



Goucher ready to 'bring it' in Berlin

Fri Aug 21, 2009 By Joe Battaglia / Universal Sports



★★★★★ (7 ratings)

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BERLIN – Kara Goucher's motivation to get into running was simple.

"I was 7 years old, and I really wanted to win a prize," she said.

Not much has changed since for the über-competitive American distance runner over the last 24 years. Goucher still has her eyes on the prize. The latest: a gold medal on Sunday in the women's marathon at these 2009 track and field World Championships.

Goucher's approach to running is particularly refreshing in an age when most of the focus is on the stopwatch.

Hers is on the finish line.

"I've been super-competitive my whole life," Goucher said Saturday in an interview at Nike Town, in Berlin's Charlottenburg neighborhood. "I've told you this a million times, but I deal with these moments of doubt – but they're never big enough to get me not to do it. I always expect myself, to just, somehow, magically rise above everybody else."

And when she doesn't, it just adds fuel to the fire.

"When I was younger, I remember not getting picked for the part of Clara in the Nutcracker and being shocked," Goucher said. "I came home and my mom asked, 'How'd it go?' And I said, 'I didn't get it,' and I was shocked. I've just kind of been that way my whole life, whether it's schoolwork or soccer or dancing or whatever I was doing."

It is also what has brought her here to Germany.

Goucher's every intention this year was to run the Boston Marathon and then take a hiatus from the sport so that she and her husband, Adam, a 2000 Olympian in the 5000m, could start a family. But when Kara Goucher, who is coached by Alberto Salazar, finished third in Boston in April behind Kenya's Salina Kosgei and Ethiopia's Dire Tune, let's just say that it didn't sit well.

In fact, it still doesn't.

For just a moment Saturday, Goucher had to fight back tears as she recalled the hours and days after Boston:

"I went through drug testing and I went through the awards, then I went back to Alberto's room and was sobbing," she said. "I knew at that point that I had to do something else soon. I've wanted to take a break from the sport for a while now but at that point I knew that I just couldn't yet. I couldn't go out like that."



By: AP Photo

Kara Goucher will be using a collection of past successes -- most notably a bronze medal at the 2007 world championships in the women's 10,000m -- to help her in the women's marathon at the world championships.

In her eyes, finishing third in Boston was so unacceptable that she actually lobbied to run in the London Marathon six days later, a preposterous thought for an elite runner.

Cooler heads prevailed, and after a week of thought and planning with her husband and later with Salazar, they decided that Worlds was her best option.

Goucher said it was actually through running that she was able to come to grips with Boston and to refocus on her new task at hand.

"Running for me is also this healing thing in my life," she explained. "I was sad at the time so I needed to go out and run. I wasn't training hard but I was jogging almost every day. It was a release for me, a way for me to let go of my feelings of disappointment and failure. It just made me feel better."

Goucher spent her spring training for and competing during an abbreviated track season. That proved a way for her to recharge while keeping her mileage down and getting her back to her roots.

"Some people like to prepare for one big event but I love to race," Goucher said. "I'm addicted to racing. I'm addicted to that battle and getting out there and testing myself. I think that I'll always be that way, like, 'What's coming up? Could I go run Millrose? Could I run this half-mile on the Nike Campus?' Just because you move up to the marathon doesn't mean that you've lost all of that talent that you were good at before."

For decades, an emphasis on highly structured training aimed at producing fast times actually yielded fewer victories. Lost in that gaggle of times and mileage totals was a fighting spirit, a fundamental aspect to racing.

In a recent report by the Wall Street Journal, Tom Ratcliffe, an agent representing a number of Kenyan distance runners including Richard Kiplagat, Stephen Kiogora, Evans Rutto and Ben Maiyo, was quoted as saying African distance runners "enjoy the battle" while most Americans "race with anxiety." He says his runners usually have no idea how many miles they run per week, or how fast.

They just want to win.

What sets Goucher apart from many is that she is cut from the same cloth.

"Sometimes you start focusing on things like threshold runs and things like that," Goucher said. "Maybe we lose a little bit of our speed, but it's still there. We've decided to take a slightly different approach and still keep up on all of my speed work. I'm still running 64-second quarters even during this marathon block. Doing stuff like that makes me feel better. I can still run a 64-second quarter at the end of a workout; that means that when I'm running at 75[-second] pace, I'm completely comfortable and the American record is 80 pace. It makes everything easier, and it's more fun."

Mary Wittenberg, president and CEO of the New York Road Runners, said that part of Goucher's appeal is her desire to have fun, something she feels could be vital in drawing the next generation of female distance runners to the sport. But beneath that, she said, is a toughness that should serve as a model for those up-and-coming runners.

"Kara is the quintessential 'girl next door' and something of a 'girl's girl,'" Wittenberg said. "It is those qualities and her affable personality that make her so appealing to all kinds of people and especially inspiring and accessible to young girls and women. But while she may be fun, lighthearted and asking for a pink uniform one minute, come race day she is all fire and ice with skulls and crossbones on her water bottles."

It's that warrior's mentality that could suit her well here on Sunday. While on paper, the field may seem depleted by the losses of injured runners Paula Radcliffe and Mara Yamauchi of Great Britain, Irina Mikitenko of Germany, and most recently, Yoko Shibui (stress fracture) and Tomo Morimoto (poor fitness) of Japan, Goucher knows this won't be a stroll in the park.

She must still contend with the likes of Dire Tune of Ethiopia and Zhou Chunxiu of China. Plus, since this race will double as a team championship event, tactics that might not normally be found in a World Marathon Majors race will likely be in play through the streets of Berlin.

Goucher said her experience in running the 10,000m at the 2007 World Championships in Osaka, where she won bronze, has prepared her for the physicality she is likely to encounter.

And when was the last time you saw a girl born in Queens, N.Y. back down from a fight?

"The (international runners) tend to run as a team," Goucher said. "We even see it on the track. They run as a team and try to set on of themselves up for a better performance. But that's okay. Getting pushed around and shoved, even the 5K at USAs this year with different surges, is something I'm used to because I'm still so involved in track. It doesn't bother me. Whatever people throw at us is ok. That's racing. It's all fair. It actually makes me more excited. It's like, 'Okay, bring it.'"

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Goucher rested, ready for long run**Boston Marathon disappointment fuels Kara Goucher's desire to win****BY DAVID MONTI***For The Register-Guard*Posted to Web: **Friday, Aug 21, 2009 11:46PM**Appeared in print: **Saturday, Aug 22, 2009, page C3**

BERLIN — Even as a little girl, marathoner Kara Goucher always wanted to win.

“I’ve been super-competitive my whole life,” Goucher said Friday, two days before competing in her first IAAF World Track & Field Championships marathon.

“When I was younger I remember not getting picked for the part of Clara in the Nutcracker, and being like shocked, you know? I was like 8 years old, and I couldn’t believe it. I’ve just kind of been that way my whole life.”

Goucher, 31, the surprise bronze medalist in the 10,000 meters at the 2007 World Championships, is here to prove to her coach, her husband and herself that she is among the world’s best at the 26.2-mile distance.

In just her third marathon, she hopes to erase the bad memory of April’s Boston Marathon where, in a slow and tactical race, she was outsprinted by Salina Kosgei of Kenya and Dire Tune of Ethiopia in the last half-mile to finish third.

Goucher was crushed.

“I went through drug testing and went through the awards,” she said. “I went back to Alberto’s room just sobbing. It still makes me emotional.”

Alberto is, of course, her coach, Alberto Salazar, the three-time New York City Marathon winner and former University of Oregon star.

Salazar, who trains Goucher and her husband, Adam, knew that Kara needed time to retool. Resisting her pleadings that she run the London Marathon a week after Boston, Salazar gave her the space to decide that running in Berlin was her best option.

“So, we started talking it over,” Goucher said. “My initial choice was to go over to London, and I pushed for that for a few days. Then, on Wednesday afternoon I finally decided that that wasn’t going to happen.”

Goucher realized she had been training intensely since last August, when she began her preparations

for her first marathon in New York in November.

In that race, she became the first American woman to reach the podium since 1994 and set a U.S.-debut record of 2 hours, 25:53 minutes. She said that she couldn't keep training at that level through the fall and wanted to run a major marathon, sooner rather than later.

"The World Championships seemed like the perfect solution," she said. "It was really an easy decision."

She also needed Adam's support, and she got it.

"I told her that she should do it," Adam said. "She came out of Boston not feeling fulfilled like she wanted to be, and I know she had a lot more in her. It was a disappointing race for her, and for me as well, because I knew she was better than she showed on the day."

Salazar said he had the luxury of time to prepare Goucher to be her best here.

"I think that this time, for the first time, nothing has been hurried," Salazar said. "For Boston, I felt like we were trying to cram workouts in. I felt like she needed to do certain workouts; I had to hurry workouts in. This time, for this race, it's been a certain thing there hasn't been any hurry."

For Sunday's race, Goucher will face strong teams from China, Japan and Ethiopia, including the reigning World Championships silver medalist, Zhou Chunxiu of China, who has a personal-best time of 2:19:51, six minutes faster than Goucher's.

Salazar didn't appear overly concerned by Goucher's competitors or that the last time an American woman won a World Championships marathon medal was in 1983 when Marianne Dickerson was second in Helsinki.

"I can't control with other people do," Salazar said. "I believe she's in a very good position to medal."

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Goucher running marathon at World Championships

London in 2012 is the finish line. Berlin in 2009 is a trial run.

By: **Kevin Pates**, Duluth News Tribune

London in 2012 is the finish line.

Berlin in 2009 is a trial run.

American Kara Goucher takes another step in her marathon career at

4:15 a.m. (Duluth time) Sunday in the women's World Track and Field Championships race in Berlin. Her third 26.2-mile race in 10 months is viewed as vital preparation for the 2012 Summer Olympics in London.

"The World Championships is about who I believe I can become, over time, with more experience," Goucher recently wrote to the News Tribune by e-mail from Europe. "I am here to execute a plan and learn more about the marathon.

"Of course, I would love to get a medal and do well for the United States, but it is just another experience I feel I need to get to my overall dream, to be in the hunt for the Olympic gold medal in 2012."

This is the fourth straight year Goucher has represented the United States — she was third at 3,000 meters on the track in the 2006 IAAF World Cup in Athens; bronze medalist at 10,000 meters in the 2007 World Championships in Osaka, Japan; and 10th at 10,000 meters and ninth at 5,000 in the 2008 Summer Games in Beijing.

The Duluth-raised runner has been third in her two marathons, 2008 at New York City and 2009 at Boston. She led the Boston Marathon over much of the final five miles only to be outkicked in the last half-mile and finish nine seconds behind. That didn't set well with Goucher, so her plans to start a family with her husband, Adam, were put on hold until after Berlin.

"I feel much more prepared, mentally and physically, than I did for New York and Boston," Goucher wrote. "I have always known that with each marathon and each experience I would get better and better. I don't think the best marathon of my life will take place Aug. 23rd, but I think it will be the best so far.

"I have handled the workload much better this time around and physically I'm at a new point of strength. Mentally I feel good, too. I haven't put the pressure on myself to perform the way I did in Boston. I'm here to get the most out of myself, but I don't feel like I have to win to be successful."

Goucher, 31, a Portland, Ore., resident, had an impressive tune-up three weeks ago by finishing first overall in a field of 14,400 in the inaugural Rock 'n' Roll Chicago Half-Marathon in 1 hour, 8 minutes, 5 seconds. Her marathon best is 2:25:53 at New York.

Sunday's field has been lessened through attrition. Out are England's world record holder Paula Radcliffe, Germany's Irina Mikitenko, and Japan's Yoko Shibui and Tomo Morimoto.

In the race are Kenya's Salina Kosgei and Ethiopia's Dire Tune, who finished ahead of Goucher at Boston, and China's Zhou Chunxiu, the 2008 Olympic bronze medalist.

Runner's World executive editor and 1968 Boston Marathon winner Amby Burfoot follows distance running as closely as anyone in America and says he's intrigued by Sunday's marathon. He wrote on the Runner's World Web site that Goucher appears well-prepared by Nike Oregon Project coach Alberto Salazar:

"Goucher is incredibly fit and has a real chance of medaling, in fact, I think she has a chance of winning and I don't often say that about Americans in world-class marathons. I think she's in about 2:22 shape now and that could be enough to get the job done in Berlin."

Sunday, the final day of the World Championships, is expected to be sunny with temperatures reaching into the mid-70s. The women's marathon starts at 11:15 a.m. Berlin time. Goucher says she's not focusing on time, but performance. She'll probably race from the front, monitor her body and take fluids at the eight aid stations from water bottles personalized by her mom, Patty Wheeler of Duluth.

The only U.S. woman to earn a World Championships marathon medal was Marianne Dickerson, second in the inaugural race in 1983, one year after placing third in the 1982 Grandma's Marathon. America's Joan Benoit won the inaugural Summer Olympics race in 1984 in Los Angeles.

"My plan is quite simple, whether it's a 2:18 race or 2:35. I will run with

the lead pack as long as possible. I am committed to believe in my finish and to not doubt my abilities to close hard. If all goes well, it will be 26 miles of