

## POWERFUL WOMEN ATHLETES

Several months ago, we asked you to define a powerful female athlete. Many of you listed confidence as a major characteristic.

To qualify for and compete in the Olympics takes an enormous

amount of confidence. To be an Olympian, while mothering your children, takes something undeniably greater.

This is the story of three Boulder and Broomfield county women who embody that rare quality of

steadfast trust in oneself: true powerful women athletes.

This is the second in a three-part series. Last month, we looked at athletes who had overcome great odds. Next month, we meet masters athleteS who push the limits.

# Local Olympic moms balance athletic passions with families

Photos by Jonathan Castner  
Story by Amanda McCracken



“The body achieves what the mind believes.”



**Shayne Culpepper,**

of Louisville, is the mother of three children under the age of 6, Cruz, Levi and Rocco.

She also has her sights on running in her third Olympic race in London 2012, under the coach and former Olympian, Steve Jones.

While the key race she is training for, the 1,500 meters, has traditionally been won by younger runners, Culpepper is not deterred.

She is inspired by Olympic sprint swimmer and mother, Dara Torres, who won a silver medal in the 50-meter sprint at the Beijing Olympics in American record time at the age of 41. Culpepper, who will be 38 for the next Olympics, believes she, too, can reach a personal best in the 1,500.

She and her husband, Alan Culpepper — a two-time Olympic runner — both think it's important to remain clearly aware that racing is “still just a game and not life.” She says her motivation is her curiosity.

Training naturally changes after pregnancy, depending on the individual and the pregnancy. After the births of her three sons, Culpepper says she found the longer runs easier because she had an increased volume of blood, and thus a higher aerobic capacity.

However, she learned after the first pregnancy to be cautious of “hitting the wall” after six months, and to give herself time to catch up with the increased workload of motherhood.

She defines a powerful female athlete as someone “not afraid to take charge of (her) own athletic career, (something) many female athletes let someone else do.”

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**Shayne Culpepper** with her sons Cruz, age 6, Levi, age 2, and Rocco age six months, at their home in Lafayette.



**Colleen Dereuck** and her daughter Tara Dereuck, age sixteen months, at their home in Boulder.

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### **When the apartheid in South Africa**

prevented three-time Olympic marathoner Colleen De Reuck from racing in the international elite competition, she took control of her athletic career.

In 1993, with faith in her racing future, she quit her career as a school teacher in South Africa, sold her home that had been fully paid for and left her family and friends to move to the United States with her husband and current coach.

Although the 1991 lift of the ban on South Africa's Olympic participation allowed De Reuck to compete in the '92 Barcelona Olympic marathon, she and her husband came to the states in the for the opportunities the race circuit offered to international athletes.

Only one year after the birth of her oldest daughter, Tasmin, De Reuck qualified for and ran the 10,000 meters in the '96 Olympics.

Her marathon performance at the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games was the last time she would run under the South

African flag. In December of that year, she became a naturalized American citizen.

After another four years of training, while raising her daughter, De Reuck became the oldest American woman to qualify for the Olympic marathon in Athens, Greece, at age 40.

Now at 44, De Reuck is still training and racing, but has readjusted her time goals. Although insists that she is a regular mother, DeReuck supports Tasmin's dancing pursuits, cares for her 17-month-old, Tara, and is training for another spot on the U.S. Olympic Marathon Team for the competition in 2012.

Whereas many other moms show up to events all "tartared up," she says, she drives up in a sweaty T-shirt. She says she sometimes has to explain to her embarrassed 13-year-old daughter that "they didn't just do a 20 mile run."

As a world-class 44-year-old athlete and mother of two, De Reuck's self-confidence has allowed her to be — as she defines a powerful female athlete — "successful in her own right."

## Current Olympic marathon champion, Constantina Dita

returned home to Erie just before the closing ceremonies of this summer's Beijing Olympics to see her 13-year-old son, Rafael, off to his first day of seventh grade.

Dita first came to the Boulder area in 2001 to train for her dream: a gold medal in the Olympic marathon.

This past August that dream came true. At 38 years old, she became the oldest athlete — man or woman — to win the Olympic marathon.

After shuffling between three months visiting their son in her home country of Romania and three months training in America, she and her ex-husband/coach, Valeriu Tomescu, decided to bring Rafael to America to “provide him with more opportunities,” she says.

Before the Olympic marathon, this past August, Rafael reassured his mom, “If you don't come in top three, you're still my mom. Please stay healthy.”

Dita sneaked out of the hotel — despite coach's orders — before her elite race in the Bolder Boulder this past spring to watch Rafael run his first 10K, the Citizens Race.

Her own first race was at age 17. A high-school teacher in her village of Turburea, Romania, seeing some twinkle of running potential in her, asked her to run in a race. She had no training, yet she raced a group of boys and beat them all.

Dita learned to trust herself throughout her 20 years of long-distance running in order to protect her body from injury and burn-out. In fact, that's how she defines a powerful woman athlete: “I trust me.”

Constantina Domesca Dita and her son Raphael at their home in Erie.

