

FAST and Light

BY BRIAN METZLER

ASPIRING MARATHONER GOES FROM THE DRIVE-THRU TO DRIVEN ONCE AGAIN

JUSTIN RICKS ADMITS he's probably half the man he was three and a half years ago.

Well, not quite exactly half, if you do the math, but he's definitely become twice the runner he was back then.

A standout high school runner a decade ago, Ricks was logging 80- to 90-mile weeks and running the mile in the 4:30s. In the spring of 2007, however, Ricks was stumbling around with more than 245 pounds on his once slender 6-foot-3 frame, often losing his breath after a few steps of chasing his young children. Fast-forward to Dec. 5 and the super-fit Ricks, now 80 pounds lighter, will be on the starting line of the California International Marathon with the hopes of breaking 2:19 and earning a place in the 2012 U.S. Olympic trials marathon.

This is a story about a once fast and dedicated runner who got sidetracked with the realities of life — working long hours, starting a family, too much time commuting, developing bad eating habits, etc. — and suddenly found himself as the butt of playful jokes among a family of runners.

"I was in the mode of eating what I wanted and doing whatever I wanted," says Ricks, 30. "Once I got that big, I would never get on a scale. It was horrible and I knew it was wrong. When I'd bend over and tie my shoes and come back up and was more than a little winded, I said to myself, 'OK, this has got to stop. I'm a runner and have always been a runner, but I let myself go, and now I've got to get back.'"

Ricks' story isn't unique — how many borderline-obsessive distance runners do you know who've let go of the running lifestyle? — but it's noteworthy because he turned his life around in time to run PRs and make long-term goals seem possible again.

With a newfound motivation and more mileage than he'd ever run, Ricks started to run pretty well in ultradistance races in 2008, winning the Greenland Trail 50K near Denver in a course record (3:23:11) and taking 13th in the U.S. 50-mile championships (7:43.39) at the White River Trail Run near Seattle. That success continued last year, when he took fifth in the Pikes Peak Marathon, broke the Greenland's 25K course record (1:36:27) and clocked a course-record 2:32:30 amid windy conditions at the American Discovery Trail Marathon in Colorado Springs.

With those kinds of results, he had hoped to run a fast time at the Houston Marathon last January, but a stress fracture foiled that plan. Instead, after getting healthy, he focused on ramping up his mileage for the TransRockies Run3, a 59-mile solo stage race through the heart of the Rockies in late August. After dominating that event (winning in 7 hours, 10 minutes — 45 minutes ahead of 2:24 marathoner and Ironman triathlete **TIM SURFACE**), he spent the fall fine-tuning for Cal-International.

Ricks has understood the rigors of long-distance running since he was a youngster,



Fit and fast, Ricks won the TransRockies Run3 event in Colorado last summer.

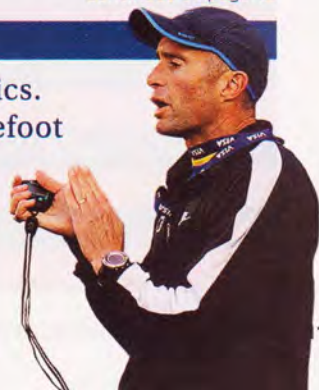
evidenced by the time as a 12-year-old he paced his dad, Thomas, for 33 miles of the Arkansas Traveller 100-mile race. As a self-motivated teen, he became a standout runner at Wasson High School in Colorado Springs, logging big miles and often doing extra work

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QUOTEWORTHY

"There has to be one best way of running. It's got to be like a law of physics. Dathan can't be a heel-striker and expect to run as good as the best forefoot runners. You can be efficient for a while with bad form — maybe with a low shuffle stride — but eventually that's not good for your body."

— **NIKE OREGON PROJECT COACH ALBERTO SALAZAR**, EXPLAINING WHY HE HELPED **DATHAN RITZENHEIN** CHANGE HIS RUNNING FORM LAST SUMMER





Ricks is running Cal-International on Dec. 5.

FAST

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on mountain trails near Pikes Peak. He was the runner-up in both the state cross country meet and the 3,200m on the track as a junior and finished third in state in the 3,200m (10:04) and second in the mile (4:31) as a senior.

He kept at it during his freshman year at the University of Colorado-Colorado Springs, but took a year off as a sophomore, then got hurt and, for several reasons, found himself losing interest. "It just wasn't for me," he says. "I still ran some on my own, but running in school just didn't work out."

After school, he took a sales job with an equipment rental company in Alamosa and married college sweetheart Denise, who also briefly ran on the track team in college. Each believed in fitness and a healthy lifestyle, but

having two kids in the first two years out of school, combined with working full-time, they suddenly didn't have time to run with regularity anymore. Then, as Denise stayed home with the kids and Justin was promoted to a district manager with an expense account, each ballooned in weight.

"If we didn't leave a restaurant with a lot of food on the table, it just meant we didn't order enough," Ricks says with a chuckle, admitting that people are astonished to see his driver's license photo.

"The worst for him was the \$1 Big Macs every Monday," Denise adds. "He'd eat five of them every time."

That was rock bottom and they knew it. He recalls watching a video made during his cross country season his senior year in high school. "In my interview, I said, 'I'm going to run forever, no matter what happens,'" he recalls. "I thought to myself, 'What was I thinking for those five years that I didn't run?' I love to run, and I've always loved to run."

The couple made a pact to get fit by making time for running and eating a healthy diet. Their primary catalysts were their son, Malachi, now 8, and daughter, Kylah, 7. "We just wanted to teach them about a healthy lifestyle," he recalls. "Not just running, but biking, hiking, swimming, just being active all the time."

They stopped buying candy and donuts, ate a vegetarian diet for a year and even tried going vegan before eventually returning to a moderate, well-balanced diet. Denise started running once the kids were in school full-time, lost 40 pounds fairly quickly and now looks like she could run a fast 5K. Running three times a day on most days, Justin also

shed a lot of weight quickly and within six months was running 100 miles per week.

Ricks knows he wasted a chunk of his running career with inactivity and poor eating habits, but he's only looking forward now. He's back to being the best runner in the family, and that means his father, Thomas, a longtime trail ultrarunner who has run Pikes Peak and the Leadville 100, brother, Jamison, who ran for a year at Western State College, and his other five siblings that ran in high school, can stop the snickering.

"I want to run faster and hopefully get a chance to run at the trials, but really I'm just happy to be healthy," he says. "I guess now I see both sides and I don't want to ever be on that other side ever again. But if I didn't get to be that way, maybe I would have never gotten back to this side. I felt horrible every day. Now if I don't run every day, I feel bad." **RT**

SHOWCASE RACE

USATF CLUB CROSS COUNTRY CHAMPIONSHIPS

Dec. 11, Charlotte, N.C.



The USATF National Club Cross Country Championships is one of the best and perhaps most unsung events on the American running calendar. Every December, more than 1,000 harriers of all ages show up from all corners of the country, lace up with long spikes and get after it old-school style on what always seems to be a filthy, muddy course. In last year's open races, elite development group ZAP Fitness/Reebok (NC) outdueled Boulder Running Company/adidas (CO) on the men's side, while Boulder Running Company/adidas (CO) edged McMillan Elite/adidas (AZ). But this event is just as much about you and your local buddies running your guts out for bragging rights against runners from top clubs like the Atlanta Track Club, Greater Lowell Road Runners, Club Northwest, Tamalpa Runners and Complex Racing. For more, go to usatf.org.

SUMMER OF SPEED

American distance records continued to fall in 2010, with **BERNARD LAGAT** setting new marks in the 3,000m (7:29.00) and 5,000m (12:54.12), **CHRIS SOLINSKY** taking down the 10,000m mark (26:59.60) and **MOLLY HUDDLE'S** breakthrough in the 5,000m (14:44.76). Here are a few more new U.S. marks set on the outdoor track this year.

Nolan Shaheed



EVENT	AGE	RECORD	RUNNER	DATE	LOCATION
800m	75-79	3:25.73	Suzi MacLeod	July 24	Sacramento, CA
800m	60-64	2:10.78	Nolan Shaheed	April 16	Walnut, CA
1500m	60-64	4:31.93	Nolan Shaheed	May 1	Costa Mesa, CA
3,000m	60-64	10:11.24	Douglas Winn	June 12	Portland, OR
5,000m	HS	15:48.91	Emily Sisson	July 21	Moncton, NB, Canada
5,000m	55-59	16:14.55	Rick Becker	July 22	Sacramento, CA
10,000m	45-49	31:14.21	Paul Aufdemberge	April 23	Hillsdale, MI
3,000m steeple	Junior	10:00.88	Shelby Greany	June 12	Eugene, OR
3,000m steeple	55-59	10:39.56	Dale Campbell	April 16	Azusa, CA