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Chicago Marathon gets 3-time Olympian

Ritzenhein, fresh off making 2012 U.S. team, signs for October race

Globetrotting by Philip Hersh

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EUGENE, Ore. -- You don't want to train for the long run in a short time.

Dathan Ritzenhein knew that in January, when he ran the U.S. Olympic Marathon trials in Houston after two Achilles tendon surgeries in the previous 10 months had kept him from training for a six-month stretch.

"I got in good shape really fast," Ritzenhein said.

As much pain as the Achilles tendon had caused him, it then felt worse to run a marathon personal best of 2 hours, 9 minutes, 55 seconds and miss the third and final place on the Olympic team by an agonizingly small margin - 8 seconds.

"I never thought I would run 2:09:55 and not make the team," he said.

That sent him on a successful chase for a spot in the 10,000 meters at the U.S. Olympic track and field trials Friday night.

And it cleared the way for him to enter the Oct. 7 Bank of America Chicago Marathon, since Ritzenhein said he probably would not run a fall marathon if he were competing in the Aug. 12 London Olympic marathon.

Chicago Marathon officials are to announce Tuesday they have signed Ritzenhein, who made a third straight U.S. Olympic team by finishing third in Friday's 10,000 with a time (27:36.09) that met the Olympic qualifying standard.

"That 4th place finish (in the marathon trials) made this so much better," he said. "It was a tough road for me to make this Olympic team, but it is the best one (of the three)."

Ritzenhein was the top U.S. finisher (9th) in the marathon at the 2008 Beijing Olympics. He did not finish in the 10,000 at the 2004 Athens Olympics.

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The 29-year-old father of two, who grew up in Michigan and now trains in Portland, Ore., has run six marathons since his debut at the distance in 2006. He finished second in the 2007 New York Marathon.

Ritzenhein hopes the fast course in Chicago can help him run the kind of marathon time many have expected from him since 2009, when he had impressive track personal bests at 10,000 meters (27:22.28) and 5,000 meters (12:56:27, then the U.S. record) and the half marathon (60:00).

“The marathon is so fast now you have to have speed in your legs,” Ritzenhein said. “I have showed that kind of speed before but the biggest thing going for me in Chicago is this is the healthiest training I have ever had. I’ve never had a full year of being healthy.”

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