

Former Buff Kara Goucher out to avenge near miss in Boston

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BOSTON -- After Kara Goucher last ran the Boston Marathon, she was so fresh -- and frustrated -- at the finish that she begged her coach to let her run another 26.2 miles a week later in London.

Goucher insists she has calmed down, helped in part by the perspective she gained after giving birth, in the two years since she finished third in 2009 and missed the olive wreath by nine seconds. But when the former University of Colorado standout lines up in Hopkinton for the 115th Boston Marathon today, her goal remains the same.

"I have run that race again about 1,000 times in my head," she said this week after arriving in Boston. "I just want to win this thing."

After giving birth in September to a son, Colt, Goucher thinks she has figured out how to balance motherhood with her attempt to make the 2012 Olympics in London. In her first race back after childbirth, she finished second in the Arizona Half Marathon but her time of 1 hour, 14 minutes, 2 seconds showed her that she wasn't really ready for the race.

"I need to make a choice: Am I going to keep using Colt as an excuse?" she said. "I decided, 'No more excuses.' I want to be the best. I don't want to be the best who has a baby. I want to be the best."

Though Colt is getting teeth and beginning to crawl, his 32-year-old mother said having a baby around the house has helped her training. Now, she knows she doesn't have time to dawdle with half-measures, and when she trains she is more focused and effective.

She finished third in the New York City Half Marathon in March, a tuneup for Boston, running 1:09:03. And now she is hoping her experience on the roads and at home will help her today to avoid a repeat of her last race in Boston, when she grew impatient with the slow pace and broke from the pack too early.

Goucher ran a 2:25:53 to finish third in New York in 2008 and came to Boston as the best American hope to end more than two decades of foreign dominance. No American has won the race since 1985. She was among the leaders with a mile to go but was outsprinted to finish third in the closest three-way finish in the race's history.

It was the closest an American has come to winning since 1985. (Kim Jones reached the podium three times in the early 1990s but was never within 2 minutes of the winner.)

Goucher broke into tears after crossing the finish line.

The pace was so slow that a day later Goucher, bouncing around for reporters to show she was still spry, pleaded with coach Alberto Salazar, the 1982 Boston winner, to let her run London. Such a back-to-back effort would have been unprecedented, and Goucher was eventually talked out of it.

But she still hasn't gotten over how close she came.

"I just want to win," she said. "Sure, I would love to get a (personal record), but I would rather be the 2011 Boston Marathon champion than have some PR. Hopefully, I would break the PR someday. But no one else can ever be the 2011 Boston Marathon champion."

To win it, Goucher will have to contend with Ethiopia's Teyba Erkesso, who is back to defend her women's title, and Dire Tune, who won in '08 and finished second in '09 -- just ahead of Goucher. Four-time Boston winner Catherine Ndereba is also back in the field, along with U.S. Olympian Blake Russell.

Kenyan Robert Kiprono Cheruiyot returns a year after breaking the course record by 82 seconds with his run of 2:05:52. Today's forecast calls for temperatures in the low 50s with a wind of 16 mph from the west-southwest -- a tailwind that could help put his course record in jeopardy after just one year.

Cheruiyot said he was in a car accident back home that left him with an injured tendon in his right side, and if he can't overcome it there is a thick field of countrymen ready to bring Kenya its 19th Boston win in the past 21 years. Among them is Geoffrey Mutai, who has the fastest time in the field with a 2:04:55 in Rotterdam last year.

American Ryan Hall, who finished third in '09 and last year broke the American record in Boston, is also back for another try.

Wheelchair winner Ernst Van Dyk is seeking an unprecedented 10th title, and women's winner Wakako Tsuchida overcame training difficulties in Japan after the earthquake to try for her fifth in a row.

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