

## T&FN INTERVIEW

# Deena Drossin

**T**wo weeks in March and April saw Deena Drossin take 2nd in the World Cross Country long-course race and then set a road 5K World Record in Carlsbad, California.

Following her 2:26:58 in the New York Marathon last fall—the fastest debut ever by an American—the two spring races marked huge achievements in the 29-year-old Drossin's 17-year career. At the same time, each in a sense brought her home.

Involved in the sport since mom Heleana signed the 12-year-old Deena up for a local track club to expand her social circle, Drossin excelled in cross country (most of her five California State prep titles came in cross) and enjoyed its team aspect. So Drossin was in her element leading a U.S. women's long-course squad—five of its six members part of her Team Southern California training group—to a team silver medal.

At Carlsbad, of course, she was at home in the sense of being back in California, where she grew up. After four-plus seasons, 1996–00, spent in Alamosa, Colorado, Drossin has relocated back to the Golden State, where she splits her time between a home at 8000 feet of altitude in Mammoth Lakes and workouts under the eye of coach Joe Vigil at the Olympic Training Center near sunny San Diego—where T&FN caught up to her.

**T&FN:** Congratulations. You've had quite a spring.

**Drossin:** Thanks. It's been pretty exciting.

**T&FN:** I guess the only difficulty might be choosing a highlight. How do individual and team silvers at World Cross stack up against a road World Record in your mind?

**Drossin:** They were both really very great in different senses. The World Championships were fabulous because in working together as a team we all came out with individual highs as

far as performance was concerned. It's in working together that we individually did great at the World Championships. But we were fighting for a team medal, so to come out successful on both sides was very exciting.

In Carlsbad to be able to share it with my friends and family—my family was there, a lot of friends from the Olympic Training Center were there—made it very special.

**T&FN:** What this year made the difference between 12th-place in '01 and 2nd?

**Drossin:** I think Running USA has offered a great avenue for a bunch of us women to work together, so that has been an extreme difference for all of us.

And Coach Vigil and I have been working together for 6 years and he has instilled in me that every training session you've got to work and think at a higher level, and we've been doing just that.

He's told me this year that I'd have to take a lot of risks and put myself out there, kind of extend myself, and I feel like I've been taking that advice and it's come out in my favor every time I've pushed beyond what I considered my limitations.

And I just incorporated plyometrics strength training in my routine through a fabulous strength coach, Jack Weatherford, who I've been working with for two hours three times a week on plyometrics and drills. That's proven extremely beneficial also.

**T&FN:** Did running the marathon last fall benefit you in the shorter distances?

**Drossin:** Even though [after the marathon] I took a month off in November from doing any training at all, I definitely think that I felt the strength and conditioning from last fall benefit me this year.

**T&FN:** You seem really enthused about the team aspect of the Running USA program and your Team Southern California group. How much of the time do you actually train as a team?

**Drossin:** Everybody has different training and racing schedules. Some people, their focus is more on the roads, and others on the track. We really came together for cross country season.

We trained together all fall

by Sieg  
Lindstrom

### — DROSSIN IN A NUTSHELL —

Deena Drossin is 5-4/105 and was born February 14, 1973, in Waltham Massachusetts. She was graduated from California's Agoura High School in '91 and from Arkansas in '96. She set an American marathon-debut record of 2:26:58 at New York in '01. Her track progression:

Year	Age	1500	3000	5000	10,000
'88	15	—	10:04.36	—	—
'89	16	5:01.66+	9:59.2	—	—
'90	17	4:36.2	9:50.5	—	—
'91	18	4:33.8	9:41.6	—	—
'92	19	—	9:31.28	16:21.47	—
'93	20	—	9:16.54	15:52.80	—
'94	21	—	9:45.31	16:45.17	34:10.89
'95	22	(redshirt)	—	—	—
'96	23	—	9:35.75	16:29.17	34:13.75
'97	24	4:21.98	9:10.80	15:43.63	32:47.44
'98	25	—	9:06.28	15:07.83	—
'99	26	4:13.98	8:45.13	14:56.84	32:00.72
'00	27	4:07.82	8:42.59	14:51.62	31:51.05
'01	28	—	8:45.77	15:08.02	32:05.14





KIRBY LEE/THE SPORTING IMAGE

and then for a month leading up to cross country nationals. And then Jen Rhines, Matt Downin, Meb [Keflezighi] and I all went up to Mammoth after cross country nationals to train together for another three weeks of altitude.

**T&FN:** After you set the road 15K AR in March, you almost seemed more excited about U.S. team prospects at World Cross than the record. What inspired you about the team goal so much this year?

**Drossin:** The United States has always had the talent and always had the numbers of people running, but when you get a group together and you really get to know each other and respect each other and work together, the synergy of that is incomparable, and I really think it's elevated all of us. Both on the women's side and on the men's side.

**T&FN:** When did you start focusing on that for World Cross?

**Drossin:** We actually started discussing it last fall, what a great thing we can do on the world level, because we have the talent but we also have the depth. So it was something we've been talking about since the fall that we all wanted to make the team together and we did.

There were five of us girls on a six-member team—Colleen [De Reuck] being the only person that's not a part of Running USA, but she definitely did a fabulous job herself in bringing on the silver medal. We got really close in Dublin, all of us girls, and had the friendship, respect and drive to be able to pull it off for a silver medal.

**T&FN:** What did it feel like to be sharing the lead with one of the sport's most gutsy front-runners, Paula Radcliffe, late in a world championships race?

**Drossin:** It was exciting. I respect Paula. I look up to her in so many ways, not just as an athlete, but what she stands for in her stance against drugs and just trying to keep the sport pure. So to be running side by side with her was definitely an inspiration to me and a tribute to all that we had been working for.

**T&FN:** Did you ever think you might win the race?

**Drossin:** No, because I re-

ally didn't expect to have just the two of us running together. When I was preparing for the race I was expecting it to be me hanging onto this pack of Paula with Ethiopians and Kenyans all around. I didn't expect it to be me pushing the pace for the totality of the 8km.

So I was a little bit insecure being up there—but felt strong—and just didn't prepare to be in that position, so I couldn't execute it all the way.

**T&FN:** What about Carlsbad? Did the Dublin experience boost your confidence there?

**Drossin:** It definitely changed my preparation for the race. In the World Championships I really wanted to be pushing the whole time but when I found myself in the front I was a little hesitant in doing it, in pushing all the way, so in Carlsbad I didn't care if I was in 1st-place or if I was in 8th-place. I just wanted to be aggressive and focus on myself for the entire race, just never settling and pressing past my comfort zone. And it seemed like since I was training for 8 and 10Ks that a 5K seemed relatively short, that I might be able to push a little harder and take greater risks as far as going out hard.

**T&FN:** Did you have a race plan, any splits you wanted to hit?

**Drossin:** I just wanted to go out and run. I didn't want any numbers in my head to distract myself from just really pressing past my comfort. I did look at the clock. I don't remember exactly what my time was when I passed through 2M [9:32], but I remember looking up and thinking, "I think that clock must be wrong." I didn't let it sink in too much; it was just a quick thought and then I was back to pushing the pace again.

**T&FN:** We hear you'll be running a 10,000 at Stanford in May. The rumor is you hope to break Lynn Jennings' 31:19.89 AR. True?

**Drossin:** I really just want to run a personal best in the 10K because I don't really feel like I've run my potential in it. It's either been a tactical race or just not feeling great going into it, so I feel like I've never really run a fast 10K.

The conditions are going to have to be perfect, everything's going to have to fall into place like it did in Carlsbad in order for records to be broken, but I am definitely looking for a personal best there.

We're hoping to get some pacesetters, to go through in 15:30, and then I'm going to try to hold onto that pace. I'm going to try to run it consistently since that's the most efficient way to run.

**T&FN:** What are your racing plans for the rest of the year?

**Drossin:** I'm going to be doing the Boulder Boulder 10K and the Mini-Marathon 10K in New York and then Nationals. I'm pretty much set on running the 5K at Nationals and then going overseas right away and just running three races—a 1500 in Cork, a 3000 in Rome and then a 5K in Stockholm—within a 10-day period. So just kind of a ballistic track season and then taking probably a week's rest. Then I'm going to run Chicago.

— continued on p. 57 —



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## Drossin — from p. 39

**T&FN:** How important is the marathon to you now compared to track and cross country?

**Drossin:** I think we're pretty lucky that we can place importance on all of them because they fall at different times of the year. I definitely want to run a good marathon. We have a great group of people coming up to Mammoth in the fall to train for it. We have probably around 20 U.S. runners that are going to be training for fall marathons up there.

Khalid Khannouchi is possibly going to be coming up there; Sonia O'Sullivan from Ireland is looking into coming up there.

I know Peter de la Cerda is, Terrence Mahon, Matt Downin, Meb Keflezighi, Abdi Abdirahman, Nick Rodgers, and I'm forgetting some... a good group.

**T&FN:** Running has taken you on a bit of a journey, from high school in California, to Arkansas. Then after college onto isolated Alamosa. Now it's Mammoth?

**Drossin:** Yeah, my boyfriend [Andrew Kastor] and I got a place together last fall. He's a personal trainer and a massage therapist up there, for the Snow Creek Resort. And we just love it up there. It felt like home from the first day we arrived there.

**T&FN:** How do you split your training time between Mammoth and San Diego?

**Drossin:** I probably spend four months out of the year in San Diego and the rest up in Mammoth. I would train most of the time at altitude except we don't have a track there.

**T&FN:** Does Andrew run with you?

**Drossin:** Sometimes. He loves doing it. He ran in college. Meb is up there right now and Andrew actually went on a training run with him this morning, so on a good day he's out the door with us. He also works a lot so it's hard to get the time.

**T&FN:** Mammoth is, of course, a big ski resort. Do you ski?

**Drossin:** From the front door of our house to the ski lift is about a 3-minute walk and neither one of us skis at all. We're in the prime location for it, but...

**T&FN:** Do you avoid it so you don't get injured, or have you never tried it?

**Drossin:** I tried it once and I hated it. I'm much more of a summertime person.

**T&FN:** Joe Vigil has said that when he first met you he chuckled because your goals were slightly high. Yet by the time you won your first U.S. cross country title he offered only modest praise since he wanted you to look ahead to the world level. Together you've crossed quite a few high goals off your to-do list. What is it about your coach?

**Drossin:** He says all the time, "Oh, I'm just a coach." But he's probably one of the best motivators in the world, if I can be as bold as saying that. He brings out the best in everyone. I think that's why the group has thrived so much with working with him. If you come with your head down to practice, he's got you thinking about making an Olympic team in a matter of about two minutes. □