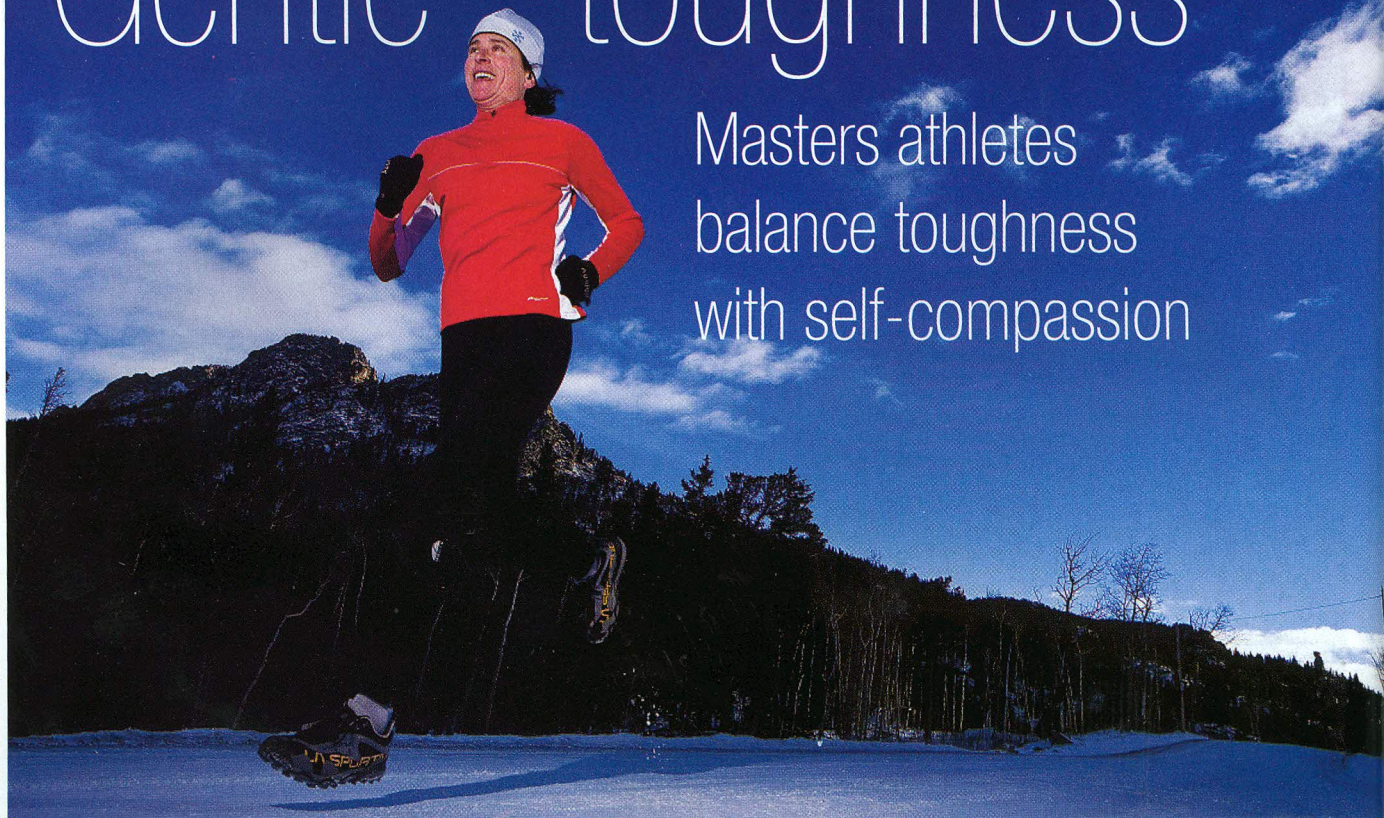


Gentle toughness

Masters athletes
balance toughness
with self-compassion



Photos by Jonathan Castner

Lisa Goldsmith training near Nederland.

For the past two months, we've looked at powerful female athletes. First, women who had overcome the odds. Then we met three Olympian mothers.

This month, we'll introduce you to local masters trail runners with the mastery of balancing toughness with self-compassion.

Part of what makes a powerful woman athlete rise to the surface is a dose of toughness and resilience. And on Boulder County's trails, you can find two women masters runners — over the age of 40 — with racing resumes that epitomize tough and resilient.

But what has kept them going so long — both in years racing and miles traveled — is quite the opposite of tough. Lisa Goldsmith, 44, and Stephanie Ehret, 45, say they've made it this far because they have compassion for themselves.

Boulder native Ehret has completed more than 40 ultra marathons from 28 to 710 miles, placed first among women in 19 of those races and won four of them outright, beating all men and women.

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— Stephanie Ehret

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Ehret had tackled the high-altitude Colorado ultra, the Leadville 100, five times and placed second among women twice. And several close brushes with death have taught her that it's easy to be tough, but being compassionate with yourself takes more work. While racing, Ehret has suffered from hyponatremia and thrown up her stomach lining twice in the middle of a 100-mile race. She has endured cerebral edema running up Mount Kilimanjaro, and also spent two days in intensive care recovering from rhabdomyolysis, a precursor to acute kidney failure from too much physical exertion.

Now, Ehret is learning how to find balance between challenging her limitations and caring for her health.

In Boulder, Ehret says, "We completely worship fitness and youth. It's strange to see women in their 40s and 50s

who are in better shape than their teenage daughters.”

As she sees it, a powerful female athlete is a woman “whose confidence and drive comes from within.” These women are not constantly comparing themselves to others.

“They therefore give me permission not to judge myself,” Ehret says.

She says a powerful woman athlete also strives to “listen to her body and respond appropriately.” Having learned the hard way, Ehret says “the idea is not to overpower the body’s communication — not to subjugate it — but to work with it.”

If you’re running in Nederland, you may bump into — or more likely be passed by — Lisa Goldsmith. She says her first memory is of her dad throwing a baseball to her.

“I either had to duck or catch it,” she says.

Ever since, she has been catching fast-balls tossed in her direction. Goldsmith’s vast resume includes winning the National Amateur Triathlon Championship in ‘88, riding as a professional cyclist for five years, and winning (and still holding the masters record for) the Pikes Peak Ascent (13.32 miles in 7,815 feet of vertical gain) — twice.

Still, one of the races Goldsmith is most proud of was not a personal best time. She says she ran the 2007 Boston Marathon “perfectly” because she was going for a “good experience.”

Focusing on the performance in a race, rather than the win, is a part of Goldsmith’s character. She considers a powerful female athlete someone who doesn’t give up, even when it doesn’t matter. That’s what makes competition fun, she says.

With so much success already behind her and most of her life dedicated to competition, Goldsmith says she doesn’t look too far ahead. She keeps measuring success by asking herself, “Am I still enjoying it? Am I still having fun with my friends? Am I still challenging myself?”

For Goldsmith, being tough doesn’t mean that you toss mindfulness out the window. She stayed up for three nights straight contemplating her decision to quit her career in bike racing. It was through this decision that she says she showed compassion towards her exhausted, anemic body.

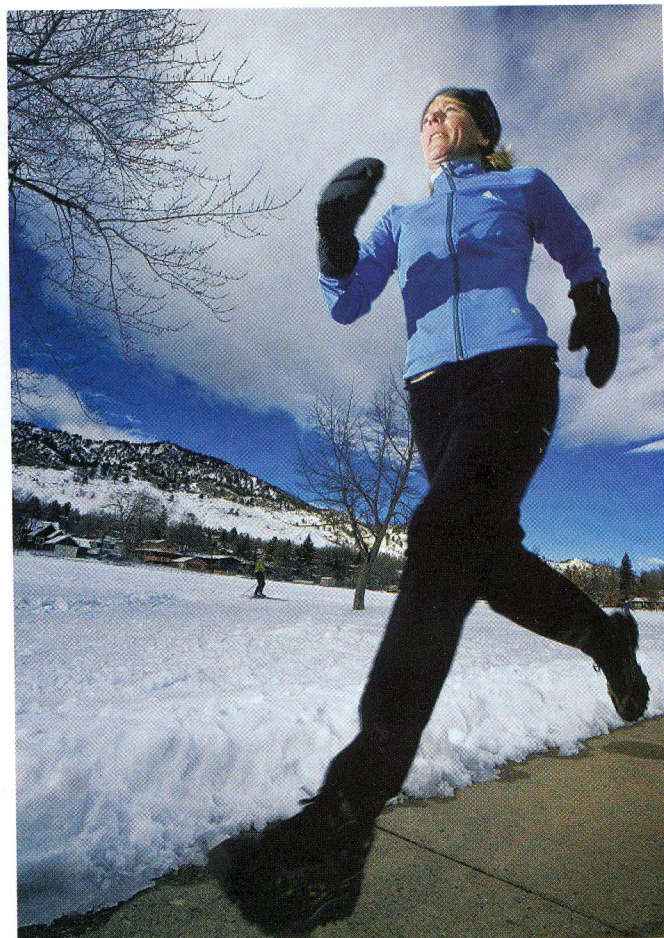
“I always knew I wanted to be happy,” she says. “I never didn’t care for my body.”

Although she has considered “being too balanced” a possible roadblock to success, remaining true to her mind, spirit and body has allowed her to become the sharp yet cheerful athletic female role model that she is today.

— *By Amanda McCracken*

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Stephanie Ehret, above and below.



Photos by Jonathan Castner

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