

old ideas coming back to life

venhamon

April 7, 2021

USAIN BOLT

MO FARAH

OCR [obstacle course racing] **ROB KRAR**

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SCOTT JUREK MEB KEFLEZIGHI JOAN BENOIT SAMUELSON

DAVID EPSTEIN

JEFF GALLOWAY 70, Atlanta Olympian, Inventor of the Galloway **Run-Walk-Run Method**; *Runner's World* columnist Influence: Social Media Savvy, Elite Athlete, Expert

He's known as "America's Coach," and with good reason. Once one of the nation's fastest runners—a 1972 Olympian in the 10K who trained alongside the likes of Steve Prefontaine, Frank Shorter, and Bill Rodgers—he brought the sport to the masses by slowing things down for beginners. "He is personally responsible for inspiring thousands of people to participate in road races doing his method of run/walking," says Boston Marathon Race Director Dave McGillivray. Adds women's running pioneer Kathrine Switzer: "By making running—and marathons—achievable for everyone, he has transformed cities and charities and people." Galloway is also a motivational speaker, a race founder, a specialist retailer, an online coach, a technology innovator... the list goes on and on. Concludes running historian Roger Robinson: "His influence on the sport is incalculable."

The 50 Most Influential People in Running

September 1, 2015

RUNNER'S WORLD

The athletes, execs, inventors, and others who inspire us and enable our modern running lives

The first question we asked ourselves while embarking on this ambitious endeavor was, What do we even mean by "influential?" After lots of research, scrutiny, and debate, here's where we landed: Influence is the ability to set trends, inspire participation, and drive engagement in the sport and culture of running.

Definition in hand, we turned to a long list of experts representing a diverse cross-section of the running world: athletes, race directors, journalists, running-store owners, grassroots organizers, shoe-company execs, sport-governance officials—even a "run concierge." We asked each to nominate five people, giving close consideration to those from their corners of the culture who are having an impact today, in 2015. More than 60 smart, plugged-in leaders weighed in (with many of them being nominated by peers in the process).

In the end, 168 worthy nominees were put forth, and a team of *Runner's World* editors whittled them down to (about) 50, leaning strongly on the names that experts singled out again and again. (Read more about the process [here](#).)

We organized the finalists into six categories:

- Champions: The elite athletes who inspire us the most
- Maestros: The organizers of events that amaze and unite us
- Gurus: The coaches, journalists, and experts who make us better and smarter
- Innovators: The business leaders and ideas people who make the industry hum

- Advocates: The proponents of important causes who give voice to the average runner
- Visionaries: The brilliant minds who seek answers to the most important questions in running

Now, let the debate begin:

CHAMPIONS

USAIN BOLT

29, Kingston, Jamaica

Winner of six Olympic golds; owns 100- and 200-meter world records

Influence: Financial Clout, Social Media Savvy, Elite Athlete

The “world’s fastest man” is not just the most recognizable runner on the planet, but one of the most iconic athletes in any sport. Bolt has pushed the limits of human speed while transcending the doping skepticism that plagues his sport. What has made Bolt such a crossover sensation—he’s the only runner on the 2015 Forbes 100 highest paid athletes list, reeling in \$21 million last year—is his larger-than-life personality signified by his trademark “To Di World” pose. Well, that plus his genius marketing awareness: lucrative deals with Puma, Soul Electronics, and others ensure that even when he slows down on the track, the Bolt brand will live on.

MO FARAH

32, London

2012 Olympic 5K and 10K gold medalist; winner of five worlds golds and one silver

Influence: Social Media Savvy, Elite Athlete

He’s already an all-time great on the track and has plenty of competition left in him. Farah, who has recently been dragged into the doping scandal encircling his Nike Oregon Project coach, Alberto Salazar, has brought charisma to a sport that is often lacking in it—he’s gone after the 100-meter sack race world record, and has a signature move, the “Mobot,” that is somehow both derivative of Usain Bolt’s more famous pose and still utterly endearing. Put simply: The running world loves Mo Farah, and he loves it back. He’s inherited the space once filled by Haile Gebrselassie, and like that Ethiopian legend who set the marathon world record after a stellar track career, Farah’s foray into road racing has fans worldwide holding their breath.

SHALENE FLANAGAN

34, Portland, Oregon

Olympic bronze medalist; U.S. 10K record holder; second-fastest American woman marathoner

Influence: Social Media Savvy, Elite Athlete

Flanagan has won the hearts of running fans not for her race accomplishments—which are numerous—but for her unbridled, never-say-die spirit. Her gutsy effort in her hometown Boston Marathon the year after the bombings, when she led for 19 miles and set a PR but ultimately finished seventh, was a fitting counterpart to Meb Keflezighi’s stunning win in the men’s race. She’s drawn from that inner fire to be very vocal about doping in the sport, too. Pair that zeal with the backing of superbrand Nike and a strong social media presence, and it’s not too much of a stretch to say that, even after fading to ninth in Boston this year, Flanagan is the face of elite distance running in America right now.

LAUREN FLESHMAN

33, Bend, Oregon

Two-time U.S. 5K champion; cofounder of Picky Bars; writer

Influence: Social Media Savvy, Elite Athlete

Few elite runners have managed the awkward late stages of their pro career more effectively than Fleshman, who has a sponsorship with upstart women’s apparel brand Oiselle, her own energy bar company, a strong social media presence (it won her a 2015 Shorty Award—think “Oscars for social media”), and no problem poking the bears of the running world, particularly USA Track & Field. Fleshman, who also has written a *Runner’s World* column, is everywhere, even when not running. “She has reached a visibility that extends far beyond her achievements as a runner,” says writer David Epstein. “Her style,” adds journalist Dick Patrick, “is personal and revealing, drawing fans, especially women, to the sport.”

AMELIA BOONE

32, Chicago

Obstacle course racing superstar

Influence: Social Media Savvy, Elite Athlete

“You cannot have a conversation about OCR [obstacle course racing] that doesn’t start and end with Amelia,” says Matt Davis, cofounder of Obstacle Racing Media. OCR is the acronym that Tough Mudders/Spartan Racers/Warrior Dashers and the like use to describe the still-evolving space of endurance sport that they occupy.

Boone, a corporate lawyer, has emerged as a bona fide OCR superstar, winning the 2013 Spartan Race World Championship as well as the 2012 and 2014 World’s Toughest Mudder titles. She has succeeded at everything from sprint-style obstacle races to 24-hour slogs, exploits that have earned her a deal with Spartan Race title sponsor Reebok. All this from a person who discovered OCR by accident, and isn’t fully comfortable describing herself as a professional athlete—but does self-identify on Twitter as a “ketchup & Pop-Tarts enthusiast.”

Having conquered the OCR world, Boone is now turning her superstar smarts and competitive drive to ultrarunning. With exactly two traditional running events under her belt, a half-marathon and a trail race, Boone signed up for the Georgia Death Race, a 68-mile gauntlet with 40,000 feet of elevation change. She ended up placing 31st out of 170 entrants, and third among women. This April she won a 30K trail run in California and currently ranks as the top female Spartan athlete in the world. Are OCR and ultrarunning a fit? One thing seems clear: If anyone can bridge the gap between running disciplines, it’s Boone.

KARA GOUCHER

37, Boulder, Colorado

Two-time Olympian; 10K world championships bronze medalist; fastest American woman half-marathoner

Influence: Social Media Savvy, Elite Athlete

“Who doesn’t love Kara?” asks Tracey Russell, CEO of the Los Angeles Marathon. Goucher isn’t just one of the most recognizable runners in America; she may be the best at cultivating a fan base. In 2013, she struck out on her own—leaving sponsor Nike (she’d later sign with Skechers and Oiselle) as well as her coach, Jerry Schumacher, and training partner, Shalane Flanagan, to return to her college coaches in Boulder. The move has liberated Goucher, and not only to do fun stuff like hosting a wine-and-running retreat with fans in Napa last year, and blogging and tweeting about her training, motherhood, and cooking. In June, she boldly went on the record as part of an investigative story where she accused her former coach Alberto Salazar of impropriety. Goucher feels free, and that makes her as important to the sport as she’s ever been.

ELLIE GREENWOOD

36, Vancouver

and

ROB KRAR

38, Flagstaff, Arizona

UltraRunning magazine’s Ultra Runners of the Year

Influence: Social Media Savvy, Elite Runner

Though ultrarunning will likely never fully come into the mainstream, Greenwood and Krar are the kind of athletes that runners universally admire: dominant, courageous, and yet disarmingly modest. Greenwood, a Scotland native, inspired fans with her grit by overcoming a stress fracture in 2013 to cruise to victories in both South Africa’s iconic Comrades ultra and the 100K World Championships last year. Her course records include the grueling Western States 100-miler in California. Krar has combated his own challenge en route to winning Western States the past two years and the Leadville Leadville Trail 100-miler in Colorado last year: depression. He’s produced a short film where he’s opened up. “He’s gone public with it,” says ultrarunning legend Dean Karnazes, “and in the process has inspired and given hope to legions of others dealing with mental health issues.”

SCOTT JUREK

41, Boulder, Colorado

Ultramarathoner; author

Influence: Social Media Savvy, Elite Athlete, Expert

Jurek had already solidified his résumé as one of the greatest ultrarunners ever by the time his appearance in Christopher McDougall's best seller *Born to Run* made him practically a household name in 2009. He's won just about every ultra that matters and reigned at the epic Western States 100-mile Endurance Run for an astonishing seven straight years. This summer, Jurek made headlines by setting the Appalachian Trail thru-hike speed record, traversing the iconic route in 46 days, eight hours, and seven minutes. Jurek makes this list, however, not only for his athletic feats but for becoming a vegan icon since the 2012 release of his own *New York Times* best-selling memoir *Eat & Run*. In telling his personal nutrition journey and sharing some of his own plant-based recipes, he almost single-handedly made veganism viable for serious athletes. Through social media, appearances at races, and continued feats of extreme athleticism, he has carved out an enduring space for himself in the running world.

SANYA RICHARDS-ROSS

30, Austin, Texas

Winner of four Olympic and five world Outdoor gold medals, fastest 400-meter runner in U.S. history

Influence: Social Media Savvy, Elite Athlete

"Sanya is well-versed, ambitious, hardworking, and the most genuine athlete I've ever interacted with," says a man quite familiar with those traits, U.S. middle- and long-distance great Bernard Lagat.

Like her professed hero, track legend and outspoken civil rights activist Wilma Rudolph, Richards-Ross has leveraged her visibility to effect major change. Since the 2012 London Olympics, she has been in the vanguard protesting the International Olympic Committee's Rule 40, which restricts sponsor promotion (and therefore earning) opportunities for athletes during and around the Games—and in February, the IOC announced a change that will allow athletes to promote their individual sponsors, just in time for Rio 2016.

Unlike many athlete dissidents in track and field, where career vitality relies on often-fickle sponsorships, Richards-Ross has boldly spoken out while still in her competitive prime. In May, 11 years into her pro career, she led the women's distance medley relay team to a world record and also won gold in the 4 x 400 meter relay team at the IAAF/BTC World Relays in the Bahamas.

A Nike athlete, Richards-Ross also has her own reality show on WE TV, a youth empowerment sports clinic, a mobile app, and a large following on social media. She's been an active role model for young athletes and girls, and has also been open about her battles with a rare autoimmune disease.

Says another respected track vet, Olympian and Louisiana State University coach Khadevis Robinson: "She is truly an all-around ambassador for the sport."

MEB KEFLEZIGHI

40, San Diego

Olympic silver medalist; winner of the 2009 New York City and 2014 Boston marathons

Influence: Social Media Savvy, Elite Athlete

If the nominating process for this list had been a competition, Keflezighi would have won it going away. Though our 60 experts came from every corner of the sport, at least one in four of them named Keflezighi. Yes, he's wowed us with gutsy performances on the grandest stages, but Keflezighi's universal appeal only begins with his racing. Sports industry analyst Matt Powell notes that as a brand ambassador, his "win at Boston singlehandedly gave Skechers athletic performance credibility," and L.A. Marathon CEO Tracey Russell observed that "at the 2015 Boston Marathon Expo, it seemed as though every other booth had a life-size cutout of Meb." Few have more directly observed his impact than Boston Marathon race director Dave McGillivray, who perhaps best sums up Keflezighi's impact: "His character, demeanor, and integrity are second to none. He has inspired legions of people to take up the sport."

JOAN BENOIT SAMUELSON

58, Freeport, Maine

1984 Olympic Marathon gold medalist; founder of the Beach to Beacon 10K; Nike consultant

Influence: Social Media Savvy, Elite Athlete

That Samuelson's competitive ability has outlasted that of her contemporaries such as Bill Rodgers and Frank Shorter might explain why they both were so eager to nominate her to this list. "She's living proof of a paradigm shift in older women runners," says Shorter. She ran a 2:54:03 at this year's Boston Marathon, which would've beaten the

world record for 57-year-olds by 26 seconds except that the downhill point-to-point course disqualifies it. No matter: She already owns the age 53 mark and once upon a time set two overall world records of 2:31:23 and 2:26:12. With Samuelson, it's always been as much about her grace as a competitor as just how incredibly and consistently fast she's been. This fall she plans to run the Chicago Marathon, 30 years after setting an American record in the Windy City of 2:21:21. Her goal: to run within 30 minutes of that time.

MAESTROS

ADRIAN BIJANADA

36, New York City

Creator of the Obstacle Course Racing World Championships

Influence: Strategic Authority, Expert

Part of the challenge for “OCR” outsiders is grasping what falls under its umbrella: There's Tough Mudder, Warrior Dash, Spartan Race, and many other series. What makes Bijanada “a visionary,” according to Matt Davis, cofounder of Obstacle Racing Media, is that he aspires to bring all of these together with one singular title event. For the inaugural OCR worlds held in Cincinnati last October, Bijanada created standards and identified qualifying events from all over the world, developed a \$60,000 prize purse, and attracted 700 athletes from 12 countries, including OCR superstars like Spartan Race's Jon Albon and World's Toughest Mudder's Junyong Pak. This year he's tinkering with a global rankings system in advance of October's main event. “Adrian has created an event to unite everyone,” Davis says. “He was scoffed at by most at first—including me—then pulled it off.”

MICHAEL CAPIRASO

53, New York City

NYRR President/CEO

and

PETER CIACCIA

62, New York City

NYRR President, Events/NYC Marathon Director

Influence: Financial Clout, Strategic Authority

A footnote to Mary Wittenberg's entry is that it will take two people to replace her—these guys. By virtue of inheriting her New York Road Runners empire, Capiraso and Ciaccia are influential. Neither, however, are newbies: Capiraso has been with NYRR since 2010 and was the “day-to-day” boss as chief operating officer (not to mention that he has run the last 23 NYC Marathons), and Ciaccia, a 14-year NYRR veteran, was responsible for the operations of the NYC Marathon as the race's technical director. Wittenberg called him “the person responsible for growing the marathon into the world's largest.” The first major test for the twosome comes on November 1, when the NYC Marathon will be held without Wittenberg at the helm for the first time in a decade.

SEB COE

58, London

Orchestrator of the 2012 London Olympics; two-time 1500-meter Olympic gold medalist; IAAF president

Influence: Financial Clout, Social Media Savvy, Elite Athlete, Strategic Authority, Expert

Already one of the most powerful people in global track and field, Coe went up a notch in August when he was elected president of the IAAF, world road racing and track-and-field's governing body. The businessman, ex-member of parliament, and sports legend is still riding high after not only winning the Olympic bid for London but also for putting on a great show. *Runner's World* U.K. editor-in-chief Andy Dixon says Coe, in his new role, promises to reform the world meets calendar to increase the importance of big international competitions, youth engagement, and anti-doping resources. Journalist Roger Robinson calls Coe's manifesto a “visionary strategy.” One more fun Coe goal: making cross country a Winter Olympic sport.

RICH KENAH

45, Atlanta

Executive director, Atlanta Track Club
Influence: Social Media Savvy, Strategic Authority

The former 800-meter Olympian has been on the job only since February 2014, but he's made waves in a hurry. The Atlanta Track Club is best known for hosting the Peachtree Road Race—which drew 60,000 runners this year, making it the largest 10K race in the world. Kenah uses it as his playground for big ideas. “He’s going to make a positive impact on other races and organizations because he isn’t afraid to try new things,” says Merhawi Keflezighi, who would know: Last year Merhawi worked with Kenah on a quirk that set his brother, Meb, at the back of the field with the challenge of passing at least 22,500 runners to raise \$75,000 for an inaugural ATC youth race. This year, Kenah established a team competition, the Peachtree Cup, for elites from the U.S. against Africa, Asia, and Europe, linked to boosted purse prizes. Which has the running world asking: What will the mad race director think of next?

JEAN KNAACK

43, Arlington, Virginia
Executive director, Road Runners Club of America
Influence: Strategic Authority

Knaack, says former New York Road Runners CEO Allan Steinfeld, “has the ear of more running clubs and race directors than perhaps anyone.” For the last decade, she’s been behind the curtain guiding more than 2,400 event directors and club leaders on best practices, big and small, that have tangible impacts on the experiences of runners across the country. She helped roadblock notorious race canceler Dean Reinke and others like him from bilking runners in the future, helped revitalize the RRCA’s youth running program to the tune of \$115,000 in grants to youth clubs since 2007, and spearheaded the RunPro Camp, which helps top college runners transition to professional running careers. “She’s kind of under the radar,” says Merhawi Keflezighi, agent to his brother Meb and several other elite Americans, “but her network is so influential.”

MARY WITTENBERG

53, New York City
Global CEO, Virgin Sport, former president and CEO of New York Road Runners
Influence: Financial Clout, Social Media Savvy, Elite Athlete, Strategic Authority

Arguably the most influential woman in running now works for Richard Branson, one of the most unconventional billionaires on the planet. That in itself is an interesting development for the sport. How Wittenberg became the fitness consigliere to a man whose other interests include tourism of outer space also suggests that the best is yet to come.

Starting in 2005, Wittenberg oversaw the growth of NYRR, the world’s foremost running organization, which puts on the New York City Marathon, the world’s largest. In her last year alone, she increased the nonprofit’s income nearly 30 percent to \$87.5 million, which fuels an enterprise that puts on more than 50 races attended by more than 400,000 people. She grew the field for NYRR’s main event, the marathon, to 50,530 last year, and in 2012 secured a five-year deal with ESPN/ABC to televise the marathon and other NYRR events. Free youth running initiatives that she has spearheaded impact more than 200,000 kids a year.

Once a competitive runner who won the 1987 Marine Corps Marathon, Wittenberg has been unafraid to take up the mantle on big issues in the pro sport. A champion for elite athletes, she guided NYRR to be a leader in prize money. As cofounder of the World Marathon Majors—a partnership among the world’s six marquee races—she helped lead the charge to improve anti-doping protocols.

She’s endured her share of criticisms—including for the delayed cancellation of the 2012 NYC Marathon in the wake of Hurricane Sandy. It’s telling, however, the extent to which she’s endured the occasional storm, metaphorical and otherwise, to be so beloved by people from every corner of the sport: Out of 168 individuals nominated to our list, only Meb Keflezighi’s name came up more frequently.

Though details on Virgin Sport remain scarce, Wittenberg’s charge is to launch a lifestyle company focused on “expanding the reach of mass participatory events in running, cycling, and other formats.” In other words, it’s a role she’s uniquely suited for—only now, she gets to do it on a much larger scale.

VIN LANANNA

62, Eugene, Oregon

President, TrackTown USA; Associate Athletic Director, University of Oregon; Coach of the men's track and field team in the 2016 Olympics

Influence: Strategic Authority, Expert

Few have done more to put the U.S. in the international track-and-field spotlight. Specifically, Eugene: He's turned a town with an already rich running history into a mecca for big events. To the chagrin of some, who would like to see the wealth shared, Lananna has brought several major track meets to Oregon, including the 2014 world junior championships in Eugene and next spring's world indoor championships in Portland. The former title-winning track coach's biggest get came in April when it was announced that, for the first time, the world outdoor championships would be held in the U.S. at Hayward Field in 2021. "Vin not only had the audacity to suggest that a small college town in Oregon could host the sport's biggest competition and celebration," says Atlanta Track Club's Rich Kenah, "he had the skills to maneuver a minefield of international sport politics and pulled it off." In July, on top of all of his wheelings and dealings, Lananna was named the U.S. men's track and field coach for the 2016 Olympics.

DAVE MCGILLIVRAY

61, North Andover, Massachusetts

Race director, Boston Marathon; founder and president of DMSE Sports

Influence: Elite Athlete, Strategic Authority, Expert

One might describe McGillivray as "the race director's race director." In addition to conducting the Boston Marathon since 1988 and a grand total of more than 1,000 events since 1981 through his company, he might also be the most accessible man in the industry. "No matter what time of day or night," says L.A. Marathon CEO Tracey Russell, "he provides guidance and shares his wisdom to any race director—regardless of event size—who reaches out for help." It seems impossible that any one person could muster the energy for all those events and phone calls. This, however, is the same man (and dedicated philanthropist) who, in 1978, ran 3,452 miles across the country, raising \$150,000 for the Jimmy Fund in the process. He also runs his age in miles every year on his birthday—yes, he ran 60 on his 60th. In other words, he's hardly lost a step.

GURUS

DAVID EPSTEIN

35, Brooklyn

Reporter, ProPublica; author of *The Sports Gene*

Influence: Social Media Savvy, Expert

In June, Epstein teamed with the BBC to break one of the biggest stories of the year, documenting the accusations and evidence put forth by former Nike Oregon Project staff and runners that coach Alberto Salazar and distance star Galen Rupp violated anti-doping rules. (The two have denied the allegations.) In the last several years, Epstein has emerged as the preeminent investigative reporter on performance-enhancing drugs; while previously at *Sports Illustrated*, he helped break the news that baseball star Alex Rodriguez tested positive for steroids and also contributed to the efforts that toppled Lance Armstrong. His 2013 *New York Times* best-selling book *The Sports Gene* advanced public discourse over the role of genetics in sports, especially running. Epstein's stature has become such that the mere presence of his byline implies that a story is a big deal.

JEFF GALLOWAY

70, Atlanta

Olympian, Inventor of the Galloway **Run-Walk-Run Method**; *Runner's World* columnist

Influence: Social Media Savvy, Elite Athlete, Expert

He's known as "America's Coach," and with good reason. Once one of the nation's fastest runners—a 1972 Olympian in the 10K who trained alongside the likes of Steve Prefontaine, Frank Shorter, and Bill Rodgers—he brought the

sport to the masses by slowing things down for beginners. “He is personally responsible for inspiring thousands of people to participate in road races doing his method of run/walking,” says Boston Marathon Race Director Dave McGillivray. Adds women’s running pioneer Kathrine Switzer: “By making running—and marathons—achievable for everyone, he has transformed cities and charities and people.” Galloway is also a motivational speaker, a race founder, a specialist retailer, an online coach, a technology innovator. . . the list goes on and on. Concludes running historian Roger Robinson: “His influence on the sport is incalculable.”

HAL HIGDON

84, Long Beach, Indiana

Prolific author of running books; wrote best-seller *Marathon: The Ultimate Training Guide*

Influence: Social Media Savvy, Elite Athlete, Expert

There’s perhaps no clearer testament to the man’s staying power than this: When you Google “marathon training” or “half marathon training,” Higdon’s is the first name that you’ll see. “I ran my first marathon 15 years ago,” says Westin Hotel’s national running concierge Chris Heuisler, “and like nearly every first-time marathoner I meet in my job, I used his marathon training plan. It is remarkable that no one has dethroned Mr. Higdon from the top spot.” By Higdon’s own estimation, a half-million runners have gone 26.2 using his famous plan. A 1952 Olympic Trials qualifier in the 10K, record-setting masters runner, cofounder of the Road Runners Club of America, social media expert, and author of 36 books—with more on the way—Higdon has spent a lifetime working tirelessly to earn the trust of the running public.

MERHAWI KEFLEZIGHI

36, San Diego

Director, HAWI Management; agent to his brother Meb and other elite runners

Influence: Financial Clout, Strategic Authority, Expert

Keflezighi stays busy—and not only on account of his celebrity brother/client. *Runner’s World* contributing editor Peter Gambaccini describes him as “an ingenious and industrious business wizard who has dreamt up all manner of commercial opportunities for his brother Meb, Leo Manzano, and other clients.” It was “Hawi” who helped coordinate Meb’s charity challenge at the Peachtree Road Race last year. Hawi who guided Olympic 1500-meter silver medalist Leo Manzano to a then-shocking but, in retrospect, brilliant sponsorship with breakout shoe brand Hoka One One in 2014. Hawi who joined with Dave McGillivray and Superhero Events to create the potentially game-changing, qualifiers-only USA Half Marathon Invitational (to debut this November). And Hawi who ought to be the next Keflezighi the world gets to know on a first-name basis.

WELDON AND ROBERT JOHNSON

Both 42, Ithaca, New York

Cofounders of Letsrun.com

Influence: Social Media Savvy, Elite Athlete, Expert

The masterminds behind perhaps the most engaged online community of runners—particularly those at the front of the pack—have also earned their stripes as tenacious watchdogs.

The identical twin brothers founded Letsrun.com in 2000 after they moved to Flagstaff, Arizona, to focus on Weldon’s dream of qualifying for the Olympics. Sequestered in the high-altitude training haven, they launched the site, which to this day maintains an endearing early-Internet page design, to be a meeting place for those obsessed with competitive running.

Weldon (above left) fell short of his Olympic goal, but the site took off, boosted by the vibrancy of its “World Famous Message Boards.” The boards, which allowed for anonymous posting until recently, have been criticized by some as havens for vitriol and unfounded rumors, but they’ve also been a breeding ground for major story breaks: the outing of vice presidential candidate Paul Ryan’s bogus marathon PR claim started there, as did the chatter over a civilian photo that would help identify Boston Marathon bomber Dzhokhar Tsarnaev. The Johnsons themselves have been tenacious in their coverage of doping, breaking the news that former U.S. distance elite Mo Trafeh had purchased EPO.

“Love ’em or hate ’em—and that probably depends on how much time you’ve spent on the message boards—the more newspaper coverage of running contracts, the more Letsrun becomes the daily newsfeed for breaking news and quick

results,” says author David Epstein. Indeed, Letsrun.com’s homepage has become an essential bookmark for followers of the elite sport.

RAY MAKER

33, Paris

DC Rainmaker fitness tech blogger

Influence: Social Media Savvy, Expert

Maker produces one of the most popular running/cycling/triathlete gear review sites, drawing over a million unique visitors a month, almost entirely on his own—and all around his real job, as a computer networks and systems designer. Maker, an American who is also an avid runner (with a 2:54 marathon PR) and triathlete, has built a die-hard following on his website and social media through rigid independence and a geeky yet relatable thoroughness in his reviews. (Readers are also drawn by wanderlust to his frequent travel postings.) To the former point: He won’t let brands he reviews advertise on the site. To the latter, he delivers IT-guy know-how on reviews of watches, cameras, activity monitors, and much, much more—and supplements the nuts-and-bolts stuff with nifty how-to guides. For the running technophile, Maker’s site is a daily must-visit.

ALBERTO SALAZAR

57, Portland, Oregon

Head coach, Nike Oregon Project; distance-running legend

Influence: Financial Clout, Elite Athlete, Expert

“He’s probably the most successful coach in America and maybe the most controversial,” says running journalist Dick Patrick, who made that remark prior to a June ProPublica/BBC report that accused Salazar and his star pupil Galen Rupp of violating anti-doping policies (Salazar and Rupp have refuted the allegations). As a coach, Salazar made his name shepherding the careers of one of the planet’s best distance runners (Mo Farah), arguably America’s best 10,000-meter runner (Rupp), and other accomplished runners, with a reputation for pushing the legal limits of modern sports medicine. He’s also an avatar of his employer, Nike: intimidating, aggressive, indomitable. His critics call him a bully and have long questioned the secrecy and intensity of his training program; his supporters have praised him for his savvy and passion. He is, after all, a man who has come back from the brink of death twice. The question now becomes: Will the obsessive competitive drive that made him a legend also be his undoing?

HAJO SEPPELT

52, Berlin

Journalist; doping watchdog

Influence: Expert

Seppelt may be the most dangerous man in the sport—if you’re a crooked official. He started making waves in the track-and-field world in 2012 with an exposé of rampant doping in Kenya. Late last year he released an incendiary documentary that accused Russia of widespread systematic doping—and implicated the IAAF, the governing body for the sport, in covering it up. Then, in August, he released another documentary revealing what he reports are blood tests from the IAAF from 2001 to 2012 that show that a third of medals in distance events at the Olympics and World Championships during that time frame were won by athletes with “suspicious” bloodwork—results “highly suggestive of doping or at the very least abnormal,” according to an expert interviewed in the film. “After so many years of speculation and the isolated suspension here or there,” says ProPublica reporter David Epstein, “he pulled back the curtain, and I think launched an investigation that will carry on and even grow for years.”

INNOVATORS

SALLY BERGESEN

47, Seattle

Founder and CEO, Oiselle

Influence: Social Media Savvy, Strategic Authority

Oiselle is still small fry compared with the giants of the running industry—with sales at almost \$10 million last year—but in opening its first brick-and-mortar store in Seattle this summer, Bergesen's showing that her flock is here for the long haul. She's a fighter—fearlessly critical of the likes of Nike and USATF—and she needs to be; as this very grouping demonstrates, she's elbowing for space in an industry dominated by male executives. Her women's-only apparel brand has fostered a fierce following in no small part because of its sponsorship of top runners like Kara Goucher, Lauren Fleshman, and a crop of up-and-comers including Lauren Wallace, the surprise national champion in the 1K at U.S. indoors this year. The brand embraces its ambassadors beyond their PRs and gives them a platform—as runway models during New York Fashion Week, as personalities online—to create fans. Count fellow influencer Mary Wittenberg as one: “She's building her brand by giving voice to women athletes and celebrating the strength and confidence of women runners.”

TOM CARLEO

51, West Newton, Massachusetts

Vice President of Running, New Balance

Influence: Financial Clout, Elite Athlete, Strategic Authority, Expert

Carleo, a 1988 1500-meter Olympic qualifier, was a popular nominee among the specialty running store operators polled for this list. Chances are you've worn a shoe he's had some hand in bringing to life: He spent 15 years at Nike and helped develop the Bowerman Series shoe line, then helped lead Saucony's revival in the mid-00's, and, since 2008, “has had a great influence on New Balance's turnaround in running,” says Ken Sung, co-owner of Gazelle Sports in Michigan. The brand has found success with its product line, which John Benedict, co-owner of Michigan's Playmakers specialty stores, matter-of-factly says “are selling well with great consumer acceptance.” Carleo has also signed to Team New Balance some of track's brightest stars, including 1500-meter champion Jenny Simpson, 800-meter ace Brenda Martinez, and steeplechase phenom Emma Coburn.

JOHN LEGERE

57, Bellevue, Washington

President and CEO, T-Mobile

Influence: Financial Clout, Social Media Savvy

The colorful telecom tycoon isn't just one of running's biggest fans—he might be its richest, too. The latest information on his earnings shows that, in 2013 alone, he raked in \$29 million, and the prolific tweeter/hot pink shirt-wearer/tech party-crasher/avid runner seems intent on spreading the love to his favorite sport.

Legere, who at age 53 ran a 2:53 at the 2011 NYC Marathon, appears to be trying to single-handedly improve earning incentives for top American runners. Last May, he ponied up \$20,000—including \$5,000 first-place prizes—to help miler Nick Willis launch the Michigan Track Classic. Prior to the NYC Half this March, he tweeted a series of performance-based offers to Meb Keflezighi and other top American men; Legere ended up donating \$25,000 to Keflezighi's namesake charity for leading the race coming out of Central Park. For the BAA 5K in April, he took to Twitter again to announce bonus awards of \$5,000 each to Ben True and Molly Huddle for breaking American records. He timed the announcement of a T-Mobile sponsorship of Keflezighi to just prior to this year's Boston Marathon, and also tried (and failed) to offer a performance bonus to top Americans at the race. Earlier in 2015, he made a six-figure donation to his alma mater, UMass Amherst, where he ran competitively. He frequently tweets encouragement and congratulations to top American runners.

Legere's long-term strategy with this foray into elite running remains inscrutable; the casual timing and method for his prize announcements almost give the impression that he's making them as the mood strikes. The amounts are basically Monopoly money to a man of his wealth. Still, his running résumé and prior involvement on NYRR's board of directors reveal a sincere interest in the vitality of elite running. For a sport always yearning for investment from companies and individuals outside of running, that's a wonderful thing.

MARK PARKER

9, Beaverton, Oregon

President & CEO, Nike, Inc.

Influence: Financial Clout, Strategic Authority, Expert

“When you think Nike, you think Phil Knight,” says *Runner’s World* writer John Brant. “But Parker is the man in charge, and over the last several years at the helm, he has led the company to some of its best years ever. In terms of running, it’s Nike’s world, and the rest of us are just living in it.” The baton pass will become official in 2016, when Knight has said he will be stepping down as chairman. Parker joined Nike as a shoe designer in 1979 after running at Penn State University; he rose to president and CEO in 2006 and last fiscal year saw sales rise 10 percent to a whopping \$30.6 billion. His is the kind of company that can sign a \$500 million deal with USATF and lead observers to call it a bargain for the shoemaker. Nike sponsors most of the top distance runners in the country, including Shalane Flanagan, who credits the company for “consistently” backing the elite sport. It remains a trendsetter in mass-market shoes and apparel—including its wildly successful Free line and, lately, in wearable tech through its growing relationship with Apple. “Parker’s attention to design excellence and state-of-the-art innovation,” says shoe-industry analyst Matt Powell, “has made Nike the industry leader in technical product.”

LESLIE JORDAN

72, Portland, Oregon

Founder and president, Leslie Jordan, Inc.

Influence: Financial Clout

Chances are that if you’re a frequent road racer, you have a Leslie Jordan tech T somewhere in your closet. She founded her apparel design and manufacturing company in 1986, originally specializing in light Tyvek jackets before becoming an early adopter in the production of moisture-wicking technical shirts. Over the years her wholesale offerings to race organizers expanded to hats, totes, flip-flops, and an array of other swag; her operation grew to 16 factories in six countries and was one of the first to supply gear for international events. In 2006, Jordan was inducted into Running USA Hall of Champions. Still at the wheel as her company approaches the end of its third decade, Jordan is, says Running USA president Beth Salinger, “an influential woman in a male-dominated industry and is always ahead of the curve.”

MAX SIEGEL

50, Indianapolis

CEO, USATF

Influence: Financial Clout, Strategic Authority

The shortcomings of the sport’s behemoth governing bureaucracy have been well documented, but there’s no denying the deal-making savvy of its top executive. Since his hiring in 2012, following a tumultuous period after Craig Masback left the post, Siegel has nearly doubled USATF’s annual revenue behind a flurry of new partnerships—highlighted by a 23-year, \$500 million new contract with longtime national team sponsor Nike. The windfall has helped him begin to answer the demands of elite athletes who want more prize money at national championships and more earning opportunities overall. A businessman with past experience at NASCAR and in the music industry, Siegel has used his “marketing acumen” to make a big difference, according to former NYRR CEO Allan Steinfeld. “He’s an important player for the Olympians,” says agent Merhawi Keflezighi, “and has been a stabilizing force within the organization.”

TRAVIS SNYDER

37, Salt Lake City

Founder and CEO, The Color Run, LLC

Influence: Social Media Savvy, Strategic Authority

By now, nontraditional races are entrenched in the running culture: Since 2009, participation in them has grown from 100,000 to 4 million in 2013, more than half marathons and marathons combined. “Mainstream running events don’t like these guys,” says former USATF president Bill Roe, “but I maintain that for every runner they siphon off, they are probably creating a new participant who wasn’t running before.” Snyder’s all-comers The Color Run—branded the “Happiest 5K on the Planet”—has catalyzed this trend and hosted more than 300 events in more than 50 countries last year. To Roe’s point: About 60 percent of The Color Run entrants have never run a 5K, which has “helped launch the third running boom,” says former Running USA media director Ryan Lamppa, who hedges: “See me in five years for confirmation.”

ROBIN THURSTON

43, Austin, Texas

Chief Digital Officer, Under Armour; cofounder MapMyFitness

Influence: Financial Clout, Elite Athlete, Strategic Authority, Expert

Under Armour has positioned itself to be at the forefront of the digital fitness revolution—and has handpicked a workout app whiz to lead the way. Recently becoming the second-biggest fitness apparel company in the U.S. behind Nike, UA has recently snapped up \$710 million worth of health apps, including MyFitnessPal, Endomondo, and Thurston's own MapMyFitness, and put the former pro cyclist in charge of it all in its new Connected Fitness division. In September, an investment bank survey reported that Under Armour's fitness app was the most preferred by women. The play is coming together just as rival Nike has scuttled its FuelBand and shifted its focus from wearables to integrating its Nike+ Fuel app with Apple's HealthKit. Basically, the rival companies are competing for your data to learn more about how people exercise so that they can create better apps and gear. And with more than 150 million Connected Fitness users already, Thurston's got his work cut out for him.

JIM WEBER

55, Seattle

CEO, Brooks Sports, Inc.

Influence: Financial Clout, Strategic Authority, Expert

Quick: Name the number-one-selling shoe brand in specialty running stores. Nope, not Nike—it's Brooks. To hear Brooks senior vice president Dan Sheridan tell it, this has been the goal ever since Weber took over in 2001: "Under his leadership, the company decided to focus singularly on the run." The brand with the "Run Happy" philosophy just finished its 13th year of record revenue and has hauled in a load of running-shoe design awards. Weber has "a relentless focus on world-class customer service," says industry analyst Matt Powell. Weber is the type of CEO to respond directly to customer complaints on Twitter. His arrival at Brooks, and with it his plan to compete with Nike by specializing, came "at the right time," says Super Jock 'n Jill store owner Chet James. "The consequence of timing, having a great team, and funding aimed at trying to be the 'runner's brand' all lined up."

ADVOCATES

MO'ATH ALKHAWALDEH

26, Amman, Jordan

Elite marathoner; programs officer at Generations for Peace

Influence: Elite Athlete, Strategic Authority

What makes Alkhawaldeh special isn't that he dreams of inspiring the next generation of Jordanians by qualifying for the 2016 Olympic Marathon (his PR is 2:33)—it's that he's dedicated his life off of the roads to that same cause. After coming to the U.S. on a full-time athletic scholarship at the New York Institute of Technology and earning his bachelor's and master's degrees, as well as doing stints at the United Nations and in finance, he returned to Jordan to work for Generations for Peace, a renowned peace-building nonprofit. Alkhawaldeh implements youth programs in 22 Middle Eastern and African countries that are focused on using sports to address issues of conflict in those communities. Says Paul Thompson, a standout masters runner who coached Alkhawaldeh in New York: "He's almost single-handedly showing how running can enrich the lives of his country folk."

MOLLY BARKER

54, Charlotte, North Carolina

Founder, Girls on the Run

Influence: Elite Athlete, Expert

The numbers speak for themselves: What began with Barker and 13 girls in North Carolina has grown to a nonprofit running/life-skills program that now reaches over 160,000 preteen girls in more than 225 cities and that hosted 333

year-end 5Ks in the U.S. and Canada last year. Barker, a former Ironman triathlete with a master's in social work, hit on a crucial need: The World Health Organization has found that adolescent girls are twice as likely as boys to suffer anxiety and depression and that regular physical activity can be as effective as antidepressants and psychotherapy. Barker no longer has a formal role with the movement she launched, though she remains, says Kathrine Switzer, "the face for this organization that is using running to empower many thousands of young girls and get them on the road to fitness for life."

ASHLEY HICKS-ROCHA

32, Atlanta

and

TONI CAREY

31, Atlanta

Cofounders, Black Girls Run!

Influence: Social Media Savvy, Strategic Authority

Take it from Atlanta Track Club executive director Rich Kenah: "Toni and Ashley have organically created and grown a running network, not just a running club or organization. By opening chapters in most major cities across the U.S., these two women have not only allowed black women to tackle what they saw as an obesity problem in their community, they have empowered women to take first steps into a running world that had typically been dominated by 'white men in short shorts.'" Since launching in 2009, Black Girls Run! has seen ambassadors start branches in 71 cities across the country, membership numbers hit 209,000, and Oprah Winfrey give her stamp of approval. The growth has been spurred by a fun and welcoming organizational attitude governed by the motto "Preserve the Sexy." "Theirs is the model by which running networks will grow in the future," Kenah says.

EDWIN MOSES

60, Atlanta

Chairman, Laureus Sport for Good Foundation; two-time Olympic gold medalist in the 400-meter hurdles

Influence: Elite Athlete, Strategic Authority, Expert

The restlessly brilliant hurdling great has always craved a challenge. During his career he led the charge for out-of-competition PED testing, and after retirement he served on the IOC's Athletes, Medical, and Ethics commissions and is now the board chair of the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency. He's gotten his MBA, received an honorary doctorate, and worked on Wall Street for about five years. Perhaps his most important work, though, has come during his 15-year tenure with Laureus, which has grown from supporting just one community sports program targeting disadvantaged youth in 2000 to, today, more than 150 in 35 countries. Under Moses's direction, Laureus estimates that the number of kids impacted by these programs—which use athletics to combat social problems ranging from HIV/AIDS to racial and religious intolerance to crime—is in the millions.

TRACY SUNDLUN

63, San Diego

Senior vice president for events, Competitor Group, Inc., Head manager of the U.S. men's track and field team for the 2016 Olympics

Influence: Financial Clout, Strategic Authority, Expert

In August 2013, Competitor Group made an announcement that rocked the U.S. distance-racing world, citing "a strategic decision" to significantly cut its North American elite athlete program resources at its flagship Rock 'n' Roll Marathon Series: No more appearance fees or paid travel and lodging expenses for top runners, many of whom rely on such incentives to sustain their careers and find races at which to earn Olympic Trials qualifying times. Sundlun, who has played a major role in Rock 'n' Roll's geographic expansion (it expects 500,000 participants this year), says Allan Steinfeld, was the man on the inside who "convinced [his fellow executives] to reinstate it." After extreme backlash, the mea culpa came four months later, along with the announcement of guaranteed prize money at every North American race. "He fought tooth and nail for the elite structure to be enhanced, suffered when it was temporarily pushed aside, and worked very hard to get it back," says former USATF president Bill Roe.

BROGAN GRAHAM

32, San Diego

and

BROJAN MANDARIC

33, Boston

Cofounders, The November Project

Influence: Social Media Savvy, Strategic Authority

It's one thing to start a fire—as these two did when they launched their early morning, high-intensity group fitness movement in 2011—but it's another thing to keep it burning bright. It started with a few dozen brave souls meeting around metro Boston three mornings a week for strength work, steps, and hills, then expanded to more than 300 in the fall of 2012, then to six other cities by the end of 2013, and in 2014 went from seven to 17 and has now reached 26 November Project tribes. Things have blown up so fast that the cofounders have relinquished leadership of their Boston group to focus on expansion (with sizable financial help from The North Face). Graham, in keeping with the group's communal ethos, deferred attention by nominating Laura McCloskey to this list, a former Northeastern runner who moved across the country to found what is now one of November Project's most rabid tribes in San Francisco, drawing more than 200 members at some workouts. For empowering such dedicated ambassadors, we must pause to salute the original vision keepers.

KATHRINE SWITZER

68, Hudson Valley, New York

Women's running pioneer; 261 Fearless founder

Influence: Elite Athlete, Strategic Authority

Switzer made history in 1967 when she became the first woman to officially run the Boston Marathon. “Kathrine bravely paved the way for so many female marathoners,” says Deena Kastor, who owns the women's national record at the distance. Switzer's Boston breakthrough, however, was just the beginning. She's been an advocate for female runners ever since, creating women's race series, helping lobby the IOC to add the women's marathon to the 1984 Olympics, embarking on a career as a television commentator, writing three books, and last year launching 261 Fearless. A nod to the number on the bib that a race official tried to tear from her chest at Boston in '67, it's a women's empowerment movement with a goal of hosting 261 women's running events in the next decade. In 2017, on the 50th anniversary of her first Boston run, Switzer plans to move from broadcasting the race—which she's done every year since 1977—to running it for the first time in 41 years.

TRAVIS TYGART

44, Colorado Springs

CEO, U.S. Anti-Doping Agency

Influence: Strategic Authority, Expert

The man chiefly responsible for bringing down Lance Armstrong will also oversee the investigation into Alberto Salazar's elite running group. Tygart, a lawyer, leads arguably one of the most well-respected anti-doping outfits on the planet and has been tenacious in his mission to stamp out cheating in American sports. With USADA since 2002 and its top executive since 2007, Tygart was instrumental in the doping investigation of the BALCO laboratory in San Francisco (infamously linked to several pro baseball stars and sprinters Marion Jones and Tim Montgomery), the DEA bust of Chinese steroid shipments known as Operation Raw Deal, and the probe of Armstrong and the U.S. Postal Service pro-cycling team. His “Reasoned Decision,” a massive document detailing USADA's case against the cyclist, “capped a paradigm shift,” says Frank Shorter, who was USADA's first chairman. “Athletes were no longer afraid to come forward.” For fans and athletes weary of doping scandals in running, there's no leader more important.

VISIONARIES

IRENE DAVIS, PhD

60, Cambridge, Massachusetts

and

DANIEL LIEBERMAN, PhD

51, Cambridge

Running biomechanics researchers, Harvard University

Influence: Expert

The colleagues are among the most influential scientists in running. Lieberman's famous 2004 Nature paper, "Endurance running and the evolution of Homo," popularized by Christopher McDougall's *Born to Run*, discussed the importance of endurance running to humans over the millennia and helped precipitate the barefoot-running boom. In the years since, Lieberman (a 3:24 marathoner) has studied Kenyan and Tarahumara Indian runners and published noteworthy studies on foot strike, running economy, and injuries. Davis, the director of Harvard Medical School's Spaulding National Running Center, specializes in helping injured runners by analyzing and correcting form. She's a believer that bad form is a culprit in running injuries and is fighting to make "gait retraining" part of standard physical therapy.

ANDREW JONES, PhD

45, Exeter, UK

Head of Sport and Health Sciences, University of Exeter, UK

Influence: Social Media Savvy, Expert

If you've been downing beet juice for a natural performance boost the last few years, you can thank Jones (or @AndyBeetroot, his Twitter alter-ego). His impact goes far beyond conducting the early research on the root-crop breakthrough, however, having been, among other things, the longtime physiologist to U.K. running legend Paula Radcliffe. In measuring her VO2 max at an otherworldly 70 ml/kg/min when she was 17 years old, he had the scientific evidence that predicted her greatness long before she was a marathon world record smasher. Other top-line work by Jones includes studies showing that greater tendon stiffness—indicated by a poorer sit-and-reach—may be tied to better running economy. "He is an absolute world-class scientist with hundreds of publications," says Trent Stellingwerff, Ph.D, of the Canadian Sport Institute.

STACY SIMS, PhD

42, San Francisco

Exercise physiologist/nutrition scientist; cofounder and chief research officer, Osmo

Influence: Elite Athlete, Expert

The former competitive ultrarunner, Ironman and Xterra triathlete, and professional road cyclist is set on changing the fueling game for runners, especially women. One of Sims's primary targets: the Gatorades of the world that she believes overload athletes with carbohydrates to the detriment of hydration. Her company Osmo Nutrition, which launched in 2012, intends to correct an industry obsession with crashing.

Sims believes the solution is simple: Separate fueling from hydration, or as Osmo touts, "food in your pocket, hydration in your bottle." In practice, her recommendation is to fuel well in advance of training or racing—three or four hours—drinking a low-carb hydrating drink (the term is "low osmolality"), and being mindful not to misread late-workout fatigue as a need to fuel up when it might just be dehydration. Sims spent about 15 years researching the science and used herself, pro teammates, and elite endurance athletes as guinea pigs. Osmo's product line emphasizes in-workout hydration paired with postworkout recovery protein.

Sims's other main interest is how women's fitness needs differ from men's. "Women are not small men"—a dig at the overemphasis on male subjects in exercise physiology studies—has been adopted by Osmo as a slogan for its women's line. Her research has found that hormonal fluctuations during the menstrual cycle can impact athletic performance. Her recommendation: Consume more protein before and after training, be mindful of hydration, and ingest more carbs for intense sessions.

NICOLAS MERMOUD

48, Chambéry, France

Co-Creator of the Hoka One One shoe

Influence: Elite Athlete, Expert

By now, everybody knows the iconic, super-cushy shoe that launched a "maximalist" revolution, but few are familiar

with the brains behind the concept. Mermoud, an elite French mountain runner, and his Hoka colleagues drew inspiration from skis, mountain-bike tires, and tennis rackets—equipment that emphasized oversized “sweet spots”—and was able to expand the platform of the shoe without adding weight, thanks to unthinkably light-yet-durable materials. In 2010, top U.S. ultrarunner Karl Meltzer tried them—and the rest has been history. Two years later, Mermoud and his partners Jean-Luc Diard and Christophe Aubonnet sold Hoka to Deckers Outdoor Corporation, whose CEO, Angel Martinez, deserves an honorable mention for sustaining the founders’ momentum, signing elite athletes from milers to ultrarunners and reeling in \$48 million last year. “Mermoud and company,” says *Runner’s World* Senior Content Editor Scott Douglas, “made cushioning cool again.”

TIM NOAKES, MD

66, Cape Town, South Africa

Endurance sports researcher; author

Influence: Social Media Savvy, Elite Athlete, Expert

Noakes has made a career out of challenging sport-science conventions; among other things, in the 1970s he helped disprove a theory that experienced marathoners couldn’t die from heart disease and pioneered an entire field of research on exercise hyponatremia (excessive hydration). He is perhaps most famously known for his book, *Lore of Running*. Now, the avid runner’s latest cause célèbre, outlined in his coauthored 2014 best-seller *The Real Meal Revolution*, is that a low-carb diet could actually be best for runners—going against the, er, grain of conventional carb-loading thinking. “Whatever he does is influential in running,” says David Epstein, “and now it happens to be this.” Noakes, however, recently found himself in hot water over a tweet sent last year advising a mother to have her baby follow a high-fat, low-carb diet. In November, he’ll face a hearing in front of the Health Professions Council of South Africa to determine if he acted unethically in dispensing the advice.

PAUL WILLIAMS, PhD

63, Berkeley, California

Guest scientist, Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory

Influence: Expert

What began with a questionnaire for *Runner’s World* readers in 1991 grew into the preeminent longitudinal study of the health impacts of our sport: the National Runners’ and Walkers’ Health Study. In its charge, Williams has collected and analyzed data on more than 150,000 subjects over 24 years. Reports stemming from his study have linked running with lowered risks of cancer, heart disease, high blood pressure, and an array of other ailments, and have also debunked the myth that running increases osteoarthritis risk. The study, which has received \$4 million in grants from the National Institutes of Health since it began, is close to running out of money, and Williams is awaiting word from the National Institutes of Health and from several potential industrial partners on future funding. Meanwhile, he continues to report from the study’s existing data, with several papers to appear soon on running performance and statin drugs (widely used for lowering cholesterol) and the benefits of running in people with high cholesterol.

Source: <https://rw.runnersworld.com/the50/>

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