

Tough women

# The model survivors



## What defines a powerful female athlete?

*Do* you have to be a mother? Must a woman athlete compete gracefully, with “lady-like” manners? Do you have to perform at world-class competitions?

I asked my friends this question. Most responses defined a powerful female athlete as physically and mentally strong, respectful of herself and others, determined yet wise,

and balanced. They said she must also inspire others through her commitment to the sport.

This month, Women’s Magazine is featuring two women in Boulder County who serve as positive role models in our community and have overcome large personal obstacles. This is the first in a three-part series about powerful women athletes. Next month, we introduce you to local Olympian mothers. And in January, we look at a masters athlete who pushes the limits.

Triathlete  
Colleen Cooke

Photo by Jonathan Castner

## A true lover of competition

If there's a race, Laurie Mizener, 39, has probably raced it. The Boulder woman adds to her athletic pursuits in triathlon, running and cyclocross with a job at Fleet Feet Sports. She also coaches for Fastforward Sports and is a volunteer coordinator the Fleet Feet triathlon and running teams. And she does all of this while supporting, as a single mother, her own 9-year-old daughter's athletic dreams, soccer, running and cycling.

In 1996, Mizener ran in the 1996 Olympic Trials Marathon. Little did she know then that she was yet to meet her fiercest competitor: her own immune system.

Shortly after her daughter was born in 1999, Mizener went blind in her right eye for several days. She was soon diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. She was faced with overcoming depression, redefining her identity and finding a way to continue running. She did all of this, she says, "by prioritizing health and longevity over living and racing for the here and now."

But today, she says that having dealt with major health setbacks helped her relate to non-elite athletes as a coach and in her work with customers. When she gets tired and stressed, the vision in her right eye still grows fuzzy. She has to step back and reassess what she's doing and why she's doing it.

Keeping her vision — literally and figuratively — in focus is a goal Mizener works on daily and a message she passes on to athletes in the community.

— By Amanda McCracken



Laurie Mizener

Photo by Jonathan Castner

### "If something scares you, do it."



Photo courtesy of Colleen Cooke

Perhaps most recognized by her trademark smile on the race course, Colleen Cooke, 36, is a well known tri-athlete in Boulder County. The smile, she says, helps keep her relaxed, while at the same time encouraging others.

Her motto: "If something scares you, do it." This has led her to finish four Ironman competitions and participate as a soloist in the six-day, 106-mile running race, TransRockies.

Cooke is also a nutritional counselor who encourages people to eat a little chocolate every day.

"If you give in to cravings, they become less taboo," she says. "If you resist the craving, you give it the power."

Cooke learned this the hardest way. She battled anorexia for 11 years before seeking counseling at the age of 26. She admits that living in Boulder County, ranked this year fifth-skinniest city in the country by "Money Magazine," can be intimidating and demanding for both men and women.

Sometimes, you have to step away from the athletic scene to stop comparing yourself with others and realize, "I'm OK," Cooke says.

— By Amanda McCracken