

THE GREAT OUTDOORS

Julie Young is racing to the world-class level

Julie Young was recruited out of St. Francis High School to play golf at UCLA, but after two years, the team encountered difficulties with its coach, who decided to disband the entire squad and start anew.

Young says it's the best thing that ever happened to her.

"I'm really grateful, actually," said Young, 25. "I wasn't very happy with playing golf. And cycling is a neat sport, because you can see your progress so quickly."

After just three years of racing, the Sacramento native is one of the most promising cyclists in the world. She's seemingly come out of nowhere for high finishes in major races, including a second at Sunday's Nevada City Classic, where she lost in a sprint to veteran rider Sally Zack.

"People are saying, 'What the heck happened to her? Who's she? Where'd she come from?'" said Young's coach, Bob Augello, of Team Kahlua. "I don't think even Julie realizes how good she is."

"She's right there, almost equal to the best women riders in the world — and she'll very quickly be considered one of the best. Julie's really going to go places."

Her immediate destination is Idaho, for the Ore-Ida Women's Challenge. The 10-day, 11-stage event is the top women's race in the country and the toughest, covering 588 miles and climbing 19,306 feet.

BICYCLING

By Susan Slusser

that she turned out to be at the top level."

Young initially start racing with the Davis Bike Club three years ago, and later rode with Menlo Velo. Then Augello spotted her at races in Visalia in March.

Luckily, Young has been concentrating on her climbing and looked strong in both the hilly Nevada City Classic and the mountainous Mammoth Cycling Classic in early June. She won the second stage at Mammoth and finished second overall in the three-stage event.

"I really feel confident climbing this year," she said. "At the start of the year, I was pretty happy with my sprinting, but I didn't want to limit myself to criteriums. To be world-class, you have to be a good climber."

Next on Young's list is the U.S. Nationals in Park City, Utah, July 2-9. She also hopes to compete in the Pan Am Games in Havana, Cuba, in August, and in the World Championships in Stuttgart, Germany, the same month. Next year, Young is aiming for a spot on the U.S. Olympic team.

"I think Julie would do very well at Worlds — and an Olympic berth is a probability," Augello said. "She's got all the pieces to the puzzle. She's got great mental concentration, a gifted body and she has worked very hard. She's become world class in a very short time."

"Julie was aggressive and very, very strong," Augello said. "She was always at the front or near the front, never out of the action. And she was very animated about being totally into the race."

"She flatted when I was in the support vehicle, and she was very intense about getting back into the race. She was obviously very committed."

Young is training in Truckee for

the summer and plans to live in Auburn during the offseason, where she'll run and Rollerblade to stay in shape. She also wants to concentrate on another sport.

"I'm trying to do more mountain biking," Young said. "I'll probably do some racing, just for diversity and to keep up my intensity."

Young picks things up so fast, off-road riders had better beware.

Notebook — Top local finishers in

the Nevada City races included U.S. national team member Steve Larsen of Davis, who was 14th in Sunday's men's race, and 17-year-old Chad Gerlach of Sacramento, who was 19th. Stacey Cooper of Sacramento was 14th in the women's race.

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For the first time, Young also has a nationally competitive team, with experienced racers such as Sue Sutton, Tricia Walters and team captain Carolyn Donnelly, along with World mountain bike champion Julie Furtado and track rider Renee Duprel.

"This team looks really big for the future," Young said. "We all get along really well as a team; we're not just a bunch of individuals. It's really important to know that your teammate is not chasing you down, but is back there blocking for you."

Before she joined Team Kahlua, Young had to rely on local bike shop owner Steve Rex (Rex Cycles) for equipment. "Steve helped me tremendously," she said. "He really supported me, built my bike — he's such a good guy. He helped me from the beginning, which was great."

Young's success, however, means she can no longer ride Rex's bikes. She has to use the equipment provided by her new sponsor.

"I knew she didn't have anything going, so I asked her if she wanted to ride one of my bikes," Rex said. "Until now, when she can't ride it anymore. I'm kind of disappointed about that, because she's really prominent now, and it's a big boost to have someone of her caliber on my bike."

"I didn't know she'd be this good this year — she's one of the very, very best in the nation. Mainly I did it because I like her. It just worked out