



Fleet's Feet: From Agony To Glory

by Erik Elken

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EUGENE, Ore. — His real name is McClellan Verne Fleet, but he's better known in these parts as Mac. Mac Fleet.

"It's a nickname or name that people in the running world or people up at Oregon kind of gave me. And it works, it sounds good," said Fleet.

The highs came early on for Mac "Fleet of Foot".

As a high school senior, he won the 2009 Pan-American junior championship in the 1,500 meters. As a freshman at Oregon he set the school record while finishing as the national runner-up in the indoor mile.

Mac Fleet was on his way to becoming one of the next greats among the Men of Oregon.

But a foot injury derailed most of his sophomore season, and just as Fleet was working his way back, another, much worse, injury surfaced on his other foot.

"I was at a point last year, over the winter, where I actually thought I'd never be able to run, not even competitively, but just go out and run," said Fleet.

He had developed plantar fasciitis in his left foot, and he could no longer do what brought him to Oregon.

"Running is something I now identify myself with. I go to the University of Oregon. I'm from San Diego. and I run," said Fleet. "If you take one of those major things away, you're kind of at a loss."

"Imagine if you can't have chocolate. Imagine if you can't smoke a cigarette. Imagine if you can't go an exercise. Imagine if you can't read a book. Imagine taking something away that you do every day," said Oregon head coach Robert Johnson. "Most kids, most people, would have folded."

Fleet did not fold. He still attended practices while injured, taking on the role of a mere spectator. He spent two hours a day in rehab, but nothing got better.

Finally, there was a break. On his way back up to Oregon in the fall, he saw foot specialist Amol Saxena in Palo Alto, California.

He was given a cortizone shot, a shot that injected new life into Fleet's running career.

"Immediately in the next couple days, I knew that something was different," said Fleet. "I knew that I'd be able to start running again."

Fleet's done more than just start running again – he's winning again. Three years after bursting onto the scene at Oregon, Fleet's hoping his long, and at many times painful, journey comes full circle. He hopes to become a national champion during the NCAA Championships at Hayward Field.

"To see where he was at, down in the pits, down in despair, and to see him come back, and see him in contention to win a title, that's huge," said Johnson.

"It's something I've wanted to do for quite a while and I believe I have a decent opportunity to [win the national title]," said Fleet.