



- [Go Back](#)
- [Email this story](#)
- [Print this story](#)
- [Letter to the editor](#)
- [Discuss](#)

## SPORTS

### D-M captain flies high in orienteering

By Ryan Finley

ARIZONA DAILY STAR

Tucson, Arizona | Published: 06.15.2009

Cristina Luis began her orienteering career as a little girl, whether she knew it or not.

"My mom always gets really carsick," she said. "So when I was really little, my dad would hand me a map in the car. He'd say, 'You're the navigator.' "

She's taken it literally. The 30-year-old Tucsonan is a captain at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, where she's a navigator on a HC-130 search and rescue plane.

In her free time, Cristina has developed into one of the nation's top female orienteers. Using little more than a thumb compass and a detailed map, she races through wild areas for sport.

advertisement



Fast, faster, fastest: "There are three disciplines: The shortest races are about 15 minutes, and the longest one is 1 1/2 or 2 hours. For the most part, you run at a 10K pace or a 5K pace."

The map: "I've always been into maps. I followed pirate maps, maps of the world. I studied geography in high school. With orienteering, you use maps especially made for the race. There are little points all over the map, and you have to go to those points in order. When you arrive there, there's a flag to let you know you arrived at the right space. You use a little digital 'fingerstick' to check in."

Look! "The first thing I do when I get a map is find the triangle on there. You know ... 'You are here. '"

What to wear: "You bring yourself and your compass, and long pants to cover your legs to avoid scratches. There are orienteering shoes, but I've been wearing cross country-style shoes, things with really aggressive tread."

But that's it ... "People keep giving me suggestions — 'Check out this lightweight jacket' — but it doesn't really matter. It's like showing up at a local 5K for me. Sure, you're going into the woods, but it's just a running race."

The best route ... "is pretty much a straight line. You have to find out what the best way to get from one point to another is."

Game face: "When I'm running through the woods, I don't really think about snakes or weird spiders. Sometimes you see them, but you forget about them. But if I'm hiking with friends and see a snake, I freak out. I'm in a different mode."

How to train: "A lot of it is physical training. Running in terrain is a good thing, too."

The amazing race: "There were tryouts this spring in a place called Cobb, Calif., for the world championships. They take five people; I was fifth. I did not expect to make it, at all, this year. I came in third each day. I had my best runs of the year, all in the same weekend."

Headed for Hungary: "The world championships start in August. I'll probably get there a week or so early to prepare. There are four races, but each country only has two

Buy Daily Star photo reprints - Select sizes now 20% off



Cristina Luis says a lot of people think her sport "is like Boy Scouts, with compass work and pace-counting. It's like that on crack."

JAMES S. WOOD / ARIZONA DAILY STAR

#### Other articles by Ryan Finley:

- Las Vegas speedster commits; UA wants Milus to reconsider
- Six Wildcats chosen on second day; three selected by Indians
- Stoffel leads 6 Wildcats chosen in draft
- UA's Stoffel not chosen in first three rounds
- Eight Cats on cusp of beginning pro career
- For recruit, summer is season to turn, turn, turn some heads
- Stoffel looking to join ex-teammates in majors
- Camps give prospects, coaches a connection
- 'Camp Huachuca' success leads to extra day
- Miller says '09 trio is just a start on program

**TopJobs** View all Top Jobs

---

**General**

- Medley Communications Installation Professional/Cable TV

---

**Health Care**

- Advanced Reimbursement Eligibility Specialist

---

**Health Care**

- Danville Services of Arizona RNs and LPNs

[Online RN to BSN Degree](#)  
 RNs â€ Earn Your BSN Degree Online From CCNE Accredited Jacksonville U  
[www.JacksonvilleU.com](#)

[Foreclosed Homes](#)  
 Seized homes selling for only \$10k. Pay \$1 to get listings in your area  
[www.HUDforeclosed.com](#)

Wildcat newsletters  
ARIZONA • sign up now  
U of A basketball coverage

Ads by Google

[Online RN to BSN Degree](#)  
 RNs â€ Earn Your BSN Degree Online From CCNE Accredited Jacksonville U  
[www.JacksonvilleU.com](#)

[Foreclosed Homes](#)  
 Seized homes selling for only \$10k. Pay \$1 to get listings in your area  
[www.HUDforeclosed.com](#)

[Train to Become an RN](#)  
 Request free info from schools that can train you to become an RN!  
[www.do-something.com/nursing](#)

[A Great Place to Live](#)  
 Very affordable living in beautiful Cochise County, Arizona.  
[www.VermilionRealty.net](#)

[Hawaiian Airlines Deals](#)  
 Book Round-Trip Fares from Phoenix to Hawaii - Starting from \$450\*.  
[www.HawaiianAir.com](#)

people running in each race. There are three individual races and a three-person relay."

Underdog: "Orienteering's huge in Scandinavia; it started there as a military thing. There are other countries that are up-and-coming — Switzerland, the Czech Republic and Russia — but Finland, Sweden and Norway are the dominant countries."

Her start: "I was a softball player at the University of Rochester, third base, for a year and a half. I was involved with the outdoors club in college. I found out about orienteering my senior year. I had heard about it, and I had always been into maps. I knew I'd like it."

Air Force: "I joined the Air Force after grad school at the U of A. I was actually deployed from October to January in Djibouti. It really wasn't bad. Mostly, we were on 24-hour alert. I have two more years in the Air Force. If I get out, I'll probably do something really different. I taught eighth-grade science for a year between grad school and the Air Force. I'd like to teach."

Smart guys: "Orienteering is actually kind of a nerdy crowd. You have to enjoy thinking while doing sports, which not everyone likes. There are a lot of scientists and teachers who did it; occasionally, you'll get somebody with a social-sciences background. One woman on our team is a trainer, and another's a sports physiologist. It's definitely a pretty smart crowd. These are people who get you."

It's all about ... "Patience. You have to be able to analyze what you've done wrong or right while you're racing. That's the key."



0 Comments on this story

Wildcat newsletters **ARIZONA** • sign up now for U of A basketball coverage

Get Arizona Daily Star home delivery and SAVE BIG!

 EMAIL THIS STORY	 PRINT THIS STORY	 LETTER TO THE EDITOR	 DISCUSS
--	--	--	---

Copyright © 2009

[Go Back](#)

[Train to Become an RN](#)

Request free info from schools that can train you to become an RN!  
[www.do-something.com/nursing](http://www.do-something.com/nursing)



Ads by Google