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## A Friendship Built for Long Distance

By SARAH BOWEN SHEA

In January, when the elite marathoner [Kara Goucher](#) found out she was pregnant, she knew exactly whom to ask for advice. [Paula Radcliffe](#), the women's world-record holder and mother of a 3-year-old daughter, had just arrived in Portland, Ore., to train with her.

The topic of pregnancy became more personal for Radcliffe a few days later when she, too, learned she was expecting. She and Goucher are due to give birth on the same date in late September.

"We were both really excited and really happy," said Goucher, who had been forthright in her desire to have a baby in time to regroup for the 2012 Olympics.

Before this year, the friendship between Goucher, a 32-year-old American, and Radcliffe, a 36-year-old Briton, was based mainly on e-mail messages with occasional meetings at races. They became acquainted at the 2007 Great North Run, a prestigious half-marathon in England, in which Goucher staged a surprise win over Radcliffe. A few weeks later, Goucher watched Radcliffe win the [New York City Marathon](#).

"There was a lot of respect there, but I didn't know her well enough to classify her as a good friend," Radcliffe said in a phone interview.

They grew close while spending their first trimester together.

"She's now one of my very best friends," Goucher said in a recent interview at Nike headquarters in Beaverton, Ore. "I feel I can ask her anything, and she'll tell me. That came over time. It wasn't like I asked her everything on our first run."

In the first few weeks of pregnancy, Goucher and Radcliffe met every morning at 9:30, after Radcliffe dropped off her daughter, Isla. They ran together, doing tempo runs, hill repeats and track workouts wearing heart-rate monitors to gauge their intensity. They occasionally met in the afternoon for a second workout, although Goucher often napped instead because of pregnancy-induced fatigue.

“It helped to have someone going through it at the same time even though we didn’t have the exact same feelings on the exact same day,” Radcliffe said. “If you haven’t gone through pregnancy, you don’t know what that type of tiredness feels like, what being wiped out feels like.”

Goucher, who finished third in the 2008 New York City and 2009 Boston marathons, benefited from Radcliffe’s advice to leave her watch at home during hill repeats and to cut runs short when she feels a twinge.

“She’s been giving me a lot of advice on chilling out,” Goucher said. “She helped me realize I’m not failing. She’s helped me realize I can just push to my limits.”

Radcliffe said she did not see herself as a “mommy mentor.”

She added: “I didn’t sit down and lecture her; I passed along bits to her,” by consulting the training diary she kept during her first pregnancy. “It helped her accept it.”

Radcliffe reminded Goucher to eat before lifting weights, which they started doing together at Week 8 of their pregnancies.

“I felt a bit like a mum when I’d nag her to eat,” Radcliffe said, laughing.

Goucher cited recent solo workouts as proof she had listened.

On May 2, she ran 13 miles at 6 minutes 50 seconds per mile. But the next day, she ran six miles at an 8:15 pace.

“I was tired on that run,” Goucher said. “That used to upset me when I’d have a bad day, but now I know it is what it is. When I feel really tired, I’ll just cut my mileage back and in the afternoon do the elliptical or bike.”

But Radcliffe said they were “competitive animals” who occasionally pushed themselves too hard. They told of a track workout that consisted of various sprints, and they took turns leading.

Goucher said she ran too fast “because it was Paula Radcliffe running behind me.” Then Radcliffe felt she had to lead as fast as Goucher had. Looking at their monitors during a brief respite, their heart rates skyrocketed, Goucher said. They recruited Radcliffe’s husband, Gary Lough, to lead them for the remainder of the workout.

Their training is intense but within the most recent physical-activity guidelines for pregnant women from the United States [Department of Health and Human Services](#).

“The recommendations say women can sustain the level of their activity prior to pregnancy,” said Danielle Symons Downs, an associate professor of kinesiology and obstetrics and gynecology at [Penn State](#) who researches pregnancy and exercise.

Radcliffe and Goucher, she said, are “right in the guidelines with their vigorous activity.”

Other experts disagree.

“I don’t know it’s safe for high-level marathon runners to run at that level during pregnancy,” said Dr. Mona Shangold, the director of the Center for Women’s Health and Sports Gynecology in Philadelphia. “It has not been shown that running for that long, for that intensity, is safe.”

Nonetheless, Goucher and Radcliffe are planning to convene for the New York Mini 10K, a women’s race on June 12 in Central Park put on by the New York Road Runners.

“It’s an excuse for us to get together; a chance to hang together before we get too pregnant to travel,” Goucher said with a laugh. “We are really just running it for fun. Not racing.”

Radcliffe agreed, adding that they may have Mary Wittenberg, the Road Runners’ president, accompany them to ensure that they do not go too fast.

As for their competitive paths and relationship after they give birth, Goucher and Radcliffe intend to qualify for the 2012 Olympic marathon in London.

“When both of us stand on the start line and the gun goes off, we both want to win that race,” Radcliffe said. “But there’s room for a really good friendship at the same time.”