first.

"There's a group of post-collegiate runners at Speed River who came back to the club because they want to keep competing at a high level and that's an inspiration to the younger members of the club," said the 5-foot-9 Driedger.

"They still compete in nationals and in international races and I think it would be neat for me to pursue that after I'm finished school."

The World Cross Country Championships will be broadcast on the CBC in late April.

0.9% finance for up to 60 months & Lease for 48 months at 0.9% both o.a.c.

\$750

Gas Card
on new CIVIC

Georgetown Honda



2011 CIVIC

2011 CR-V



ALL NEW
84 month
finance at

2.9%
O.A.C.

www.georgetownhonda.ca

316 Guelph Street, Georgetown 905-873-1818 905-874-3021 HONDA