

Deena Kastor

by Jon Hendershott

Whether under her maiden name of Drosin or her married name since '03, Deena Kastor has been a distance-running mainstay for well over a decade, topped by her '04 Olympic marathon bronze.

She gained her first U.S. Ranking in '93 as an Arkansas soph and has rated either nationally or worldwide every season since '98. She has

made three Olympic teams, four Worlds squads and six World Cross teams.

The only U.S. women to run a sub-2:20 marathon, she has set countless American Records at a variety of distances.

In Beijing, she suffered a broken bone in her right foot only 5K into the marathon.

While recovering and readying for late-spring road races, she served on USATF's High Performance Task force (see p. 25):

T&FN: Was one particular finding or conclusion from the panel most significant to you?

Kastor: I guess if I were to sum up what's going to make this work it's the athletes being in charge of their profession. I feel that's something I've been fortunate

with, from graduating college and starting to work with coach [Joe] Vigil. I just surrounded myself with people I trust, who believe in me and helped me work for my goals. So I've never had a problem with that.

But in talking with a lot of athletes, I realized that they kind of got stuck with the coaches they're with. They might question the coach, or the motives of their manager.

That was shocking to me; the large number of athletes who don't control their profession. And it is our profession. We have to be the initiators and we have to make good choices right from the start in order to be successful.

T&FN: Are the recent successes in the women's distances due more to the individual efforts of athletes to surround themselves with the most effective support groups?

Kastor: I definitely think so. When I was looking at my choices coming out of college, I actually looked at who was dominating on the world scene—even though I didn't even have a national college title. I saw it was the Africans, who have training camps and they train together and they train at altitude.

So I wanted to be in a group environment, a team environment and at altitude. My first conversation with coach Vigil, who is such an amazing man, won me over.

T&FN: Over the years, you have said that you experience sheer joy in the physical act of running. Have you always felt that way? Just what does running give to you?

Kastor: Gosh... I guess I remember always feeling this way from the very first day of meeting for track practice when I was 11 years old. I know that in my last couple of years of college, there were other things I was missing out on. I wanted to read and write; I got so into my major of English and creative writing.

I wanted to open up a café, which has been a childhood dream of mine. I started baking for local cafés and restaurants. I felt like my whole life I had been running but I had all these other passions that I wanted to fulfill.

But when it came down to it, I got right back into my running shoes and realized that I could open a café at any time in my life. Or write at any time in my life, or read.

I just love running; I love the invigoration of accomplishing goals every day. My goal of making the 2012 Olympic team is four years off, but each day that I'm out running I'm chiseling away at that goal. So there's a sense of daily gratification even before a long-term goal is reached. I also really love the people in the sport, as well as the people I surround myself with. I just love every aspect of it.

T&FN: You have written about the day in the summer of '01 when you "became" a marathoner, after taking an 18-mile run over the Santa Monica Mountains to the Pacific and back.

Kastor: That day was a relaxed time

Kastor In A Nutshell

•Personal: born Waltham, Massachusetts; February 14, 1973; 5-4¼/104 (1.63/47)

•Schools: Agoura (California) HS '91; Arkansas '96; now represents Asics

•Coaches: Bill Duley (HS); Lance Harter (Arkansas); Joe Vigil, Terrence Mahon (pro)

•PRs: 1500: 4:07.82 ('00), 2000: 5:42.76 ('01), 3000: 8:42.59 ('00), 2M: 9:35.89 ('02), 5000: 14:51.62 ('00), 10,000: 30:50.32 ('02); Mar: 2:19:36 AR ('06); ARs at 9 other road distances

•Major Meets: 5000: 8)NC, 4)OT '92; 2)NCI, 5)NC '93; 5)NC '96; 10)US '98; 2)OT '00; 2)US '02, 10,000: 4)NC '94; 5)NC '96; 3)US, 1)WUG '97; 3)US, 1)WC '99; 1)OT, 18h)OG '00; 1)US, 11)WC '01; 1)US, 12)WC '03; 1)OT '04; 4)US '05; 1)US, 6)WC '07; Mar—2)OT, 3)OG '04; 1)OT, dnf)OG '08; also 7-time USATF XC champ

•World/U.S. Rankings: 3000—x, 3 '99; x, 3 '01; x, 1 '03; x, 5 '07, 5000—x, 9 '93; x, 7 '98; x, 2 '99; x, 2 '00; x, 4 '01; x, 2 '02; x, 1 '03; x, 3 '07, 10,000—x, 4 '97; x, 1 '99; x, 1 '00; x, 1 '01; 6, 1 '02; x, 1 '03; x, 1 '04; x, 6 '05; 6, 2 '07, Mar—x, 1 '01; x, 2 '02; 9, 1 '03; 3, 1 '04; 5, 1 '05; 1, 1 '06; x, 1 '07; x, 2 '08.

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JOHN BARNHART/PHOTO RUN

in my schedule. I was out from Colorado visiting my family and I just wanted to touch the sand and the water and come back. So I didn't have any paces to obligate myself to and no expectations going into the run, except that I wanted to meet the ocean and then run back.

Before that, I was doing only 15-mile runs and always trying to hang on to guys and suffering. So this was an 18-mile run at my own pace and I just got so invigorated, I'm still astonished at the paces I was running as I climbed back up the mountain toward my parents' house.

I think it was just the lack of expectations and the lack of structured paces that are typical of my training schedules. I could just go out and frolic in the wilderness [laughs].

The Santa Monica Mountains have always been dear to me from my first day of running.

So that just helped unite me with my roots of running, being in a similar mountain range as that first day of practice. It was an ecstasy and joy and invigoration that comes with accomplishing something you've never done before.

Also the energy that it fills you with. It could have been one of the more exhausting runs of my time because it was a few miles farther than I'd ever gone. But it ended up being the most invigorating.

T&FN: *Marathoners race the full distance very infrequently. Is that tough from the psychological standpoint of actually competing in the marathon, and is that partly why you run a variety of other road distances and also get back on the track for a 10,000?*

Kastor: I definitely enjoy racing and, yes, I can't run many marathons in a year. But I've also never felt I needed races to insure my fitness level. I can gain a lot of confidence through training because we do similar cross training runs and different intervals throughout the months and the year.

So we can always compare them to some other time and gain confi-

dence that way. So I don't feel I have to race to gain confidence, but I do love to race.

T&FN: *Where are you now in your recovery from your broken foot in Beijing? You mentioned on your blog about doing a 20-miler.*

Kastor: I'm right on schedule to be racing this spring. I just don't want to rush. I was really conservative in everything coming back from Beijing. I didn't want to be anxious about coming back—which was very difficult. I had never been so sedentary for three months in my entire life. So that was very hard for someone who likes to be proactive; just to sit and wait for my foot to heal.

But I guess because I was conservative and did everything right, I feel like I'm in great fitness right now. I'm able to look forward and

Deena Wines & Dines

Deena Kastor uses the word "passion" about things, including the food and wine that she and husband Andrew enjoy.

Her website talks about her enjoyment of cooking, with recipes for dishes like blueberry pancakes, chocolate raspberry scones and "hearty winter chili." How does being a food lover square with demanding distance training. Does she just burn it all off?

"I think it's a combination of energy expended and energy consumed. But I really do listen to my body. On a day when I'm running more intensely or longer, I'm just going to eat more naturally. But on a day when we have just a light, easy jog and nothing else going on like heavy gym work, then my appetite isn't as good.

"So you have to follow what your appetite is. The hearty winter chili is great to warm your bones, but if you're a sedentary person, maybe limit it to one bowl. But if you just did a 20-mile run and it's damp and wet out, and then you shoveled snow in the afternoon, maybe you should consume an extra bowl.

"I think that people kind of look for a specific answer on what exactly they need to eat. But I don't think you should cut anything out of your diet. Just listen to what your body needs and thrives on."

As for wine preference, she says, "We like a lot of Northern California wines, especially from the Miner Family Winery in Napa. Other favorites of ours more recently have come out of the Paso Robles area on the central coast. We try to get there at least once a year for some touring and tasting.

"A company there produces a cabernet now with 26.2 on the label. They're really delicious and a really fun gift. It's a fun way to celebrate the distance, whether someone is getting ready to run it as a goal or just to accomplish it and have a finish-line toast."

get excited for the goals I have ahead.

T&FN: *Even with all your successes on the track and in the marathon, is cross country still your strongest passion in running?*

Kastor: It is. I just love cross country. I love the ruggedness of it and battling the elements. It's just a gritty, tough way to run. Whether it's training for it, or racing it, it's always just a huge joy for me. It's one of the reasons we live in



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Kastor Interview

the mountains [Mammoth Lakes, California], because I love running that way.

T&FN: How long do you intend to compete? I assume you'd like to have a family eventually?

Kastor: One child is probably good enough for us, but I definitely want to run through the 2012 Olympics. My focus after Beijing was first to just get healthy and then round into fitness again,

I hate to put [a family] in the line of my other passions and dreams, but I think the opportunities present themselves at the right time—and it's not the right time yet. We'll definitely have one child; maybe have one in the next decade as well as adopting.

T&FN: You have made references in the past to "the crazy goals I have in this sport." Do you want to say what those goals are?

Kastor: I still feel like I cheated myself out of my goal for the Beijing Olympics, so I would love to earn a gold medal—or at least another medal—in the 2012 Games.

I would love to run under 2:20 again. I'm going to run a fall marathon this year, but I'm not sure which one. So another big goal for me is to win another major.

I look at Berlin and Chicago and if those are my choices, I want to be able to run fast. If New York is my choice, it's been a dream since my first marathon there in '01 to win that race. That would be a dream come true.

T&FN: What has been the oddest experience you've ever had in a race?

Kastor: It definitely came from swallowing a bee at the '00 World Cross in Portugal. Well, I didn't actually swallow it per se. It stung the uvula at the back of my throat and I spit him out! My throat started to swell and close up, until I finally passed out and hit the ground.

Luckily, I hit the ground hard enough that it shook me back to my senses. I sprang back up and finished the race. My manager, Ray Flynn, told me after the race that they kept playing it in slow motion on the jumbo screens near the finish line. Later in '00, I had the honor of introducing President Clinton to a large crowd, only to have him retell the story. It was quite embarrassing.

T&FN: Has there been one race in your entire career that was most satisfying to you?

Kastor: Not at all. I get as equally excited with good workouts as with good races. As far as the commitment and hard work that went into it from so many people, Athens in '04 was very sweet because my whole family was in the stands.

The sweetest part of Athens for me was how powerful and strong I felt leading up to

the Games. Then to have that outcome and be able to share that with so many people was intoxicating. But the pride and the empowerment came in the weeks leading up to Athens. I couldn't believe I had put together so many months of quality training and I still felt on top of the world.

That for me kind of sums up what racing is all about; the preparation is what gives you all the tools and empowerment in the world. The race is a sweet reward for all the work you've



VICTOR SAILER/PHOTO RUN

When legends meet: Kastor & '84 Olympic champ Joan Benoit Samuelsen.

done in the months leading up to it.

As far as internal satisfaction, all the races are the same. I feel like I grab something from each experience. I cherish both good and bad.

T&FN: Do you feel a drive to top '04? You said you'd like to win another medal, so is that a major motivator?

Kastor: I would like to win one more at the Olympics, but I don't think I could compare the experiences. The next time around is going to be totally different. Not to top it, but to make it a wonderful experience as far as training and preparation goes, as well as the race itself.

T&FN: So where is your '04 medal?

Kastor: [laughs] We have a basket next to the telephone with pens and paper clips and loose change and it's in there. Hopefully not getting too many pen marks on it.

I do speak to schools and civic groups and right after the Games I took the medal with me. But I don't anymore because I want to offer something different, deeper experiences, as the years have gone on. I've had some great talks just since Beijing on how to overcome adversity and I've enjoyed talking on that subject quite a bit. □