



Shalane Flanagan: American Record Has Made Her Re-evaluate Her Career

by: LetsRun.com
February 1, 2007

Shalane Flanagan entered the Reebok Boston Games, hoping "to get a race in, kind of get the jitters out, (and) shake off some rust" in preparation for the emphasis of her winter season, the US Cross Country Champs next weekend in Boulder, Colorado. Instead, Flanagan stunned American track and field fans and surprised herself with a career-changing performance. She battled Olympic 5000m champ **Meseret Defar** to the line, and smashed the American indoor 3k record by running 8:33.25.

The race left Flanagan on cloud nine, but wanting more. "I think I'm still kind of on a high from this past weekend. I literally couldn't sleep the night after my race. It was a very magical night. I'm just happy I was able to put together a great performance," said Flanagan via phone from Scottsdale, Arizona as part of a USATF teleconference.



Flanagan said the record run in Boston was "pretty flawless," but she was not completely satisfied after having time to digest it, because she wondered if she made a slight tactical mistake that possibly cost her the victory. **Yes, ladies and gentleman, an American distance runner talking about beating Meseret Defar on the track.** "With about 500m to go I kind of challenged Defar. I was feeling really good. My coach was yelling at me not to get too greedy and to just stay back and stay patient. But I think within that one second when I kind of hesitated I kind of lost all my momentum to challenge her. I think in hindsight we both agree that I should trust my own judgment when I'm out there," said Flanagan.



Instead Flanagan let Defar use her superior footspeed to outkick her over the final lap. "With the Ethiopians, you can't necessarily play their game (letting it come down to a kick)...I think it would have been advantageous if I had really gone with 500 to go. Really, looking back, she was kind of panicked that I was there. I think she thought she was just going to flog through this race and it was going to be easier for her. I think having me on her shoulder really made her nervous. Not that she's not fit. I think she's fitter than me. Just mentally I think she wasn't expecting anyone with her..."

Nonetheless, Flanagan says she was overall, "really, really, really happy" with her performance in Boston and who could blame her? Her run on Sunday is the type of performance that can change careers and Flanagan is aware of that.

Boston Performance Career-Changing

"This is really exciting. This has made me re-evaluate some of my goals that I have for the rest of my career. In my mind, this is a debut for me as a professional (Flanagan actually turned professional in 2004). I don't think I've been really training the way I could have been (in the past). I just didn't know any better. I feel like I was really naive. Like I said I feel like this was my professional debut. I'm finally training like the rest of my competitors."

Flanagan's run was even more remarkable because it was her first track race since the World Championships in 2005, where she ran the 5k. She missed the entire track season last year after she had surgery in April performed by **Dr. Amol Saxena** in Palo Alto, California to correct an extra bone in her foot that prevented her from pushing off her big toe and was causing pain with her post-tibial tendon (the injury is similar to an accessory navicular but different according to Flanagan, but she does not know the name for it). The injury had hampered her even in 2004 when she made the US Olympic team at 5k.



She gave a lot of credit to Saxena (who also performed surgery on American studs **Tim Broe** and **Rich Kenah**), "I feel like if I had not found the right doctor I would not still be running," she said.

In addition to coming back from injury, Flanagan had relocated and switched coaches during her time off. She [had moved to Portland, Oregon](#) to have access to the resources of some of the Nike training groups which first got started under **Alberto Salazar**, although her new coach is former George Mason coach **John Cook**.

Training at a New Level

Flanagan said the change of coaches and scenery exposed her to a new level of commitment and finally put her on an even level with her competitors, "I think my training the past year and a half has really changed. I'm just more committed than ever. I've changed my lifestyle. Running is more of a priority for me now. Whereas (in the past) I feel like it was kind of like a hobby. Not that I wasn't dedicated, but I really feel like I now have stepped it up. It's just a whole new confidence level for me. I know that I have total faith in my training. Whereas before I used to get on the line and wonder if I really belonged. I didn't know if I had worked hard enough to belong there, but now I know I have worked hard enough."

Flanagan says in college at North Carolina she would peak out around 70 miles a week, but now does 3 week cycles of 60, 70, and then close to 80 miles a week. In addition she touches on her speed nearly every day with strides after almost every run, plus a lot of core strength work and drills. She says it all has had its effect, "I feel like I'm just overall a better athlete. We do a lot of core strength, a lot of drills, focusing on being really efficient... I literally used to just go run. Now I'm doing all the little things that are starting to make a big difference for me. It's just a new stimulus for my body."



Ready to Take on Deena at US Cross, Which Was Her Emphasis This Winter

Next up for Shalane is the US Cross Country Championships in Boulder, Colorado next weekend where she'll try to defeat the standard bearer in US distance running, **Deena Kastor**. Kastor has been virtually unbeatable versus her American competitors over the last decade but could have her hands full with Flanagan. Flanagan's focus all winter was not the 3k in Boston, but rather the cross country season. She said, "The goal has been more cross country than anything".

Kastor has dominated US distance running and US cross country (7 US titles, and 2 world championship silvers in cross country) for nearly a decade, but has not run the US championships since 2003. However, with the US and World Championships returning to one race this year, Kastor is back. Kastor, Flanagan, **Elva Dyer, Sara Slattery, Kara Goucher** and others will square off in Boulder for the world championship spots in Kenya and that excited Flanagan, "I'm really excited about the single race. I think it gives us a great opportunity to have all the great competitors together and really test ourselves in one great race."

Despite her record run, Flanagan still sees Deena as the favorite, "Deena has really set the bar for what the rest of us need to be achieving. I would definitely say Deena has to be considered the favorite. I'd like to see how close I can get to Deena. If I can hang in tough with her I'll be really pumped."

One advantage for Deena is that the race will be held at altitude. Deena often trains at altitude in Mammoth Lakes, California and has won the Boulder Boulder road race 3 times. Flanagan has only trained at altitude for one four week stretch in her life, but says she adapts well to altitude (she actually was born in Boulder, so perhaps that helps her), but will be "conservative" at the start of the race to see how the altitude affects her.

Flanagan is planning on making the US team for Worlds and then seeing where she truly stacks up against the world in the single-race World Championship in Mombasa, Kenya in March. "I think I'm really fit and would like to test myself against the rest of the world to see where we're at. Hopefully we can gather a nice team (for Worlds). I would like to encourage a lot of people (who qualify) to go."

Would Love to Take Drug Cheat Regina Jacobs' 5000m American Record

In the meantime, Flanagan is battling a bad cold she picked up in Boston, and will continue to train with her husband and main training partner, **Steve Edwards**, hoping to get in optimal shape for the track season. Her focus will be the 5000m, but she also would like to get an Olympic qualifying time in the 1500 and possibly even the 10k (in order to have a backup plan to qualify for the Beijing Olympics in case disaster strikes in the one race American Olympic trials system).

In the 5k, nothing would please Flanagan more than taking down drug cheat **Regina Jacobs'** American record, 14:45.35 (anyone remember this [classic letsrun.com interview with Regina?](#) that is what thankfully comes up #1 in google when you type her name in). "I think there a bunch of women who can take a shot at it. I think we're all really motivated to break that record. I think that is one a lot of people are shooting for. I think whoever it happens to first, we would all be excited to see that one fall," said Flanagan on the 5k record.

And while many of Regina's contemporary competitors on the circuit did not like her because of her suspected drug use and cold attitude, apparently, the animosity has passed down to the next generation of American stars, as Shalane would not even mention the drug cheat by name, "I don't want to say her name or anything... There is an undertone. I've talked to multiple 5000m women in the US, and like I said, whoever breaks it we're all going to be extremely happy for. I

think its great to take down those kind of (drug enhanced) records, and do it with athletes who are doing it the right way."

Well said.