

# A Star Is Born

Shalane Flanagan finds her distance.

BY TITO MORALES

Shortly after Shalane Flanagan's marathon debut in New York City, she and her husband, Steve Edwards, boarded a plane for a trip to the Hawaiian Islands. A few teammates from the Oregon Track Club—Simon Bairu, Tim Nelson, and Lisa Koll—joined them on the getaway.

As Flanagan lounged and recuperated on a remote beach in Maui, some 5,000 miles from Manhattan's Central Park, a couple of tourists approached and gushed, "Oh, you're that girl who ran the marathon! Congratulations!"

"I was literally in a bathing suit, hat, and sunglasses," Flanagan recalls with a laugh. "I was kind of shocked that they would recognize me."

She shouldn't have been. While her bronze medal in the 10,000 meters at the 2008 Olympic Games may have made her a star in the eyes of the international running community, it was her scintillating run at one of the highest-profile road races on the planet that elevated her renown to just about everyone else.

## The runners' daughter goes long

As was detailed in "The Runners' Daughter" [see the Sept/Oct 2010 issue], Flanagan's transformation into a bona fide marathoner was a long time coming. The seed was planted during a childhood spent in Marblehead, Massachusetts. Patriots' Day meant an annual excursion into the city to watch the Boston Marathon. She learned early on of her parents' exploits as distance runners, and she vividly remembers watching her father compete along the famed Boston course.

Hers has been a running career awash with splashy highlights. There have been NCAA championships, U.S. national titles, international cross-country medals, American records, and, of course, that wondrous podium finish in Beijing. But the marathon, as anyone who has ever attempted the distance can attest, is an entirely different beast. Excelling at shorter distances in no way guarantees success in a race that covers 26.2 miles.

And no one understood that better than Flanagan herself. When she joined forces with coach Jerry Schumacher in Portland in the spring of 2009, Flanagan

had reached a crossroads of sorts. Her record with former coach John Cook was nearly impeccable. Together they had taken her running career to near Deena Kastor-like heights. But Flanagan, 26 at the time, hungered for even more: new scenery, new ideas, new challenges, and new possibilities.

## Start spreading the news

New York: It's one of those cities where people go to achieve their dreams. It's big. It's boisterous. It's filled with a swagger all its own. So for those who have followed Flanagan's career and have witnessed her tenacity in the heat of battle, it came as no surprise that she chose the streets of the Big Apple as the setting for her marathon coming-out party.

On the morning of November 7, 2010, as over 43,000 runners were being shepherded into the start village at Fort Wadsworth, Staten Island, Flanagan and Edwards rode the elevator down to the lobby of the Hilton New York, the host hotel for the elite athletes. There, they met up with Schumacher, Bairu, Nelson, and Koll. Bairu, the Canadian record holder in the 10,000 meters, and Nelson, the 10th-fastest American in history at the same distance, were also attempting a marathon for the first time. Flanagan and Koll boarded the elite women's bus for the ride out to Staten Island.

"It was nice having her there," Flanagan says of Koll, her principal training partner during the buildup to race day. "She and I just talked on the way over to the start line. It felt comforting



► Flanagan, at long last, prepares to tackle a lifelong dream.

to have some really close friends and teammates heading out to the start with me. It didn't seem quite as scary."

Flanagan arrived about an hour and a half before race time, and she and the Oregon group lounged in a heated tent where there were comfortable chairs and tables of food. The sky over New York was clear and blue that day, but since the air was cool and windy, Flanagan's primary objective was to stay warm.

The women's field was scheduled to take off half an hour before the elite men's field. Koll, as Flanagan had been a year earlier, was invited to watch the race from the back of the media truck.

"I only did about 10 minutes of running and abbreviated stretching drills, similar to what I would do before a track race," Flanagan says. "Everything was cut down in moderation. I kept on as many layers as I could. I wanted to make sure that I wasn't shivering on the starting line."

It has become a tradition before the start of the ING New York Marathon that the top competitors are introduced to the television audience alongside young children from each of the five boroughs. Kastor, who withdrew from the race months before when she learned she was pregnant, was there as an on-the-spot reporter. As has become another tradition at the foot of the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge, one of the elites is selected to give a brief, prerace television interview. Flanagan had been asked in advance whether she would consent to such a Q and A with Kastor, but she politely declined.

"I knew I was probably going to be a little too nervous," she says.

As the women stood huddled together waiting for the gun to go off, they were all very much in the zone. The hard work had all been logged. The legs, refreshed from a taper, were springy and ready to run. And race strategy had been rehearsed and rerehearsed.

"I had faith that my coach had prepared me really well, but it was still so much of an unknown," says Flanagan. "I had never covered 26 miles before. I knew that my long tempo runs were really good, but still, to me, those were only 18 miles. To think that I still had to keep going for another eight miles seemed really daunting."

"We felt that we were prepared to handle anything that New York was going to throw at us," says Schumacher. "Our main focus was to stay patient for as long as possible and let the race develop."

## New coach, fresh approach

According to Schumacher, who set up shop in Oregon in June 2008 after a successful stint at the University of Wisconsin, taking on Flanagan's coaching duties wasn't so much a matter of overhauling her training but rather of gaining a better grasp of her goals.

“It was more understanding what she wanted and where she wanted to go with her running,” he says. “And then, once I had a better understanding of that, I said, ‘OK, these are the things I think we need to do. Now how do they compare with what you’ve done in the past?’”

One of the priorities on Flanagan’s to-do list, clearly, was to run a marathon.

“Going into it, when my coach described what I was going to have to do to be a good marathoner, I just thought, *I pray I don’t break down and get injured*,” says Flanagan. “It’s very hard training and something I’d never done before.”

One of the first objectives, Schumacher says, was tempering her zeal.

“When I first started working with her, I definitely noticed that she didn’t have a lot of patience with her training,” he says. “She kind of wanted to get after it right away. Basically, if she wasn’t hurting, then in her mind she wasn’t working. And, really, you can’t approach the marathon like that.”

Ever since she first took up the sport, though, Flanagan has been a quick study. “She’s very intelligent and she learns quickly,” says Schumacher. “All athletes are different. Some are high on speed and short on aerobic ability, and others are vice versa. From what I could tell from Shalane and how she worked and trained, she seemed to have a lot of natural aerobic ability.”

But that gift had not yet been fully tapped. With that in mind, he outlined a plan to get more miles on Flanagan’s legs.

► Flanagan confers with coach Jerry Schumacher after running a personal best 1:08:36 at the Rock ‘n’ Roll Philadelphia Half Marathon on October 1, 2010.



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“We worked diligently on increasing her mileage and on teaching her how to handle the long run and long tempo runs at a higher tempo,” says Schumacher. “That was the main focus for the fall.”

After a successful debut at the half-marathon distance in Houston on January 17, 2010, when she captured the U.S. Half-Marathon Championship, Flanagan captained the U.S. team that won bronze at the World Cross-Country Championships. She then turned her attention to an abbreviated track season.

On June 12, Flanagan ran the 1,500 meters at the adidas Grand Prix and crossed the line in 4:06.44, just shy of her 4:05.86 PR. Two weeks later, with all signs pointing toward a sizeable breakthrough at the distance, Flanagan took a spill and DNF'd at the 2010 USATF Championships. Then, on July 3, 2010, she competed at the Prefontaine Classic and ran 14:49.08 in the 5,000 meters, only a few seconds off her 14:44.80 American record. But just as Flanagan started to get into the swing of things on the track, and just as the schedule was set to shift overseas where faster races lay ahead, she and Schumacher pulled the plug.

“She was really on her way to probably having a phenomenal track season,” says Schumacher. “She didn't even get a chance to do some of the things I think she was capable of running in Europe, but that was part of the plan. If she wanted to run that fall marathon, and run it well, she knew she had to shut down the season early.”

On August 27, 2010, as Flanagan was in the midst of intense high-altitude training at Mammoth Lakes, California, news trickled in from Brussels, Belgium, that Molly Huddle, a teammate on the U.S. cross-country team, had lowered Flanagan's mark in the 5,000 meters to 14:44.76. It's only natural that Flanagan, while happy for Huddle, must have wondered what might have been had her track season not been curtailed.

Much of Flanagan's early marathon training was done with Bairu and Nelson. Most of the country's top female distance runners train with men. While it's never easy, it usually pays big dividends. But Flanagan was unabashedly excited when Koll, the 2010 NCAA Division I champion in both the 5,000 and 10,000 meters, joined the group after graduating from Iowa State University, and the two became fast friends.

“It was really nice having her through my buildup,” says Flanagan. “I think she helped elevate some of my training just by being around.”

When she was training under Cook, Flanagan never ran more than 80 miles per week. But once she committed to running the half-marathon in January, and later, as she honed in on New York, she and Schumacher gradually pushed that number up to 120.

According to Schumacher, Flanagan started scaling back two and a half to three weeks out from the marathon. “It was just coming down a little bit,” he says. “The workouts were less intense and not as long. There was still hard qual-

ity running in there, and she was still putting in some miles, but we decreased it just enough so that she started to feel the snap back in her legs.”

By the time race day rolled around, Team Flanagan was confident that Shalane was going to be right in the thick of it.

### If she can make it there . . .

When, at long last, the gun went off on the morning of November 7 and Flanagan took her first steps toward becoming a marathoner, she was surprised to see that the initial pace was more than manageable. In truth, the race could not have played out any better for a first-timer as a lead pack of over two dozen women clumped together like grade-schoolers chasing after an errant kickball.

The beauty about New York and Boston, as opposed to the other legs of the World Marathon Majors Series, is that there are no commissioned rabbits. In Berlin, London, and Chicago, organizers have made pacesetting into an exasperating art form. Spectators watching from along the course unwittingly waste cheers on front-running athletes who have no designs on completing the distance, and audiences watching from home try to catch a glimpse of the real competitors who are all too often hidden from view behind these human windbreakers. But



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▲ The elite women's field rumbles past an aid station in the early miles.



in New York it's all about racing, pure and simple. And as Flanagan has proven time and again over the course of her brilliant career, there is nothing she enjoys more about the sport than the racing.

As the runners made their way through Brooklyn, Flanagan eschewed looking at her watch. She did take one split earlier on, just to make a mental note of what the group was running compared with her exertion level. Convinced that they were merely jogging at a 6:00-minute-per-mile pace or slower, she was delighted to see that in reality they had just clicked off a 5:45 mile.

"That was semi-encouraging," she says. "I told myself, *OK, this feels very comfortable.*"

For the most part, though, the pace was much slower—agonizingly slower.

"Over those initial few miles, it seemed as if it was going to take forever to get to that finish line," Flanagan says.

But as the miles continued to mount, she began to feel more settled with the environment and with the experience in general. In truth, once she got the first 10K out of the way, her confidence level began to soar.

"Once we got rid of those first six miles, I knew that from that point on, if the race started to get really fast, I was going to be OK because it was going to be just like in practice," she says. "I told myself, *OK, I've run some really hard 18-milers. I know I can handle this.*"

Even though her instructions were to react instead of act, Flanagan admits that there were plenty of moments where she was dying to let her legs out. But if nothing else, what her training had taught her was to keep her emotions in check.

"I knew that there was going to be a lot of pain and fatigue," she says. "It was inevitable. It was going to come. So I just tried to embrace the fact that I did feel good and that the pace did feel moderate."

As any marathoner knows, the trick to getting to the finish line is breaking the race into segments. In a debut, in particular, the mind must help guide the body past a series of milestones. Once Flanagan passed the halfway point, for example, she knew that she was suddenly racing farther than she had ever raced before.

"I recall checking the clock as we hit the halfway mark and thinking there's a reason why it feels so good," she says, alluding to the large group's conservative split of 1:15:52. In contrast, 2008 New York champion Paula Radcliffe passed the half in 1:13:23, and Derartu Tulu, when she won in 2009, passed it in 1:14:05.

The lead pack, though, was still loaded with talented athletes, including New Zealander Kim Smith, a friend and rival of Flanagan's. The two had competed against one another in college when Flanagan was at the University of North Carolina and Smith was at Providence College. It was Smith who helped Flanagan scorch the track back on July 3, 2008, at the Payton Jordan Stanford Invitational when both runners destroyed their respective 10,000-meters national records. Flanagan's time that evening, 30:34.49, is still the second fastest ever recorded

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by an American (behind her own 30:22.22). Now here the two were running a marathon together, and in the early miles the tempo was so mild that they actually found themselves chitchatting a bit. For the most part, though, the mood in the lead group was businesslike. Flanagan knew about the credentials of many of her competitors—especially those of prerace favorite Mary Keitany, another marathon debutante, who entered the race with a half-marathon PR of 1:06:36 (which, on February 17, 2011, she lowered to an astonishing world-best time of 1:05:50).

“I was waiting for someone like [Keitany] to make a move,” Flanagan says. “I thought anytime past the halfway point there was potentially going to be an opportunity for her to make a move. I just felt like I had to stay on my toes.”

But it wasn't just Keitany who might have broken things wide open.

“I was looking at everyone as being a major contender,” Flanagan says. “The tempo and the pace were so moderate that I really thought any of those women had a legitimate shot. At least half the field had a 2:25 PR or better.”

## Lessons learned, lessons shared

When Cheryl (Bridges) Treworgy, Flanagan's mother, ran her first marathon in 1970, she stuck out like a sore thumb. Women back then just didn't do that sort of thing. The few forward-thinking race directors who did allow females into their fields had to contend with, and placate, the numerous male competitors who resented the decision.

When Treworgy set the world-best time in the women's marathon in Culver City a year later, on December 5, 1971, the achievement was so underplayed that it took weeks for anyone to really notice, let alone acknowledge it.

Things have changed since then. Thanks to a couple of running booms and an explosion in the popularity of road racing, the general public is now more than accustomed to female runners. In 2010, for instance, eight out of 12 *Runner's World* cover models were women; in 2011 40 percent of finishers in U.S. marathons will be women; and in 2012 marathoner Paula Radcliffe will no doubt be one of the most recognizable athletes at the London Olympic Games.

Merry Lepper, Roberta Gibbs, Kathrine Switzer, Cheryl Treworgy: What pride these distance-running pioneers must have felt as they watched Joan Benoit win a gold medal in the first women's Olympic Marathon in 1984 and what satisfaction they must now feel when they see how the female elites today line up front and center at the most important marathons. Athletes such as Shalane Flanagan have become main attractions.

“When I was in high school, I didn't think anybody even knew I ran,” recalls Treworgy. “My graduating class was 1,000. So because it wasn't a school event, I didn't think anybody really knew. But I went back to my 10-year high school reunion, and one of the guys that I'd been in class with back in middle school—

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he was a pear-shaped, overweight kid—he proudly came up to me and wanted to let me know that he was now an avid runner.”

In fact, what Treworgy came to realize at the conclusion of her career is that her running had not only helped to transform her life, but it had helped inspire many others to transform theirs.

“Probably the most touching correspondence I ever got was in 2004 when there was publicity about Shalane making the Olympic team,” she says. “It was from a girl who was living in California. I taught her in middle school in 1971, when I ran that world record. She wrote me and she said, ‘I just found out how to get in touch with you and I need to tell you my story. After school I was into drugs . . .’ and she went on with this horrific story about how her life pretty much fell apart, with kids out of wedlock. Finally, one day, she picked herself up and decided that she was going to go out and run. She told me she kept thinking about me, when I was teaching in middle school, and the running eventually changed her life. Now she’s a grandmother, she’s happy and she’s drug free. I’ve always said to Shalane, people may not remember your times, but they’re always going to remember what kind of person you are, and that’s the lasting impression you really want to make.”

*You have a responsibility. Your actions, whether you realize it or not, will affect the lives of others. The beauty of the gift is that it can inspire.* These are the lessons that the runners’ daughter grew up hearing.

Everything about the sport of distance running now is just plain bigger than it was 40 years ago. There are more people who participate in running events, more people who watch running events, and more fans who follow the sport at the elite level. Running-related web sites post news and instantaneous results from around the globe 365 days a year. Factor in blogs and social media outlets such as YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter, and a pursuit that used to be relegated to the shadows has suddenly been afforded unprecedented exposure.

With the magnitude of this information exchange, there is an even greater opportunity for a star like Flanagan to entertain, educate, and inspire. And both she and Edwards, her husband/manager, seem to grasp this about as well as anyone. Instead of being cowed by the high-speed changes that continue to affect the sport’s visibility, they welcome and embrace them. Perhaps it’s partially because Flanagan, as a child, was a firsthand witness to how her parents and their friends, including the great Frank Shorter, never really received the recognition that they deserved.

Now, between all of the training and interview videos being uploaded to the Internet and the blog posts and tweets, Flanagan’s quest to become the greatest distance runner this country has ever produced is being chronicled in real time. In the lead up to New York, for instance, she, Bairu, and Nelson starred in a web video series called “Rookies Versus the World.” Somewhere out there a young

► Flanagan decides to force the issue as the leaders approach Central Park.

girl following Flanagan’s compelling journey is being motivated to pursue her own big dreams. Somewhere, too, viewers tuning in to coverage of her performance in New York made the commitment to buy their first pair of running shoes.

Shalane Flanagan, quite simply, is at peace with her place in the world. And, thanks to the lessons she learned from her parents, she is comfortable with her status as a role model.

## The big shakeout

After mile 15, the women’s lead pack, still large, crossed the Queensboro Bridge and started a lengthy stretch up First Avenue in Manhattan. Seventeen, 18, 19 . . . the miles meandered past like a weak stream. Flanagan’s attention was split as the athletes headed toward the Bronx.

Yes, she needed to be hypervigilant for any potential move by one of her competitors, but she also had to stay focused on her own race since she was venturing deep into the unfamiliar.

In New York, the elite runners have their own designated aid stations every five kilometers, which stock their favorite fluids and gels. Flanagan knew in advance which tables were for her, but the size of the group was such that the stations in the early portion of the race were filled with commotion and congestion.

“I hated the aid stations,” Flanagan says. “They were just kind of a kamikaze thing with people weaving in and out. They were probably my least-favorite part of the race because it was such a large group.”

Schumacher, who was initially watching the race from the monitors in the media room, took off at the halfway point to check on his athletes from a couple of different vantage points along the course. He was as dismayed as anyone by how long the women’s lead group stayed intact.



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“It stayed patient for a little bit longer than I thought it would,” says Schumacher. “They definitely ran another three to six miles in that group than I would have thought.”

It wasn't until the runners hit Fifth Avenue after mile 21 that the preliminaries were abandoned and the race became a race. As the pace quickened, the stream became a fast-flowing river and, one by one, many of the runners in the lead pack began to drift behind—but not Flanagan.

The ambiance was electrifying, and what excited Flanagan most was realizing that many of the spectators knew her and of her career.

“It was amazing,” she says. “It was by far one of the most intense and exciting environments to be in. One of the number one things that people were cheering for was Carolina. A lot of people yelled, ‘Go, Carolina!’ and ‘Go, Tarheel!’”

And then, over the course of just a few city blocks, there were just three: Flanagan, Keitany, and Edna Kiplagat, who had raced to fame and fortune back in March when she not only won the Los Angeles Marathon but also bested all of the guys to pick up a cool six-figure bonus check. Flanagan, for her part, was not even aware that Kiplagat was still in contention.

“I knew about Mary, because she was pretty much the clear favorite to win the race,” she says. “I was not familiar with Edna. Honestly, she stayed so nicely tucked away that I don't remember ever really seeing her at all. It wasn't until we were on Fifth Avenue going toward the park that I realized we had a third woman there.”

Flanagan had been on the media truck for the 2009 Boston Marathon. She had had a ringside seat when Kara Goucher made her move with five miles left in the race in a bid to become the first American to win there in 24 years. Though she eventually faded to third, Goucher's assertiveness was fearless. It was bold.

“Maybe the one thing that I saw in that race with Kara was that she got excited a little too early,” says Flanagan. “So I tried to delay my excitement and my need to want to push the pace.”

But finally, as the trio reached the northeasternmost tip of Central Park, Flanagan couldn't contain herself any longer. Buoyed by the spectators, she put her head down and began to dictate the action.

“I was feeding off the enthusiasm of the crowd at that point,” Flanagan says. “I wanted to get a real battle going. That wasn't by design or plan. It was pretty much pure emotion and excitement more than anything else.”

Now Flanagan found herself in Goucher's shoes. An American woman hadn't captured New York since her parents were both still competitive runners back in 1977. *Why not me?* she thought. *Why not?*

For the second year in a row, the locals crowding the barricades in Central Park were going to be in for a treat: An American was in contention to capture

the grand prize. Could Flanagan duplicate what Meb Keflezighi had pulled off 12 months earlier?

As Flanagan led the way toward the entrance into the park, she was finally in familiar territory. She had run that last four miles so many times, in fact, that she had them memorized.

“The fans were just ridiculous, especially coming into the park,” Flanagan says. “That was probably my favorite part because the fans were really close and on top of you.”

But Flanagan’s legs began to rebel. Though she was accustomed to running on tired legs during training, this was a new sensation.

“My quads were pretty tired by then,” she says. “The downhill were actually the hardest part. I was making ground on the uphill, but I was having a really hard time keeping up on the downhill.”

Both Keitany and Kiplagat pushed past her at mile 25.

“I’ve never felt that same type of overall ache and fatigue in any type of track race,” she confesses. “It wasn’t even a cardio issue. It was just pure fatigue in my legs. I couldn’t move them any faster.”

Somehow, though, she did.

Just when it seemed as if Flanagan would have to be content with third place, she realized that Keitany, just ahead, was starting to come back to her. Flanagan, ever the competitor, decided to try to chase her down. As the fans in Central Park roared, she blitzed past Keitany and crossed the line second in 2:28:40. It was the highest finish by an American female since 1990.

Then, finally realizing her lifelong dream of becoming a marathoner, Flanagan dropped to

► Kiplagat and Keitany open a gap at mile 25, but Flanagan fights back to overtake Keitany less than a mile later.



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◀ A marathon success: Flanagan's second-place finish is the highest by an American female at New York in 20 years.

her knees just beyond the finish line and savored the moment.

### A bright future

What was perhaps most impressive about Flanagan's debut was the audacity she exhibited on the streets of New York. Marathon novices are supposed to be tentative in their approach. They're supposed to be in awe of the distance. But here she was, the ponytailed blonde in the red singlet, charging toward Central Park as if she was determined to plant a flag there.

"She executed," says Schumacher. "In terms of executing a marathon, and her first one, I think she did it brilliantly."

Flanagan's aggressiveness was further evidence that American distance running is back—that respectable finishes, while admirable, are no longer good enough. Goucher's third place finish at Boston in 2009, Flanagan's second place finish at New York in 2010, Amy Hastings' second place finish at Los Angeles in 2011, and Desiree Davila's second place finish at Boston in 2011—inspired by the success of Kastor and Keflezighi, the new generation of female marathoners races to win because it's convinced that it can do so.

The big-city marathon has dramatically altered the landscape of the sport. Thanks in part to the prize money and prestige associated with these highly competitive spectacles, performing well in a London, Chicago, or New York has worked its way up on the list of coveted goals. And unlike the Olympic Games, which come around only once every quadrennial, the big-city marathons offer multiple opportunities every 12 months to reach the podium.

"I think it's everyone's own personal opinion about how they would rank things," Flanagan says. "I'd say Olympic gold may still top everything, but finishing on the podium in New York was special. It was very different, but just as



special as my Olympic medal. And if I were to win a major U.S. marathon, that, to me, would hold more sentimental value than my Olympic medal.”

The more Flanagan reflects upon her experience, the more satisfied she is with her effort.

“I’ve had efforts in training that were much harder,” she says. “I came off the New York Marathon extremely well, I thought, for my first one. I was really pleased with how well I felt during and after, but I know that it won’t always be like that.”

Physically, she recovered quickly.

“Everything was really good,” she says. “The only side effects were my quads. The downhill absolutely trashed my quads.”

She did a light workout the day after the race, then took off a full 10 days during which she didn’t run a single step. In hindsight, she feels that may have been a mistake.

“I think for the next one I’ve learned that I need to do a little more massage therapy and a little more flushing of my legs, because once I started back up running I was still sore,” she says. “I think that was a great lesson that I taught myself—to take better care of myself post-race and to engage in the little things that you don’t want to do because you want to just let loose and not worry about it.”

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◀ In March 2011 Flanagan earned an individual and team bronze as a member of Team USA at the 2011 World Cross-Country Championships.

The “next one” will be on January 14, 2012, in Houston, Texas, where Flanagan will go head-to-head with the likes of Kastor, Goucher, Hastings, Davila, and Magdalena Lewy Boulet in what promises to be a very competitive 2012 U.S. Olympic Team Trials for the marathon.

For now, though, Flanagan has again shifted her attention back to the shorter distances, where she has already reasserted herself. In the beginning of February she dominated the 2011 U.S. Cross-Country Championships in San Diego and then, six weeks later, went to Punta Umbria, Spain, for the 2011 World Cross-Country Championships, where she placed third. It was the first individual medal for an American at the event since Kastor captured silver

in 2003. To make the day even sweeter, she, Huddle, and Koll helped lead the Americans to their second consecutive bronze medal in the team competition.

Flanagan has been quite open about her desire to improve upon her records on the track this summer. In addition to chasing fast times, she will also key on the 2011 USA Outdoor Track & Field Championships, from June 23-26, 2011, at Hayward Field in Eugene. If all goes well there, it will be on to Daegu, South Korea, for the IAAF World Championships from August 27 to September 4.

Even though her focus will be on the track during the coming months, her memories of her first marathon will never be far from her mind.

“I thoroughly enjoyed it,” she says. “It’s just very rewarding to tackle something that in the beginning seemed so daunting and scary. For my first marathon, I couldn’t have asked for a better scenario. I had a lot of fun.” 