

Victory Lap

Former Wildcat runner's 11th Boston Marathon biggest win

Tuesday, August 29, 2017



Her junior year at UNH, runner Katie Litwinowich Meinelt '03, '04G won the women's 800 meter individual title at the America East Indoor Championships — a year to the day after she had surgery to repair a torn meniscus. The victory was sweet payoff at the end of a long, grueling year of rehab, and just one of the highlights of a standout track and cross country career that included some 13 school records, including a 4x800 meter relay school mark that stood until this spring. Tapping as it did into Meinelt's abundant reserves of focus, grit and determination, it also proved to be uncommon preparation for a challenge she would face years later, when she was



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diagnosed with an aggressive form of stage III breast cancer shortly after giving birth to her son.

Meinelt's diagnosis came in December 2015. The Boston-based lawyer had recently turned 34 and her son, Wesley, was just three months old. "It was a shock," she says. "I'd stayed so healthy and active, and I had just had a baby."

Shocked or not, Meinelt dug in and brought the mental and physical toughness that had propelled her through knee rehab, her post-injury UNH career and some 12 marathons to her cancer treatment plan: five months of chemotherapy followed by surgery and then five weeks of radiation. She tolerated the chemotherapy well and maintained a rigorous running schedule, even on infusion days. She also did yoga and acupuncture and ate a healthy diet.

"I learned very quickly there were so many things out of my control," she says. "But there were certain things still in my control, and one was exercise. When my doctor told me that I could keep running and that it could save my life, I took that seriously."

If Meinelt's age and fitness were among her secret weapons, so, too, was her support system: Her husband Stephen Meinelt (a Wildcat runner who transferred to Georgetown), her parents and in-laws, who helped take care of her and baby Wes following every chemo infusion day, and a tight-knit group of family members, friends and former Wildcat teammates who cheered her through every milestone.

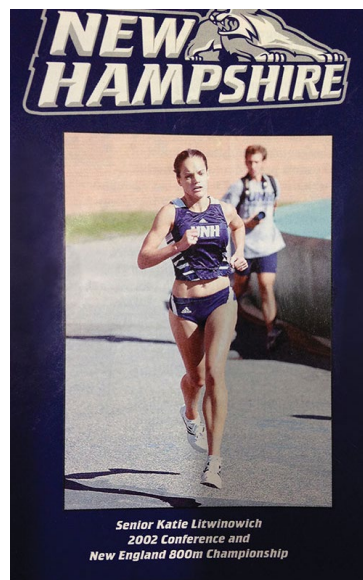
Prior to skipping the 2015 race because of her pregnancy, Meinelt had run 10 straight Boston Marathons, including a personal best of 3:29 in 2007. In 2014, she'd run as part of a



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charity team to benefit Boston's Dana-Farber Cancer Institute — the very hospital she turned to less than two years later for her own cancer treatment. Even before she completed the 10-month marathon that was her course of chemo, surgery and radiation, she knew she would run Boston again, this time raising money for Dana-Farber on a level that was much more personal. And on April 17, when she crossed the Boylston Street finish line for the 121st Boston Marathon in a time of 4:24.24, she did it with members of "Team Katie" at her side: fellow Wildcat running alumnae Lauryn Hancock Blakesley '03, Amy DeCamp Gosztyla '01 and Taryn Kenney Sleger '02, as well as childhood friend Lisa Corazzini.

Following her surgery last June, Meinelt's pathology report confirmed that she had had the best possible response to treatment, and today she is cancer-free. "It was the best news we could have asked for, according to my oncologist," Meinelt says. "She told me that they can never guarantee a person that the cancer will not come back, but that based on my results there was a



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vast likelihood I would be cancer-free for the rest of my life.”

Lifelong friend Corazzini affectionately refers to Meinelt as a “cancer overachiever,” taking on every aspect of her experience with focus and determination. “The night before the marathon, my cousin put it to me this way,” Meinelt says. “I’ve already won the race, and this is my victory lap.”

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WRITTEN [Kristin Waterfield Duisberg](#) | Communications and
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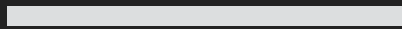
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