

Linda Somers Smith

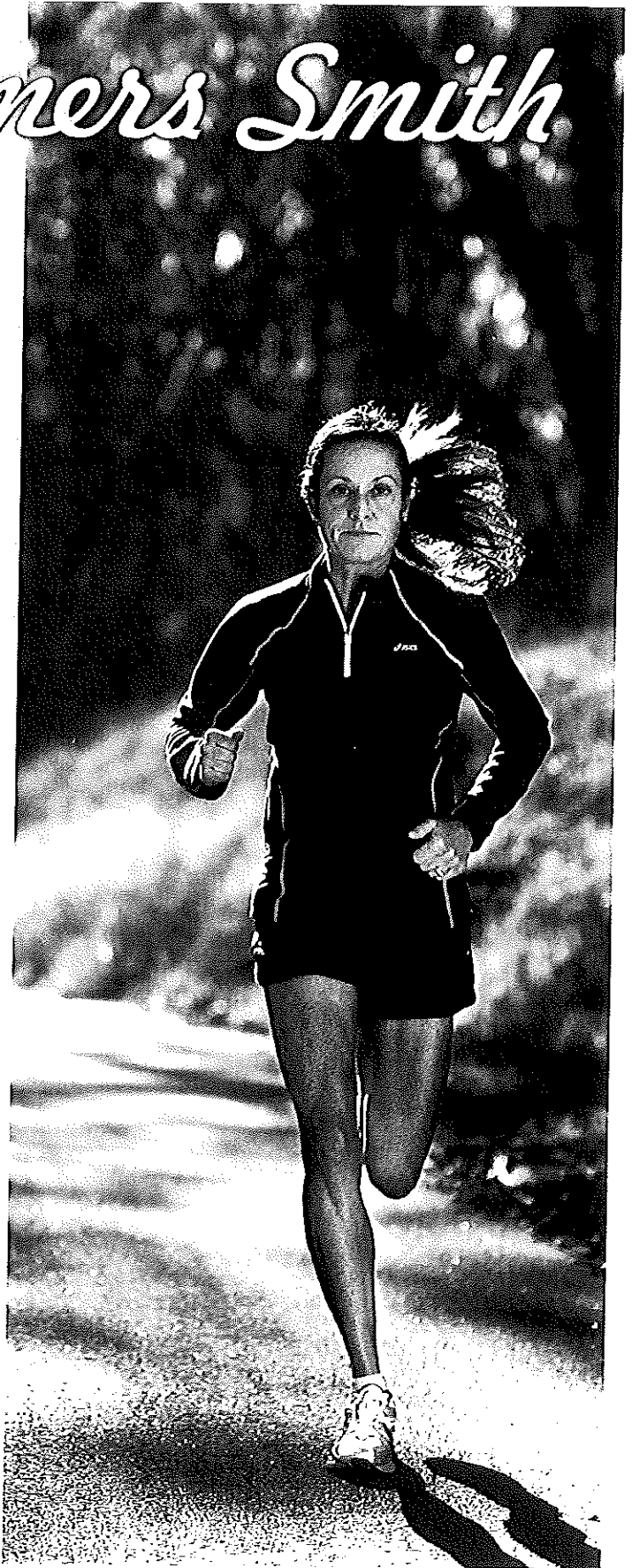
THE FASTEST GAL IN THE COUNTY

By Tana Coates

I had lunch with a friend of mine the other day — she's a former Olympic marathoner. I guarantee that she can kick your butt. At age 49, she ran a 5K in 16:14. That's a whisker over a five-minute mile. Last year, she ran a half-marathon in San José in 1:13:32, a tad over a 5½-minute-mile pace. She was second in that race to the woman who represented the United States in the Beijing Olympics. She competed in the 2010 Los Angeles marathon, placed sixth, and her time of 2:36:33 was just six minutes shy of her all-time best from the 1996 Olympic trials. She has a Wikipedia page, and she did not post it. Last year alone, she set three Masters' running records and qualified for her seventh Olympic trials, to be held next January.

Google her — it is amazing that someone of her caliber is running on our back roads. I have to brag about Linda Somers Smith because boasting is just not her style.

Linda is not only fast, she's smart. She graduated Phi Beta Kappa from U.C. Davis with a degree in economics and also graduated from law school there. Her law practice focuses on business transactions, real estate, partnerships and corporate law. Partner Tom Duggan shakes his head with admiration and is somewhat confounded as to how she keeps her superstar status



way under the radar. *"She'll race over the weekend, win, set a record, and never even mention it. Running Times published an article about her this year, focusing on her transition from Olympic marathoner to a record-setting Masters athlete, and she was so low-key about it. It's like pulling teeth to get her to talk about herself."* Duggan, however, has no problem bragging about his law partner. *"She's bright, she's competent, clients love her. She handles complex real estate transactions that make my head spin. As our managing partner, she basically runs our office, and she's good at it. You can depend upon Linda to keep her word — she's extraordinary in so many ways."*

Linda is not a tortured soul, tormented by miles yet to be run, crazed by a psychotic motivation stemming from an unhappy existence when she is not pounding the pavement. Linda is driven, yet mellow, happy, and has an amazing relationship with both her husband and her daughter. She's a voracious reader. She can be lazy. In her advanced "running age," she is dialing back the mileage to six most days, and long runs hover around 20 miles when she's not training for a race. That's way down from the nearly 100 miles a week she ran for years as a top marathoner. For Smith, now 50, running is still something she actually likes to do. *"As a lawyer, you have to have a distraction, and mine's running. I process a lot of stuff when I'm on the road and devise solutions to my client's problems."*

Now a Masters runner, Linda has few regrets about her career — but she does wish that she could have performed better in the marathon at the 1996 Olympics. *"I started to feel pain in my left heel around mile five. I didn't know it at the time, but my Achilles tendon tore during the race. I finished, but I could barely walk at the end."* For the record, she finished 31st. She also ponders if early on her decision to peg herself as a marathoner,

and logging nearly a hundred miles a week beginning in her 20s without as much focus on speed work, was the right choice. *"Back in the day, right after Title IX, there were not many avenues for women runners except the marathon; that's why I chose it,"* she explains. That decision has at times literally been a painful one, and she has spent years fighting injuries, all on her left side — undergoing three knee surgeries, a bunionectomy, and having a neuroma removed. But, leave it to Linda to reinvent herself even when she's on the injured list. While nursing a running injury last year, she decided to train for the Santa Barbara triathlon. She was the first woman to cross the finish line in 3:12:30.

You may want to know how she stays motivated, day in and day out, at least six days a week, to hit the road, the gym, the pool. Sorry to disappoint — this article is not going to end with elite-athlete psyche mumbo-jumbo. As a curious reader, you are probably wondering what she's *bad* at doing. So then, to present a well-rounded, edgy portrait of our hometown Olympian, and after peppering unnamed sources for answers, here is the list:

THINGS THAT LINDA SOMERS SMITH IS ACTUALLY BAD AT DOING:

- Anything domestic, including cooking, knitting, sewing or quilting;
- Volleyball;
- *Probably* not a very good basketball player;
- She can be moody (therefore bad at controlling her mood); and
- She spends too much time working (translation: Linda is bad at saying "no" to clients who need her).

Linda does not like “mean” people, “b.s.,” or litigation. *“It’s in my nature to work things out. Almost any dispute can be resolved if parties just sit down and try to talk it through.”* As focused as she is on compromise in the legal arena, however, when it comes to running, Linda pushes herself to run fast, and she runs to win.

I asked Linda how much longer she plans to keep on running. She laughed and said that her husband teases her that she will be a little old lady still running the roads. She will be the one kicking some young whippersnapper’s booty. ■

- Photo of Linda Somers Smith courtesy of Mike Radokavich.

Linda Somers Smith:

- Born May 7, 1961, in Bitburg Air Force Base, Rhineland-Palatinate;
- Two-time all-American in track and cross country, U.C Davis; member of UC Davis Hall of Fame;
- Graduated Phi Beta Kappa in Economics, 1983, U.C. Davis; J.D. from U.C. Davis, 1986;
- Two-time United States National Champion in the marathon;
- Won the 1992 Chicago Marathon (2:37:41);
- Won the 1993 California International Marathon (2:34:11);
- Competed in the marathon at the 1996 Summer Olympics;
- Married Scott Smith in 1996;
- Has run in six U.S. Olympic Trials Marathons;
- At 2008 Boston Marathon, she set the United States 45-49 age group record (2:38:49) placing 17th;
- Placed sixth in the Open US Club Nationals Cross Country meet in 2009;
- Set age group road record in the 5K (16:14, San Jose 11/26/2009);
- Ran the Los Angeles Marathon last year in 2:36:33 — only six minutes slower than her lifetime best at the U.S. Olympic marathon trials;
- Won 10K in Paso Robles in 2010 in 33:39, and Redding 10-mile in 57:07;
- Won Rock ‘n Roll San Jose Half Marathon in 1:13:31 on 10/3/2010; and
- Qualified for her seventh consecutive US Olympic Trials, “A” Standard, while winning the Masters title (sixth place overall finish) in the 2010 Los Angeles Marathon (2:36:33).