

# Chris Solinsky by Don Kopriva

Prior to his first 10K on the track (see p. 22), Chris Solinsky joked about how well or poorly he might do in his debut and even worried that he might not finish. But the '07 Wisconsin grad had the last laugh in Galen Rupp's much-touted try for an American Record, instead claiming the standard for himself.

Solinsky last year joined a number of his former Badger teammates and former UW coach Jerry Schumacher with the Oregon Project in the Portland area of the Pacific Northwest and responded by making it to the final of the World Champs 5K.

## Solinsky In A Nutshell

- Personal:** born in Stevens Point, Wisconsin, on December 5, 1984; 6-¾/165 (1.85/75)
- Schools:** Stevens Point Area HS '03; Wisconsin '07; now represents Nike
- Coach:** Jerry Schumacher (Wisconsin, professional)
- PRs:** 1500—3:37.27 '07; Mile—3:55.75i '10; 3000—7:36.90 '07 (10, x A); 5000—13:12.24 '07. 10,000—26:59.60 AR '10
- Major Meets:**  
*Mile—2)NatScho '03*  
*3000—6)NCI '04; 1)NCI '05; 1)NCI '06; 2)NCI '07; 2)USI '08; 3)USI '10*  
*5000—dnf)NC '04; 3)NCI, 8)NC, 10)US '05; 3)NCI, 1)NC, 12)US '06; 1)NCI, 1)NC, 7)US '07; 5)OT '08; 2)US, 12)WC '09*  
**•World/U.S. Rankings:**  
*3000—x, 4 '07*  
*5000—x, 10 '06; x, 4 '07; x, 4 '08; x, 4 '09*

Other stars in the group include Matt Tegenkamp, Simon Bairu and Shalane Flanagan.

Solinsky and wife Amy, whom he married on his 25<sup>th</sup> birthday in December, reside in Oregon's main city.

*T&FN: You've had a lot of changes in your life in the last two years—marriage, college graduation, moving halfway across the country, a new job, in effect—what could have stressed you out.*

Solinsky: I packed all kinds of things into one and feel that rather than hurt me it helped because it gave me different motivation than I ever had when I was in college.

Like meeting the girl of my dreams and asking her to marry me and then planning for the marriage and moving to Portland and buying a house.

It's been a big change but it's given me new motivation and new reasons to keep pushing, because I'm not running just for myself anymore but for me and Amy.

*T&FN: Do these changes seem strange to you?*

Solinsky: If you would have told me that the series of events of the last two or even three years would have taken place, even when I was a senior in high school or college, I would have laughed and said, "None of that's gonna happen to me."

I didn't know where running was going to

take me but I was going to try to push myself and take it as far as it could. It didn't change the ways things went. You just put your nose to the grindstone and plug away. You do your own things. Good things come from hard work, I guess.

*T&FN: How important has it been with all of you guys plus Jerry in Portland, that, in effect, you just transferred the comfort zone you'd been training in at Wisconsin?*

Solinsky: We definitely lean heavily upon each other, especially because of the familiarity we have with each other. We still are getting over the uneasiness of a new place and new people, but we still have the whole core of the group. That part didn't change. The mix, the family, so to speak, didn't change.

You just can't beat it out here; as much as I love Wisconsin and always will, I don't miss the winters one bit. It's so much easier to get in high quality training here when the worst thing you have to put up with is mid- to low-40s and rain.

Obviously, we have the world-class Nike facilities at our disposal, and in dealing with injuries, what not, it's hard to beat.

*T&FN: Do you think that the rest of the country looks at what you guys have—and what Alberto's [Salazar] guys have there too—and say, "What the heck, if these guys can't do it, what's our future?"*

Solinsky: As a group as a whole, the Nike Oregon Project, I think we do have a little pressure on us. Even after last year, with the great championships the Oregon Project had, we were really disappointed with how the World Championships went.

I think that's the level we have gotten to—with the number of talented people we have in one spot with the resources we have—it kind of puts a little pressure on you because we're expected to perform pretty highly because otherwise why put all the money and resources into a group like this.

But it's no more pressure than we ever put on ourselves.

*T&FN: Is there competition between you guys and Alberto's group?*

Solinsky: We're under the same umbrella but there are two different coaches but you know, Galen does





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something, it motivates us; if Kara does something, it motivates us. If Simon, myself, Matt, Shalane, any of us, goes out and does something, we’re motivating them.

It’s like when you see someone like Ritzenhein, who you viewed as a 10K guy or a marathoner, all of a sudden, bam, he breaks the 5K record, then it’s like, “Where did that come from?”

So, then, the norm has been shifted and expectations have risen not just from that performance. It’s like I’m around him every day and we’re doing similar things. “If he can do it I can do it” is the mentality that we have here.

**T&FN:** *We’ve always joked about your size, as in “Fat Chris” vs. “Skinny Chris.” So, for the record now, and to put to rest any rumors of you being a 190-pound wrestler, what are your height and weight?*

**Solinsky:** I was 164-165 for the 10K and I am officially 6-¾, though I would say 6-1.

**T&FN:** *Is that weight too much, too little or about right?*

**Solinsky:** It’s about right. I’ve found that it’s just about impossible for me to get to 160 or under. I actually haven’t been under 160 since about sophomore year of high school.

I am probably at my peak of my low weight, in that my body has found that perfect low rhythm in the low-to-mid 160s.

I think my workouts have distributed the muscle and rather than just carrying it on my shoulders and legs I’ve burned off what excess I might have been carrying before.

I’ve kind of embraced that “big, fatty,” whatever phrase you want to use. I’ve embraced it and I’ve actually heard from some of the bigger runners out there that I’ve motivated them to pursue dreams that they thought they couldn’t because they were too big.

You don’t have to be your stereotypical runner to be successful.

**T&FN:** *How have you stayed injury-free?*

**Solinsky:** I’d say luck has a bit to do with it because I’ve trained pretty stupidly in the past, like I’ve just tried to push the limit as far as possible. Having the extra, larger bone mass and muscle is a big plus and a big bonus.

Even when I tore my PCL last year the muscles around my knee were strong enough to hold it where my PCL almost wasn’t doing any work anyway. So even if I do get injured—knock on wood—it seems the body can compensate and help me keep training.

**T&FN:** *Was making the World team a little redemption for not making the Olympics, and did it set you on the right path?*

**Solinsky:** It’s more that there’s just a monkey off my back. I felt for at least two years that I could have been on the U.S. team, both in ’07 and ’08. So it has motivated me and did motivate me to do what I did in 2009. So my mission now is just to stay hungry and not be content.

**T&FN:** *Is the type of training different than what you did in Madison?*

**Solinsky:** The concepts are the same; we’re just heating it up a little. We do longer distances and more intense than before. You can get away with it as a professional; as a student you’re playing a double role. We do the things that are necessary to help our bodies.

**T&FN:** *Your racing schedule is so much different, too.*

**Solinsky:** I definitely miss racing but at the same time we do what is necessary for our career, not what the team needed us to do. I miss that in some ways. You can’t beat the team atmosphere in college or high school. We still have that but when it comes down to it you’re an individual on the track.

**T&FN:** *How are you looking at this year and the next two?*

**Solinsky:** Some years, like this, you can push the limit because you can afford to, versus a World Championships year or Olympic year, when you push the limit but at points you back off and you have to be ready to compete at U.S. nationals or Olympic Trials and get on the team.

The off-year you just kind of push the envelope and see how far you can take your training and your racing.

For instance, if this were the Olympic year, and I were running my first 10K, maybe I would have been happy to get the “A” standard vs. partly throwing caution to the winds and saying, “Well, if I blow up, I blow up.” You can afford those types of things now and not in a championship year.

**T&FN:** *Does that make you relaxed in your approach to the season’s races?*

**Solinsky:** There’s no pressure this year. You just can say, “Screw it.” I’m gonna push my body to the limit and if it breaks, it breaks. I just want to get out there and have fun racing. Our group is very loose.

**T&FN:** *You’ll only be 27 at the time of the 2012 Games and 31 for the 2016 Games.*

**Solinsky:** I honestly believe that I can still be competing in 10 years at age 35, not on the track but in the marathon. In fact, Simon was kidding me, that when I make my marathon

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## Solinsky Interview

debut I'll have to do something huge.

As long as my body will hold up, then God willing that Nike is standing behind me, then I think I can make it that long. I don't see competitive edge or drive waning at all.

**T&FN:** How did you look at the 10K in advance?

**Solinsky:** I was really nervous because I had zero idea about my level of fitness, so I felt I could run anywhere from 26:55 to 28:00. That's no joke. I could be good enough to really surprise myself or I could be getting too excited about what level of fitness I'm in and be 27:48 to 28:00.

But Galen running it or not running it had no bearing on my running. I was going to run the same way whether he was there or not.

All I wanted to do was survive. It was going to hurt and be hard and it was. When we showed up at the track the day before, it looked bigger and longer than the Nike track.

**T&FN:** As the race moved along, where was your head?

**Solinsky:** I got a stitch a couple of laps before 5K. We were picking it up pretty good at that point. I panicked a bit and thought about checking it off and letting it go away but that's where the nothing-to-lose mentality came in and I decided to get through one lap at a time. By the time it wore off, we had 6 or 7 laps to go and the adrenaline was flowing through my veins and able to carry me to the finish.

**T&FN:** Do you think that getting the stitch ironically may have helped you by giving you something to concentrate on instead of the number of laps that were left?

**Solinsky:** It could have been a huge blessing in disguise. It definitely took my attention off the race a little more and put me in survival mode. When it went away I got excited because I really felt good.

The biggest thing I took from the race is that it became a turning point for me in that I was finally able to shut my mind off and zone out. I found a perfect spot to stare at and it became like a tempo run.

With four or five laps to go, the first thing that went through my head is, "I'm going to finish." It shows the 10K is a pretty daunting task. That's when I thought I could win it.

**T&FN:** Your kick was one of those long sustained ones.

**Solinsky:** Actually, I wasn't planning on that coming into the race. Jerry wanted me to wait as long as possible and I've been trying to get away from those long drives. On the backstretch, I relaxed a bit and made sure I didn't overextend myself. If any American wants to medal on the world level, he's got to take what the race gives him and not be inflexible.

**T&FN:** Is your head still in the clouds?

**Solinsky:** My parents did a great job with keeping me level-headed. I've been blessed to have a good support system of family and friends. Amy helped me keep this race in perspective. As soon as I got home she wanted me to take out the garbage. □