AYLA GRANADOS

You might call Ayla Granados a late bloomer.

Coming out of Castro Valley High in 2009, Granados, by her own admission, was just “walk-on material” – good enough to be invited to “walk on” to college cross country and track teams, but not good enough to be offered an athletic scholarship.

A decade and two college records later, Granados is running professionally for Hoka, an athletic shoes and apparel company, and is close to qualifying for this summer’s Olympic Trials in Eugene, Oregon. Her best times in her two Olympic events – the 1500 meters and 5000 meters – have been run in the past eight months.

Granados set the school record in the 5000 meters (17:40) at Butte College and won Northern California Junior College titles in both the 1500 and 5000, gaining the attention of some four-year schools, including Chico State. She suddenly was more than “walk-on material.” She accepted an athletic scholarship offer from Chico and rewarded the Wildcats by setting a school record in the 1500 meters (4:21), a mark that still stands. She earned All-American honors in both cross country and track at Chico.

A competitive swimmer all through grammar school and middle school, Ayla first went out for cross country as a junior at Castro Valley High -- “to keep in shape for swimming” -- and fell in love with running. “Peter Brewer (former CVHS track coach) helped start that fire,” she said.

Granados currently lives across the bay in Belmont where she is assistant cross country and track coach for the men’s and women’s teams at Notre Dame de Namur College. Her personal coach, Sean Smith, is the head coach at Notre Dame de Namur.

Granados thinks it will take a 4:10 in the 1500 and 15:30 in the 5K to qualify for the Trials. Her best times, respectively, are 4:13 and 15:53. “It’s getting harder and harder,” she noted. “The sport is getting faster.” She has from April to June to make a qualifying time and, as training, will be running some 70 to 80 miles per week, rarely taking a day off.