

Athlete Profile
Magdalena Lewy Boulet

Marathon Trials Just Another Opportunity for PA/USATF Standout

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Magdalena Lewy Boulet is an optimist.

You can hear it in her voice, her words, see it in her low key but positive attitude.

"I try to make the most out of everything. It's in my background, my parents, where I came from. I grew up in a communist country. When an opportunity is presented to me, I just take advantage of it."

Lewy Boulet, 34, is now on the doorstep of, perhaps, her greatest opportunity. On April 20, 2008, she'll toe the line at the U.S. Olympic Team Trials - Women's Marathon in Boston, Massachusetts. At the conclusion of the 26.2 mile course, she hopes to achieve what barely eluded her in 2004—a chance to represent the U.S. at the Olympic Games. In 2004, Lewy Boulet finished the Olympic Trials Marathon with a time of 2 hours 30 minutes and 50 seconds—a 48 second personal record. Her fifth place finish, however, was just two places shy of securing a spot on the Olympic team. Now, Lewy Boulet is focussed on using that experience, and her dedication to the sport since then, to earn a ticket to the 2008 Games in Beijing, China.

Opportunity, and Lewy Boulet's personal and professional destiny, first knocked when the former resident of Jastrezebie, Poland, matriculated at the University of California, Berkeley in 1994. Less than three years earlier, Lewy Boulet and her family had arrived in Long Beach, California, by way of Kiel, Germany. In the United States, Lewy Boulet's parents sought a better life for themselves and their children.



Magdalena

GU Sports / Nathan photo

Success at Cal

At UC Berkeley, familiarly known as “Cal,” Lewy Boulet found success as a distance runner under the tutelage of veteran coach Tony Sandoval. Lewy Boulet’s collegiate career culminated at the 1997 NCAA Division I Outdoor Track and Field Championships, where she garnered All-American honors in the 5,000 meters by placing third with a time of 16:04.86.

In 1997, Lewy Boulet graduated from Cal with both a degree in human biodynamics and a profound love of coaching. Thus began a longstanding relationship with the Cal program as a volunteer coach. A long-term relationship of a more personal kind occurred when love blossomed between Magdalena—affectionately called “Magda” by her close friends and acquaintances—and Cal track and field alumnus, Richie Boulet. Boulet, a former national-class miler, became Lewy Boulet’s husband. Their son, Owen Wilberforce Boulet, was born in May 2005.

“I guess I bleed blue and gold,” Lewy Boulet said with a smile, referring to Cal’s colors. “My son learned to say ‘Go Bears!’ at 2 years old.”

In September, 2007, opportunity knocked again. Lewy Boulet, the research director for GU Sports from 2000 through April 2007, was offered the position of Assistant Coach of Track and Field and Cross Country at her beloved Cal. She accepted in what was literally an overnight decision.

“Tony [Sandoval] got back from Worlds and called me and we met the next day,” she recalled. “My husband and I discussed it and the next day I was at work!”

Elite runner, wife, mother, scientist, and now full-time coach at an NCAA Division I athletics program. Multi-tasking comes naturally to Lewy Boulet.

“I’ve done this for so long, on and off for the past ten years, on a volunteer basis,” she said. “It [coaching full-time] doesn’t seem like a big change to me because it’s been part of my life.”

“It’s just one of my passions. I enjoy working with younger kids or post-collegiate kids and seeing them develop. I enjoy seeing people achieving the goals that they set.”

And what about Lewy Boulet’s own running goals in 2008?

“The goal [of making the Olympic team] is still the same. It’s definitely taken me a little longer to get back to a routine that I had training for ’04,” she said, referring to the break she took from running in 2005 to give birth to Owen.

“I’m a pretty optimistic person,” she added. “When I went in to deliver Owen (by Cesarean section), I remember telling my husband ‘I’m just gonna take one day off, then get back up.’”

She laughed as she recalled her overly ambitious timeline.

“That’s why Richie’s such a good balance. He’s realistic. I’m very optimistic. I’m the type of person that just needs to be reminded to take it easy.”

Taking it easy is a relative term in the life of an elite marathoner. Lewy Boulet spent a month in the mountains this past summer, getting in four solid weeks of high mileage. She built up to 130 miles per week, her highest mileage ever.

In the course of a week, her bread-and-butter workouts include a threshold workout and a long run afterwards, or a long run plus interval work and fast repetitions.

Lewy Boulet typically trains twice a day, five days a week. She prefers hammering out her harder workout in the morning, and saving her recovery run for the afternoon.

“I *love* working out in the morning. I’m not a p.m. person,” she stated emphatically.

Richie’s daily schedule is just about as busy as Magda’s. Besides training and family responsibilities, he is the owner/manager of the East Bay’s TRANSPORTS running and swimming specialty stores.

“We have it pretty dialed in,” Lewy Boulet said about her and Richie’s morning childcare and running schedule. “We both take turns. Sometimes he has to work at ten a.m., so I’ll finish my run before eight, we meet up at the trails, we make the switch off, he passes Owen to me, he goes to run, and he still has enough time to take a shower and be at work by ten, and I’m at work by ten as well.”

“My husband is so supportive. We give each other time to run. He loves to run. He loves to race. It’s so nice that we both understand each other’s passion for running at whatever level it is at that time.”

Lewy Boulet’s plan is to “enjoy” (in her own words) training through December, doing key workouts, threshold work, and long runs, and maintaining mileage at 80 to 100 miles per week.

Daniels Key to Success

After December, Lewy Boulet will begin a 12-week-marathon-specific training program in her buildup to the Olympic Trials, as prescribed by Jack Daniels, Ph.D., her coach since 2001. Daniels is an internationally renowned coach and exercise physiologist who currently holds the position of Head Distance Coach at the Center for High Altitude Training at Northern Arizona University (Flagstaff, Arizona).

Lewy Boulet became familiar with Daniels, and his landmark studies about runners and their physiological response to altitude training, during her post-graduate work at California State University, Hayward (now known as Cal State, East Bay), where she obtained an M.S. in Exercise Physiology. So, in 2001, when Daniels located to Stanford University for a one-year

sabbatical from his former teaching position at the State University of New York at Cortland, Lewy Boulet jumped at the opportunity. At Stanford, Daniels was working with the Nike Farm Team, a post-collegiate elite development group of middle and long-distance runners with Olympic aspirations. Although Lewy Boulet resided in the East Bay and was competing for the Transports adidas Racing Team, she joined the Nike Farm Team to benefit from Daniels' coaching expertise.

"When I found out he [Daniels] was coming to do a sabbatical, I immediately said 'this is the opportunity of a lifetime.' I quit Transports and joined the Farm Team to be with Jack, and we became really good friends ever since."

The Farm Team, coached by Frank Gagliano, has since relocated to Eugene, Oregon (becoming Oregon Track Club Elite) and Lewy Boulet is back with Transports adidas.

Over the past seven years, Lewy Boulet has steadily dropped her marathon PR. In April 2001, she was third in the Cleveland Marathon in 2:44:57. By May of 2003, at the Pittsburgh Marathon, she improved her best time to 2:31:38. With her fifth place at the 2004 Olympic Trials, she claimed a PR of 2:30:50.

Lewy Boulet qualified for the 2008 Olympic Trials with a 2:42:38 clocking at the 2006 New York City Marathon. In October 2007, she entered the Twin Cities Marathon with a goal of running 2:36 off of base training. Unfortunately, the exceptionally hot and humid weather on race day scuttled her plan, and Lewy Boulet dropped out between miles 15 and 16. She emphasized that she is *not* a person who drops out of races. The day after Twin Cities, she was circumspect about her DNF.

"I think I learned so much," she said. "I woke up [race] morning and did my activation run and [the temperature] was high 80s at 5 a.m., and I was like 'oh my god.' I was not confident enough to back off on the pace. I still went out in 5:50s and tried to run 2:36, which in retrospect I probably should have said 'you know, today's not the day to do it. Back off. You've got to reset your goals.' It was quite a lesson. I'm glad it happened yesterday versus [the Olympic Trials] in April."

The 2008 Women's Olympic Marathon Trials race in Boston (the day before the running of the annual Boston Marathon) is drawing closer. Lewy Boulet, however, isn't particularly anxious, despite the fact that it will probably be her last serious attempt to make the U.S. Olympic team. Her perspective is much more holistic.

"I'm going into it racing, doing the best I can and making the most out of it," she said. "I want to walk away leaving everything on the line at the finish line."

"There's no extra pressure. I see this as such a beautiful journey. Everything I've learned from training and from Jack and from the lifestyle, it doesn't just go away. It's just a continuation of the next chapter of my life. All these little things—*injuries* and what you learn

from injuries, great races, not so great races, bad races. I can honestly say I always take something away [from these experiences]. Just take it to the next level. No regrets.”

Spoken like a true optimist. ■