



**A**  
**COACHING**  
**CATCH UP**  
**WITH LESLIE**

# WHAT IS YOUR TRACK & FIELD BACKGROUND?

I have been a distance runner for as long as I can remember, competing in track and field and cross country as soon as I was old enough to in elementary school. I ran varsity cross country at Queen's University and in my third year (2008) I represented Canada for the first time at the FISU Cross Country Championships. That same year I raced my first half marathon and realized I loved the roads and the longer distances. After university I moved to London, Ontario to train with Steve Weiler's group, London Runner. Since 2010 Steve and I have been working together. There have been ups and downs but overall I was consistently putting in the work and improving at various distances. In the summer of 2021 we moved out to Vancouver and I had a breakthrough season that fall, winning the Canadian 10k road race championships and achieving the World Athletics standard in the marathon. Last year at age 35 I represented Canada at my first World Athletics Championship in Eugene, Oregon where I placed 13th in the marathon.

# WHEN AND WHY DID YOU START COACHING?

I started coaching in 2013 when Steve and I were back in London. The club was growing and so I mentored under Steve and gradually took on coaching the late-elementary and high school athletes in the club. I have always been passionate about distance running and I consider myself a student of the sport so it was a great fit and I enjoyed sharing my love of the sport with young athletes. Steve was a great mentor, I had a lot to learn in the early years (and I still do) and as I gained more coaching experience he gave me room to grow and take on more responsibilities. When we moved out to Vancouver we started the Post-Secondary Endurance training group under the Vancouver Thunderbirds, a group for post-secondary and post-collegiate athletes to continue to compete and enjoy distance running through their adult years.



## HOW DOES BEING AN ATHLETE IMPACT YOUR COACHING?

I think it helps me relate to my athletes better because we have recent shared experiences.

When an athlete asks for advice, I can empathize with them because I have very likely been there too! Also as an athlete I am pretty detail-oriented and I can draw on my experiences to help athletes be better prepared for races. As an example, last year at the Sun Run 10k I had the experience of running the first 3k too fast and suffering in the second half! I shared this experience with my athletes racing the event this year in hopes that they could avoid making the same mistake! Of course, it's not all about me. I am there to support and guide the athletes, so I try to be conscious of how much I talk about my own running when I am coaching. But I think the fact that I am still competing can help give me some important insights that can help the athletes perform at their best.

# HOW DO YOU BALANCE COACHING & COMPETING?

I do wear many hats and it can be a challenge sometimes, but I do my best to set boundaries and only commit to what I can realistically do. The reality is that coaching and my own training impact on another, by the positives vastly outweigh the negatives. I might be tired for my workout after being outside for a cross country meet the day before, or my racing in the same event as my athletes might limit how much I can 'coach' them on the day. But with good planning and communication I can minimize the impact of these limitations. When I am racing the same event as my athletes, I do miss being able to watch everyone but to be honest in my event group I don't think much coaching actually happens between when the gun goes off and the athlete crosses the line. I can cheer them on and support them but if I have done my job right (ie. we do a good job on training, recovery, goal setting, mental prep, and setting a race plan), they will have the tools to succeed and execute a great race without me watching. To get to compete in the same events (like the Sun Run 10k last weekend), sharing in the challenge alongside them, is a unique and rewarding experience.



## **WHAT IS THE MOST REWARDING PART OF YOUR ROLE AS A COACH?**

Seeing athletes having fun and enjoying the sport. This really hit home during the pandemic, when Steve and I were coaching a group of mostly high school age athletes. When we were able to train as a group, there were many parents who told us that track workouts were the best part of their kids' day. For long stretches we had no official competitions, but the athletes showed up to train and run time trials simply because they loved it and they got to train with their friends. Sport can be such a huge positive in someone's life and providing that opportunity for an athlete is so rewarding.



## **WHAT ARE YOUR VALUES AS A COACH?**

Athletes perform best when they are happy and healthy. Peak performance and athlete health are not mutually exclusive; rather it is being happy and healthy that allows athletes to do the training that will lead to their best performances. To that end, I need to assign appropriate, sustainable training and more importantly, ensure that training and competing is fun. I also strongly believe that it is our job as coaches to empower athletes to take an active role in decision making by educating them about the sport and the training they are assigned. Acting with integrity and treating athletes, coaches, officials, and others with respect.

# WHO DO YOU LOOK UP TO IN TRACK & FIELD



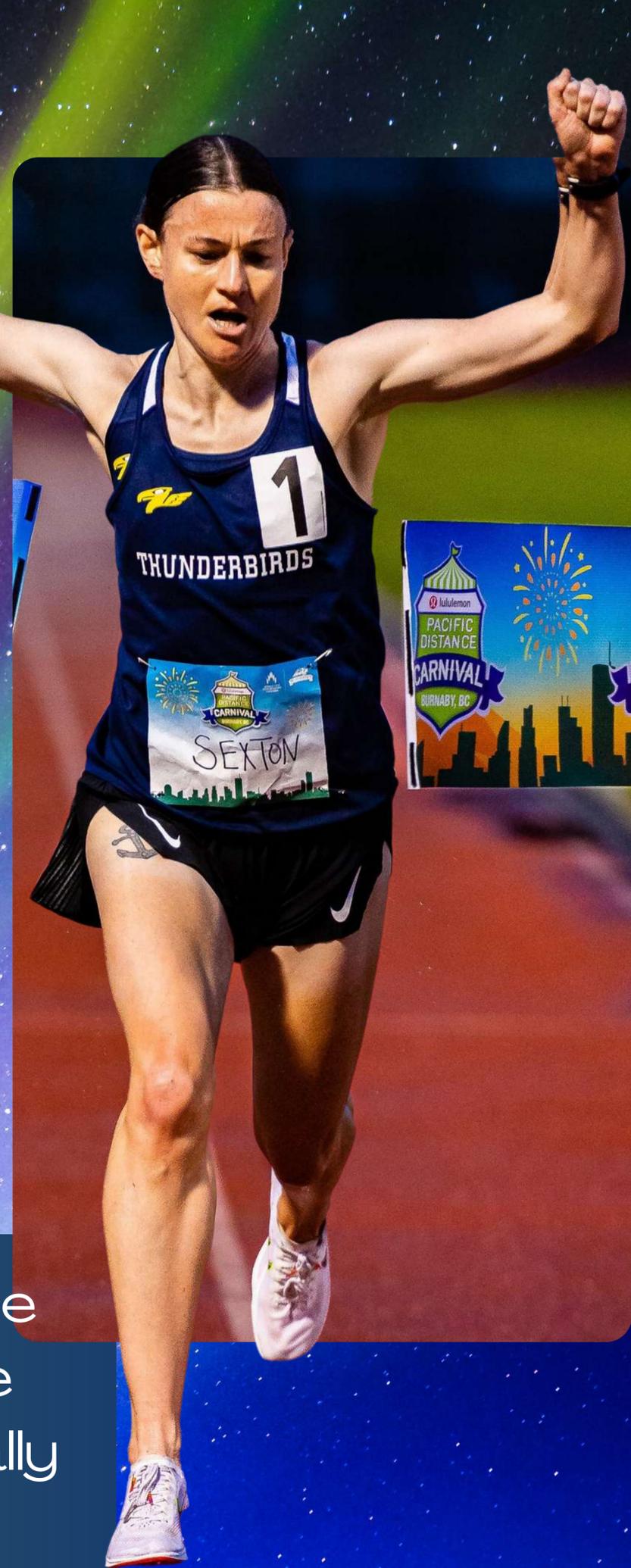
Des Linden has been a hero of mine for a long time. She wasn't a star in high school or university, but her consistent work over many years made her world class in the marathon. I love her motto, "keep showing up," it could easily summarize my last decade of running. And she is a smart racer, often running marathons with perfectly even halfway splits, which requires excellent self-awareness and patience (and toughness in the second half) on race day. I will add Evan Dunfee. He is an amazing ambassador for our sport, an athlete and person of integrity, and a smart and tough competitor, I love watching him race (and pointing to his championship performances as great examples of pacing and fantastic race execution).

# WHAT IS YOUR MOST MEMORABLE COACHING MOMENT TO DATE?

Last year's Canadian Cross Country Championships where the Thunderbirds U20 men earned the team bronze medal. The athletes came together with a shared vision of what they wanted to achieve at these championships. Each athlete executed their race with the goal of a team medal in mind and they earned their spot on the podium!

# WHAT ARE YOUR GOALS AS AN ATHLETE?

Broadly speaking, I want to explore my potential in the sport and see what I can achieve. More specifically and shorter-term, to represent Canada at the 2024 Olympic Games in the marathon and (if I qualify), place as well as I can there.



## **WHAT ARE YOUR GOALS AS A COACH?**

Most importantly, helping athletes enjoy the sport they love. I love distance running and I think everyone should get to enjoy life-long involvement in the sport and all of the benefits it can give you. I want to grow our Thunderbirds Post-Secondary Endurance group into a strong training group and community. At the top end, Steve and I hope to develop more athletes who are national and BC teams. But we also want to build a large training group with a broad range of paces so that competitive distance runners of various levels all feel welcome.

# WHAT PERFORMANCE WOULD YOU GO BACK TO WATCH LIVE?

The men's 800m final at the 2012 Olympics. David Rudisha leading start to finish in a world record that still stands, it is absolute perfection.



# WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR OTHER ATHLETES?

Success in distance running can take a long time (I think I am a good example of that). I learned to love the training and the process, and that has helped me weather the challenges and disappointments in my running career, and have my best performances in my mid to late-30s. Give yourself the chance to see what you can achieve by loving running and being too stubborn to quit.

## WHAT ARE YOUR HOBBIES OUTSIDE OF TRACK & FIELD



My partner and I have a 5 month old golden retriever puppy named Gordie and he takes up most of my spare time! I love taking him to the trails to explore or to Spanish Banks to play with the other dogs. I also like to bake, watch movies, and listen to podcasts.

