

STARTING LINES

BIG APPEAL

• With backing from Oiselle, Nuun, Skechers and Soleus, Goucher is aiming for the 2016 Olympics in Rio.



INSIDE

9 WARM-UP
12 GEAR
16 TRAINING

KARA GOUCHER, 2.0

American marathon star retools everything for Olympic quest

BY BRIAN METZLER

— WITH HER PERKY SMILE and self-effacing wit, Kara Goucher is one of America's running sweethearts.

Integral to that charm is the fact that she has competed in two Olympics, earned a bronze medal at a world championships and placed third at the Boston Marathon and New York City Marathon over the past seven years. She's also adored for being a multitasking mom, giving birth to her son, Colt, in 2010, at the peak of her racing career.

But in order to pursue another Olympic berth in 2016, Goucher, who turns 36 this month, has forced some major changes.

After a decade of living in Portland, Ore., being sponsored by Nike and coached by Alberto Salazar and Jerry Schumacher, Goucher and her husband, Adam, a retired world-class runner, moved back to Boulder, Colo., to be closer to her family and reunite with college coaches Mark Wetmore and Heather Burroughs.

Along the way, she not only opted not to re-sign with Nike, but she also made the bold decision to turn down a seven-figure deal with another major shoe and apparel company to craft a portfolio of partnerships with brands she believes in.

The process took several months, and



"It's definitely been a whirlwind of changes compared to the previous 10 years of my career."

—Kara Goucher

It didn't help that an early spring stress fracture in her hip stalled her training and eliminated the possibility of running competitively on the track this summer. Now her next step toward making the 2016 U.S. Olympic team going to Rio de Janeiro will be running this fall's Chicago Marathon or New York City Marathon.

"It was a difficult and sometime scary process, but I had to do what was right for me and for my family," says Goucher, who owns a 2:24:52 marathon PR. "In the end, it is working out for the best, but it's definitely been a whirlwind of changes compared to the previous 10 years of my career."

Goucher's first move was to sign a partnership agreement with Oiselle, an upstart women's running apparel brand based in Seattle. The small but growing company couldn't match the money of larger, more established global brands, so CEO and founder Sally Bergesen offered her a long-term deal that gave her a vested interest in the company.

It was an innovative and risky deal for both sides, but Oiselle, a company known for its avant-garde designs and strong support of female athletes, immediately experienced a boost in sales, even before Goucher began offering her style and athletic insights to the brand's design team.

"When it comes down to it, following your heart can be flippin' hard—and scary," Bergesen says. "Turns out you have to not only follow your heart's desire, but run straight toward it."

After that, Goucher signed a three-year shoe sponsorship deal with Skechers, a huge lifestyle footwear brand still trying to make headway into the performance running category. It might have been viewed as a risky move too, but it came just a few weeks after 38-year-old American marathoner Meb Keflezighi, himself a former Nike athlete, won this spring's Boston Marathon wearing Skechers. With Goucher in the fold and working on a signature shoe model for 2015, the

brand entered the summer with huge momentum and a spike in its publicly traded stock.

Other partnerships with innovative hydration brand Nuun and Soleus running watches have helped round out Goucher's portfolio, but more deals are in the works, she says. Her new approach comes in stark contrast to the comprehensive but restrictive deals most top American runners have with a single shoe and apparel company.

During her first 12 years as a pro, Nike paid Goucher a monthly stipend, provided coaching and covered extra costs for sports medicine, massage and travel to races. She'll have to figure out some of that on her own, but the tradeoff is more freedom, flexibility and brand involvement.

After racing sparingly while being injured much of the past two years, Goucher knows she has to prove herself again this fall. But training and racing should be the easy part now that she's on firm ground again.

"Hopefully, five years from now, it won't be so weird for someone to have dual sponsorships or to sign with an apparel-only company and a different shoe brand," says Goucher, who credits Lauren Fleshman, another former Nike athlete who signed with Oiselle, as one of the pioneers of the new sponsorship model.

"If companies can work together, it can be mutually beneficial and an athlete can truly be more financially stable and perform even better so they're not having to work another job or struggle to pay for things they need for training. I just hope this winds up changing the current model so the athletes have more choices and, in the end, the U.S. benefits from having athletes who can run better."

MOTION PICTURED

TRAIL RUNNING, TRAVEL AND RICKEY GATES

As the business of trail running and racing grows, the film "On the Road" is a reminder of the uncomplicated joy inherent in spending time on the trail. Director and cinematographer Dean Leslie accompanied trail runner Rickey Gates, 32, on a free-spirited, six-day trail

running and motorcycle-riding journey from Colorado to California. It's no coincidence the 18-minute film shares the same title as Jack Kerouac's best-selling novel from 1957. "What makes this film is that Rickey is so intriguing and authentic—he is the epitome of the soulful pursuit,

whether he is traveling or trail running, and that pursuit speaks to the core of so many trail runners," Leslie says. Instead of trying to provide analytical and tidy "whys" into the life of a free spirit, he simply and stunningly conveys Gates' exuberance in doing what he loves. He hopes the film's big-sky vistas will inspire others to get out and explore wild spaces.

Watch "On the Road" at competitor.com/ontheroad.

