

NORWEGIAN Endurance

Norwegian student-athletes Tom Karbo and Runa Falch are the reigning NSIC men's and women's cross country champions.

Norwegian influence is evident throughout Augustana's 150-year history, and Viking athletics are no exception.

Norwegian student-athletes, Tom Karbo, a junior from Stord, and Runa Falch, a redshirt freshman from Steinkjer, are the reigning Northern Sun Intercollegiate Conference (NSIC) men's and women's cross country champions. Both earned All-America distinction in national competition last fall.

"Tom and Runa stand out, but all the student-athletes from Norway have contributed to our success," said Tracy Hellman, Augustana's head cross country and track coach for both men and women.

Falch, a political science major, sprung the upset at the 2010 NSIC meet. Defending champion Morgan Place from Minnesota Duluth was at the head of the pack with the finish line some 1,000 meters away. That's when Falch turned up the wick and passed Place for the win. Duluth's top runner entered the event having won five consecutive races and owning an unblemished record in conference competition.

"I thought Runa would have a chance, but that finish was really cool," Hellman said.

Karbo, an economics major, dominated the men's event, finishing more than 10 seconds ahead of the runner-up from Minnesota State.

"Tom has elevated our men's program immensely," said Hellman. "He is quiet and humble, and a super hard worker." And he has helped the Vikings win two consecutive men's conference cross country championships.

When he arrived at Augustana 11 years ago, Hellman began researching the College's cross country and track history. He found some notable performances by Norwegian runners, especially in the distance races. Aware of Augustana's Norwegian heritage, Hellman realized Norway could be a lucrative recruiting destination.

With assistance from Donn Grinager, Augustana's director of International Programs, Hellman has since formed good relations with Norwegian coaches, and with former athletes and alumni who call Norway home.

"I have been to Norway seven times," Hellman said. "Augustana has become known as a school in the United States you can come to, be successful, and receive a good education."

Karbo, who has one year of collegiate eligibility remaining, is one of the top runners in Norway. After helping the Augustana men to a sixth-place finish at nationals last fall – the highest in school history – he was invited to compete for Norway at the European cross country championships in Portugal. This summer he will run the steeplechase at the European under-23 championships.



Karbo



Falch

"The steeplechase is Tom's baby, and he's really good at it," said Hellman. "His times are impressive and he has a chance to top the South Dakota collegiate record." Karbo holds the Augustana record.

Last spring, Karbo won the university-college men's 1,500 at the Howard Wood Dakota Relays. He topped the field in the 1,500 and 5,000 at the NSIC championships. In addition, he anchored the Augustana men's distance medley team to first place at the Drake Relays with a split of 4 minutes, 5 seconds. And he placed fourth in the steeplechase at nationals.

Augustana school records for the 1,500 and 5,000 are within Karbo's reach. He has run the events in Norway in times that would scuttle the school records. Pursuing records is only a part

of the positive experience Karbo has enjoyed while competing in America.

"The focus on track and cross country is different than in Norway," he said. "At Augustana we have a team versus an individual focus in Norway. This makes it more social and I feel like I am part of a team. I like to participate in different competitions with good runners and, in America, every competition is something new and it makes it more exciting. Finally, it's nice to see many new places through running meets."

Karbo transferred to Augustana from Stord/Haugesund University College, while Falch came to Sioux Falls as a true freshman.

"I met with her in Norway and convinced her Augustana was the place to be," Hellman said.

Augustana has won four consecutive women's cross country conference championships – three in the NSIC and the last gathering of the defunct North Central Conference. Falch's winning performance sparked the Vikings' latest triumph.

"She is a talent," Hellman said. "She is extremely dedicated to her running. She is so very intense that at times I have to hold her back."

Leading up to the conference cross country meet, Falch won the Mount Marty Invitational and was 19th at the Chili Pepper Festival in Fayetteville, Arkansas. Finishing ahead of her in Arkansas were runners from Indiana University, Auburn University, Oklahoma State, and Texas Christian University.

While Falch and Karbo have excelled, Hellman points to key contributions from other Augustana runners from Norway.

Kristin Brondbo (Steinkjer) was 17th at the cross country nationals last fall. Miriam Hovda (Stavern) and Cecilie Udstuen (Karmoy) ran on the women's winning 3,200-meter relay team that set a South Dakota collegiate record of 8:59.02 at the prestigious Drake Relays in 2010.