

→ SPECIAL BEGINNER'S GUIDE

RUNNER'S[®] WORLD

Get Fit, Stay Fit

- Instant Inspiration
- All Your Questions Answered
- Run-Walk Training Plan
- The Beginner Who Lost 100 Pounds!

10 Power Foods For Runners

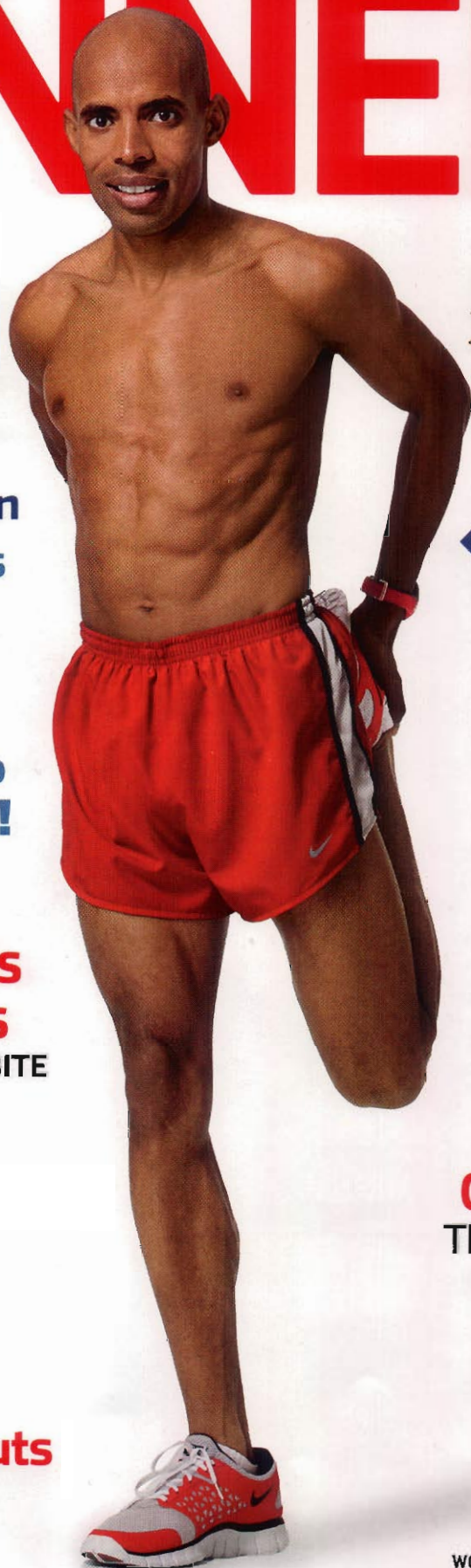
MORE NUTRITION IN EVERY BITE

Work Hard, Run Hard

How Real Runners
Find Time to Do It All

Rut-Busting Workouts

Crank Your Training Up
A Notch (Or Two)



FREE
12-Month
Running Log
Inside

← **Meb, Better
Than Ever**
The Untold Story
Of His Amazing
Comeback

Injured?

Preserve Your
Fitness—And
Your Sanity

PREVENT
MUSCLE
SORENESS

Get in the Zone

The Mental Secret To
Effortless Running

MAY 2010



RUNNERSWORLD.COM
WORLD'S LEADING RUNNING MAGAZINE



FINISHING RUNNING MEMBERS

Two years ago, a mysterious injury nearly ended MEB KEFLEZIGHI's running career. This only made his win in last fall's New York City Marathon more miraculous. With Boston looming, here's the untold story of how Meb and a team of specialists launched his unlikely comeback

BY TODD BALF ■ PHOTOGRAPHS BY ROD McLEAN

PEAK PERFORMANCE

After coming back from his injury, Keflezighi now trains year-round at high altitudes in Mammoth Lakes, California.



This late January morning is notable for what Meb Keflezighi is not doing. The schedule calls for the first intervals of the season, a build-up of his program as he readies for the upcoming Boston Marathon. The intervals he's not doing are one-mile repeats at race pace. But Meb isn't doing intervals on the long bracing stretch of High Sierra road near the Mammoth Yosemite Airport—he's looking at the stunning, snow-swept Sherwin Range from the climate-controlled, second-story orthopedic rehab room of Mammoth Hospital. ■ Uh oh.

Mebrahtom Keflezighi is known for his age (34), his race-day toughness, a laugh as big as the YouTube baby's, a big silver medal in Athens, and of late, his injuries, specifically the mysterious, largely unpublicized one that kept him from doing pretty much anything during all of 2008.

Fortunately, he isn't injured today so much as abiding by his new and surprisingly challenging theorem of training: When in doubt, don't. It's a constant struggle. Just last week, he ignored the little voice that told him his left knee was tweaked, and ran his entire 15-mile workout as planned. The next day the joint felt worse, which meant a couple days off and now this: 30 minutes on a Woodway Pro XL Series treadmill to give the leg an easy test drive. The assorted therapists and rehab patients, all of whom either know Meb personally or from his "Run to Win" posters that hang up and down the approach corridor, can see

the black Kinesio tape running down his wispy left leg. What they can't see is him joyfully up-tapping his mph. "No problems," he says, almost to nobody. "Feels good."

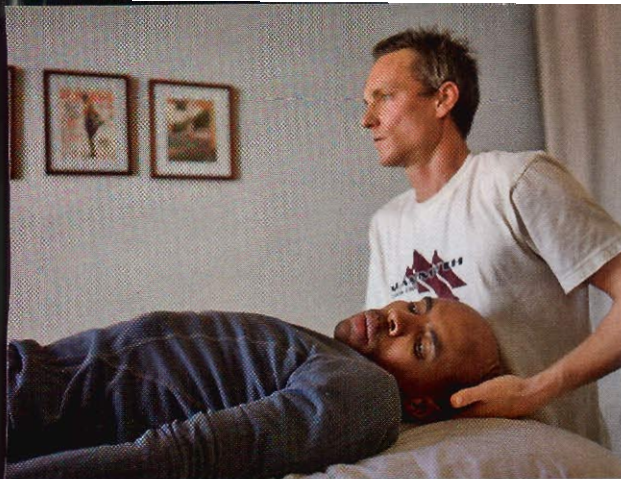
If Keflezighi feels good on April 19, it's going to be hard to bet against him in Boston. People will, but they should study the triumphant comeback he engineered in New York last November. Something intangible comes with a triumph of that sort. "Momentum," says Meb, with big lemur eyes, when I ask him *why Boston, why now*. "I've got momentum."

Yes, he's got it—that's simple. But how he got it is not. It's a story involving orthopedists, massage therapists, bone-density experts, sports biomechanists, hometown friends, family, and an intense two-month visit in the fall of 2008 to the U.S. Olympic Training Center's Recovery Center in Colorado Springs, where

HUNGRY FOR MORE

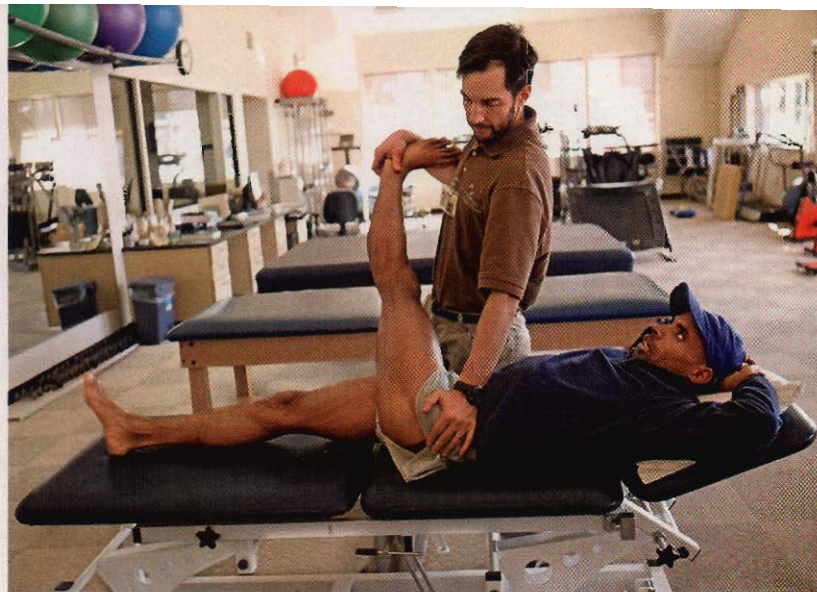
Meb wants to be the first American man to win Boston since 1983.





HELPING HANDS

Meb's sizable rehab team in Mammoth Lakes includes massage therapist Andrew Kastor (above) and physical therapist Lance Georgeson (right).



Meb went from an injury-plagued question mark to the sublime runner who surged on Kenya's Robert Cheruiyot at the 90th Street entrance to Central Park and never looked back. His momentum comes from stuff nobody knows about: months of pool rehab work in Mission Beach, heart-to-hearts with longtime coach Bob Larsen, and even a "this-close-to-doing-it" decision to take an extended and perhaps decisive break from training and racing in the summer of '08. "I told him to do it," says Meb's wife, Yordanos, who proposed an R&R with old family friends in Italy. "I said, 'Just go, don't think about running for a while.'"

What most people know is what happened before. He failed to podium at the U.S. Olympic Marathon Trials at New York in 2007, despite being the favorite, and faltered again at the U.S. Olympic Track & Field Trials the following July. Four years after winning silver in the Olympic Marathon in Athens (the first American man to medal since Frank Shorter in 1976), Meb was left off the 2008 team entirely. Most figured he was done and gone—certainly he was contemplating retirement, or maybe he already was retired. Heck, the USOC had yanked his health insurance that summer after his ranking sunk. He'd taken so many physical and emotional blows. Everybody remembers the sight of Meb writhing in agony at New York's Central Park finish line back in 2007, having lost his Olympic dream and much more. Before he fell, he was told his close friend and training partner Ryan Shay had collapsed near the six-mile mark and died.

So how in the world did Meb go from failure to revelation, from victim to hero? "Khalid Khannouchi called me and said I was an inspiration," shrugs Meb. "I'm like, 'You're a 2:05 guy, how am I an inspiration?'" In a New York moment he went from nowhere to courtside celebrity at a New York Knicks game and guest on *Late Show with David Letterman*, where he read the "Top 10 thoughts that go through your mind while running the New York City Marathon." Number 2, he joked, was: "I forgot to bring exact change for the Verrazano Bridge."

Of course that was Letterman's writers talking. What really happened in the last few miles was far more interesting. The last 24 months flashed through him, culminating with one perfectly unscripted act as he crossed the finish. He dropped to his knees, kissed the pavement, and just in case anybody wondered about his resiliency, he knocked off one clean, crisp push-up.

Being in the company of his aura now—we're at the Looney Bean coffee shop in Mammoth Lakes—it's hard to imagine he ever hit a rough patch. His injuries were the result of muscles ignored and microscopically out of balance until something big gave way, but what's most striking right now is how stout his foundation is. Of course it's more impressive because he is different for a place like this—tiny in the land of high-rise peaks, black in a fortress of snowy white—but he moves without a hitch, curling into a fireside seat. "I guess I do stand out," he allows later, but he really doesn't make much of it, just like he never made much of the nitwits who objected to his American runner designation since he was born and spent 10 years in East African Eritrea. Meb is renowned for hovering above and beyond the noise, powered by an ethereal blend of faith, family, and steely will.

At the coffee shop, he shows me a picture of his newborn daughter (his "first high-altitude" baby) and a gag photo of himself with NBA Hall-of-Fame center Bill Walton in which Meb (standing on an unseen stool) appears the taller of the two. This is just after he orders a white hot chocolate with not the slightest bit of shame. "Whipped cream on that?" asks the barista. "Of course," says Meb, not a nutritional alarm ringing anywhere.

Obviously he's a man at peace with himself, but he wasn't too long ago. The trouble began with one of the worst moments in his racing career, the U.S. Olympic Marathon Trials in 2007. Meb was a favorite, arriving in the same shape he'd had three years earlier in Athens. Back in 2004, he'd been a long shot, but Meb knew he had the capacity to compete with anyone on any given day. That was his given day. In New York, like Athens, everybody expected he'd be granted another one.

He was with the leaders past the halfway mark but soon felt his calves cramping, and he began to slide back after the 30-kilometer mark. He knew he wouldn't win, but he figured he still had a shot at the three-man U.S. Olympic team. "I was saying to myself, *Okay I'm not getting first, but maybe second.* Then it was like, *Okay not second, maybe third, maybe alternate.*" At the 20-mile mark, after Ryan Hall had run away from the pack, Meb felt a different and even more acute pain in his right hip. He dropped farther back, knowing he should quit but refusing to do so because of the crowds that kept screaming his name.



STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

Meb endures a tough conditioning routine, which focuses on core strength, hip-stability training, and footwork drills. On the bright side, he often finds that misery loves company—as he tackles these demanding workouts with Deena Kastor (in black), Jen Rhines (pink), Sara Hall (green), and the rest of the all-star cast at the Mammoth Track Club.



"I was livid," says Yordanos, who married Meb in 2005 after meeting him a year earlier at an Eritrean soccer festival in California. "I knew something was wrong with him. I couldn't imagine why he wouldn't stop." He crossed the finish line in eighth place (2:15:09). "Somebody came up to me afterward and said, 'Did you hear about Ryan?'" remembers Meb. "I thought he meant Ryan Hall at first, but they said 'No, Ryan Shay. He is dead.' I just went down. I was on the ground and I couldn't control myself, my whole body was shaking." Yordanos recalls seeing him thrashing and hysterical and saying: "It's okay, it's okay, it's not that bad," but she hadn't heard the news yet.

For the next few days, Meb couldn't walk. "It was torture," he says, describing both physical pain and emotional distress as he had to crawl around their hotel room, inching his way up pieces of furniture or a wall to reach their toddler. "From here to there, that took me five minutes," he says, pointing to a five-yard gap between our café table and the wall, "I kept thinking, *I cover a mile in five minutes when I'm running a marathon.*"

The preliminary diagnosis was unclear: His ankles were swollen, perhaps the result of no more than pushing too hard on that hilly New York course. Give it a few weeks, he was told. Deeply devout Christians, Meb and his family tried to come to terms with an uncertain future. "We prayed about it and just said, 'Hey it happened for a reason,'" he says softly. "If you want me to call it a day and move on with life, I'm ready, but I know from what talent you have given me there's more things on the table. If it's your will, I'll do my part, whatever it takes. I'll commit."

Meb, Yordanos, and their toddler-aged daughter, Sara, flew to Florida for a long vacation with relatives. When he returned to San Diego six weeks later to begin training for the U.S. Olympic Track & Field Trials, the pain shot through his hip once again. "Running from the street up to the sidewalk was hard for me,"

says Meb of his first post-New York 15-mile-plus run in San Diego. "I kind of had to think, *How am I going to lift my leg?*"

The next few weeks was a medical odyssey involving some 20 physical therapists, chiropractors, and bone-density specialists, each attempting to identify the injury's root cause. After an L.A. doctor's surgical recommendation (based on a diagnosis of a torn rectus abdominus), Meb called an old family friend from his high school days, Dr. Steven Van Camp. "Get a second opinion," advised the cardiologist, who's well known in the Southern California distance-running community. Van Camp's recommendation was apt—Dr. Lewis G. Maharam, the longtime medical director at the ING New York City Marathon. Meb met Maharam at the Rock 'n' Roll Marathon in Phoenix, then flew to his office in New York for a full exam and an MRI. The film turned up a stress fracture. Meb had broken his hip in New York—and he had probably run with the break for at least the last six miles.

The day after the MRI read—it was January 26—Meb resumed routine running and cycling workouts, which proved a mistake. Several weeks later, after a follow-up MRI, he learned the fracture hadn't mended as expected. Now there was no choice: He had to stop running. The only way to approximate the fitness he needed for the upcoming 10,000-meter Trials was to be found in the pool. For nine weeks, he rose early and reported to the Plunge, a historic facility in Mission Beach, where he spent hours aqua jogging. "I was there a minimum of an hour and as much as two and a half hours for my long run," he says. "If it was crowded, I stayed in a single lane." He supplemented the workouts with extensive treatments at the La Jolla Physical Therapy Center.

The track Trials were seven weeks away when he finally returned to running on dry land. Ultimately, it wasn't enough time. Meb was close to top form, but not close enough for a star-studded field that included Abdi Abdirahman and Galen Rupp. The

sorrow of a 13th-place finish was worsened by yet another tragedy. Longtime coach Bob Larsen's wife, Sue, died just days before the race after a long battle with cancer. "Afterward, we both were emotional," says Meb. "Some people who saw me thought I was crying because I didn't make it. The tears were for Sue."

Larsen told Meb that he was one of the finest, most hard-working athletes he'd ever had the pleasure of coaching. It sounded like they were parting ways—either because Larsen was giving up or he expected Meb to. Larsen says he had an inkling that the journey back to form was going to be longer and more grueling than either of them knew. He was right.

A few weeks later at the Falmouth Road Race, Meb notched an impressive PR (32:09) for the seven-mile Cape Cod course, finishing second to 20-year-old Ethiopian Tadese Tola. Figuring he was back to normal, he accepted an invitation to race in 5000- and 10,000-meter events in Europe in late summer. His splits in each of the track races showed the same pattern: normal early speed followed by a marked decline in the final crucial kilometers. In Brussels he went from running 65-second laps to a 67 and 68, respectively, on the final two. "I was like, 'C'mon you're supposed to run faster at the end of a race,'" says Meb. "What's going on?"

The hip pain returned—as did fresh doubts. Another MRI was negative. Was it a sign that the comeback wasn't meant to be? "When you go through what Meb did, you feel like you're always going to be injured, and we knew he didn't have an infinite amount of time left," says Larsen, who began coaching Meb as a UCLA freshman. "He was literally crawling from room to room after New York. That's one thing if you're 23, but he was 33."



FAST FRIENDS

Meb often trains with Ryan Hall (far right), Josh Cox (far left), and other elites in the Mammoth Track Club.

Dr. Krista Austin, a longtime friend and then USOC-affiliated physiologist based in Colorado Springs, flew to Mammoth to find out what was going on. "Meb said to me, 'I can't go fast. I don't have any power in my legs,'" she says. Austin was as perplexed as everyone else. "There was no good reason for another stress fracture—there was something else going on."

Knowing how hard Meb worked, the hardest of anyone he's ever coached, Larsen seemed unsure, too. "We are usually of one mind about things," says Larsen. "I know he had to be questioning a little bit, 'Is it worth doing?'"

Austin said the best place to find an answer was the facility where she worked—the Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs. Meb waffled, but Austin was blunt. "If you don't do this, you might as well retire," she said. "Take the risk and maybe you'll get rewarded."

POWER TOOLS

Four technologies that helped Meb get back on top

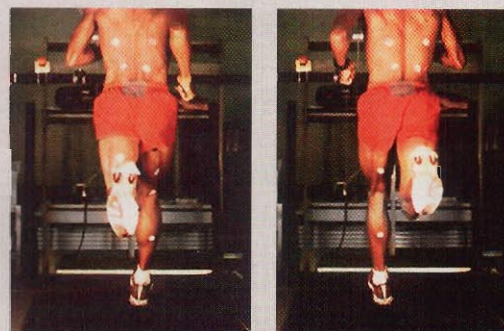
Meb Keflezighi came to biomechanist and physiologist Bill Sands at the Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs in search of a diagnosis for his mysterious and debilitating hip injury. Sands—who has since left the OTC to work at Mesa State College—can use a thermal imaging camera and other high-tech tools to tell a runner what's hurt, if it's muscular or neural (or both, as in Meb's case), and if it has impacted his stride. Herewith, the magic in Dr. Sand's bag.

THERMAL IMAGING These cameras can identify variations in soft-tissue temperature. An infrared camera captures images and sends them to a computer monitor. Black reveals tissue areas that are cold or normal, while white shows where temps are hotter, indicating an inflammatory

response. Because the images can be taken quickly and often, they're useful to both diagnose injuries and chart recovery.

EMG Surface electromyography records the electrical activity of muscles at rest and during contraction using electrodes attached to bare skin. By analyzing the neural signals, muscle weakness or abnormal firing patterns can be identified. In Meb's case, the "involved" portions of his right hip area never really shut off, resulting in fatigue late in races.

HIGH-SPEED VIDEO Eight seconds on a treadmill at 500 frames a second can tell an athlete a lot. The super-slow-motion and high-def video can isolate the smallest breaks in form—including the shots of Meb's slightly wayward right foot (above).



NORMATEC MVP These pressurized pants, dubbed "space legs" by Tour de France cyclists, use pneumatic compression to enhance the natural recovery mechanisms of the body's circulatory system. Unlike a static ice wrap, which is anti-inflammatory but also impairs blood flow, the flowing compression effect moves blood to exhausted muscles, promoting healing and an accelerated recovery. —T.B.

Austin kept pushing. She contacted the USOC, telling them she was bringing in Meb for a complete diagnostic workup at the Recovery Center, a new high-tech facility staffed with biomechanists, strength trainers, massage therapists, and diagnostic doodads like thermal imaging cameras and electromyography (EMG). Only elite athletes are invited to the Recovery Center; it's not even open to public tours. Austin pushed Meb to the front of the "fix-it" line, something that raised some eyebrows since he wasn't exactly the undisputed star of the American running scene. According to the USATF, he was the ninth ranked marathoner in the country, and one mouthy blogger had headlined a recent post thusly, "Stick a fork in him. He's done!"

"I know what people were saying," says Austin. "It wasn't the politically correct thing to do, but I knew they had what he needed. I called the big guys in the department and said, 'I need the help of some key people.'" She reminded everyone that there was still only one active American marathoner who had an Olympic silver medal and his name was Meb Keflezighi.

William "Bill" Sands, the architect of the Athlete Recovery Program, helped lead up Meb's diagnostic team. Sands figured he'd do what he always did with athletes who had a vague list of symptoms and ailments they couldn't pin down—he'd use EMG and thermal imaging tests, his specialty, to get a detailed picture of the muscular and neural activity in Meb's affected hip.

"Multiple things were wrong with Meb," says Sands, who now works at Mesa State College. "If it had been just one, he would've figured it out himself." The thermal imaging camera showed several inflamed muscular areas, and the EMG revealed "something odd going on in recruiting his muscles." The Eureka moment came when they glimpsed the tensor fascia latae (TFL), a side-of-the-hip muscle that in runners usually shows bursts and then silence. But Meb's TFL was lighting up bright as a Christmas bulb during activity and staying activated afterward. When Sands, guided by the imagery, pressed his finger on the inflamed TFL, Meb winced like he'd been zinged with a small shock. In cowboy lab parlance, Meb had been "launched."

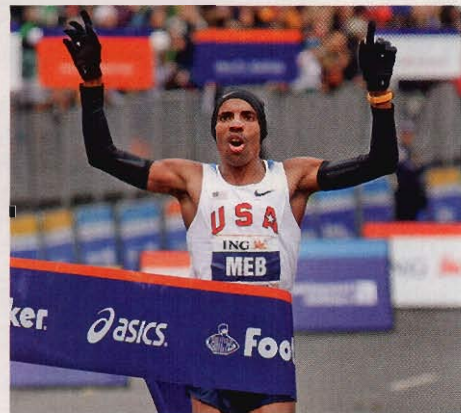
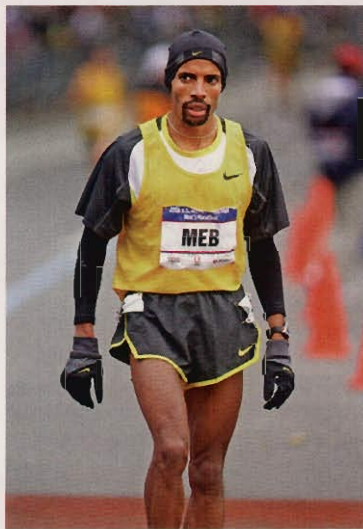
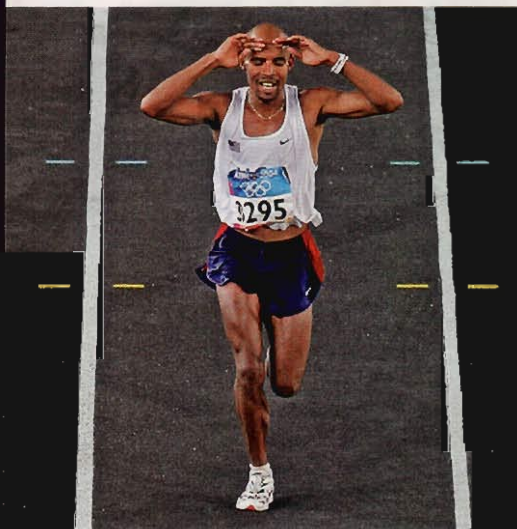
Evidently, Meb's TFL was compensating for neighboring muscles that weren't strong enough at race pace. Meanwhile, a high-speed motion analysis camera caught a corresponding speed-shedding break in form, with Meb's right foot flying out to the right and not "pushing off with full force." The game plan was clear: His TFL had to be calmed and contained so he could train; he had to improve flexibility and strengthen his core to prevent reoccurrence; and his foot had to find its way back beneath his body so he could rip off sub-4:50 miles late in a race.

The next two months was a 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. whirlwind of running, stretching, strengthening, and therapy. Before each running workout, Austin stretched him, concentrating on the hip area. His morning runs, which eventually increased in intensity and duration, were followed by more stretching, then rigorous deep-tissue massage known as Active Release Techniques. "It's not easy, but Meb never said a thing," says the Colorado Springs-based Jeff Mathews, considered one of the country's leading ART practitioners. "His whole attitude was 'whatever it takes.'"

Additionally, Meb did thrice-weekly strength and conditioning sessions. Coach Bo Sandoval designed a program to strengthen "everything in and around the hip area." In the first four-week mobility phase, the workouts were done without weights, emphasizing a full range of motions to move the hips, torso, ankles, and shoulder blades. Exercises included everything from multidirectional lunges to more rhythm-oriented skips and lower impact plyometrics.

"Distance runners often make the mistake in strength work of limiting their ranges of motion," says Sandoval, now a strength and conditioning coach at the University of Michigan. "Often, it worsens the imbalances they already have." In Meb's second and final phase, Sandoval added a little extra resistance, combining skipping with a weighted vest, for example, or lunges with barbells.

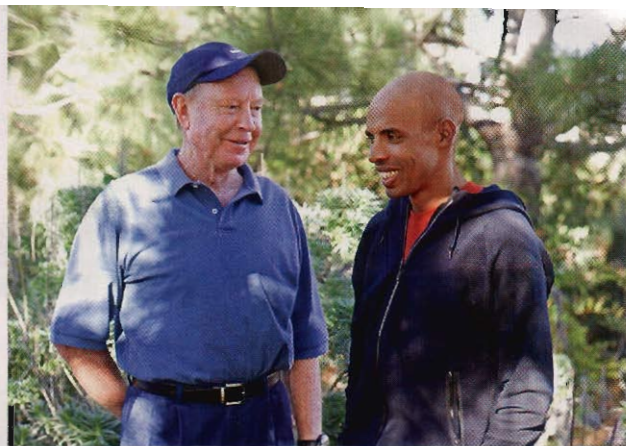
Many of these strength sessions were followed or preceded by a shorter second run, more massage therapy, balancing exercises, and a session using the foot-to-hip NormaTec MVP pants,



UP AND DOWN (AND UP)

Meb's highlights and lowlights (from left): a shocking silver in Athens; all kinds of pain at the 2007 Olympic Marathon Trials; sweet victory in New York last fall.

LEFT TO RIGHT: DAMIR SAGOL/REUTERS/LANDOV; VICTOR SAILER/PHOTORUN; SHANNON STAPLETON/REUTERS/LANDOV



HOME TEAM

The key members of Meb's support system: his wife, Yordanos, his mother, Awetash, and his three children (left), and his longtime coach, Bob Larsen (above).

a circulatory-mimicking system that uses a computer-calibrated, pressurized suit to speed the body's ability to flush out inflammatory products, reduce swelling, and return muscles to normal. Pro cycling teams had used the "space legs" system for the first time at the 2008 Tour de France. "I could actually feel the fluid moving through my legs," says Meb. "It was strange but good." An ice bath brought each day to an end.

Meanwhile, Austin managed Project Meb like a territorial bear with a wounded cub. When Meb needed ART and chiropractic help, she arranged the deal with Mathews. When the cafeteria food got old, she offered to cook. When Meb got homesick, she called Yordanos and told her to fly out. For more than three weeks, Austin hosted the family of four in her two-bedroom condo. "You're the gatekeeper, so the job is really simple," she says. "You put the best team around the athlete you can. You do only what's in the best interests of the athlete, nothing else."

Initially, Meb had only intended to spend a week in Colorado Springs, but as that turned into two and three and then much more, he stayed on, feeling both better balanced and more mobile. When Larsen visited to check on Meb's progress in October, he remembers thinking, *Everything makes sense. This has a great chance of working.*

Larsen was right. After four weeks, the thermal camera was showing Meb's inflamed TFL returning to normal. And though muscle testing revealed more integrity in his supporting and stabilizing muscles, Meb already knew it. His joints felt suppler both before and after runs. High-speed motion analysis showed his form was now dead-on; he'd "fixed the drifting of the foot" and was running as fast as ever. Even his bone-density reading, a concern back in January when he'd consulted with UCLA specialist Dr. Aurelia Nattiv, was vastly improved. The combination of extreme Vitamin D doses and the osteoporosis drug Actonel, in addition to specific resistance training on both land and water, had elevated his test scores seven percent.

He returned to Mammoth at Thanksgiving itching to race. He had considered entering New York, but Larsen helped persuade him that he didn't have the "depth of 100-mile weeks" to go. He'd strung together his first 100-mile week in late October, but previous to that it had been 80- and 70-mile weeks. "I didn't want him to come back and do okay," says Larsen. "I wanted him to nail it first time out of the barn."

They circled the 2009 Houston Half-Marathon on the calendar, a perfect test race given his fitness and mileage and the deep field. Maybe significantly, it was also the first major race of the New Year—most of the Meb team felt like 2008 was best left to run its dismal course. "He was pretty impressive," says Larsen of Meb's 1:01:25 comeback debut. "He left no doubt he was ready to go." Meb backed off with three miles to go, feeling just a little tightness in the hamstring and not wanting to risk a setback.

If Project Meb was also about training the athlete to read signs better and with more honesty, he'd passed the test. Only six months earlier, he'd blown through a similar sign in Europe, which put him back on the shelf. A good decision in Houston led to weeks more of uninterrupted training at altitude in Mammoth and a much anticipated race date in London.

Meb didn't subtract the two minutes from his personal best at the April 26 London Marathon—his ambitious goal for the race—but he did slice off 30 seconds, crossing the line in 2:09:21. Even better, he finished injury-free. His racing was benefiting both from the work he'd put in over the last 18 months and the strategic streamlining of his schedule. Where in years past Meb had raced everything from cross-country to track, 2009 featured a handful of well-distributed events: the Houston Half-Marathon, the USA Cross-Country Championships, the London Marathon, the Rock 'n' Roll San Jose Half-Marathon, and of course, New York. "He had his game face on pretty early on," says Larsen. "Even a couple of months before the marathon, you could see it coming. The only thing I was worried about was holding him back."

As Larsen likes to say, marathoning is a really tough sport. The main reason for training in Mammoth—Larsen cofounded the Mammoth Track Club—is the proven physiological benefit from high-altitude living and training. But beyond that there is a Rockiesque machismo to it all—lithe men and women battling the fierce mountain elements day after day. Meb routinely sits in the ice-cold creek behind Sherwin Plaza—the locals have dubbed one boulder "Meb's rock"—where his 5-foot-6, 125-pound body tolerates 15 minutes of shivering for the recovery pluses, and perhaps because it reminds him of how tough he needs and wants to be.

"The two of us are pretty old-school," Meb says, of his and Larsen's mentality. A decade ago the (continued on page 114)

REBUILDING MEB

Continued from page 83

thinking was that three- or four-week stays were all that was needed; Meb bought a house in Mammoth in 2002. But the 2008 Colorado Springs experience convinced him to move from San Diego to live there year-round. Practical family considerations played a role, yet the decision was mostly a two-foot-in commitment to his racing future.

This past winter, Larsen and Meb were more mindful than ever of the "it makes you tough" dynamic in Mammoth. A massive snow dump in January forced the runners to hunt for decent, snow-free terrain—sometimes the 4x4 drives to the lower altitude valleys around Bishop are an hour or more, plowing along at 35 miles per hour on icy highways. And those drives are nothing compared to the six-hour middle-of-the-night shuttles between Los Angeles and Mammoth for which Larsen is famous. Meb says he worries about his coach; he is 71. He wonders if he should let *him* off the hook, let his coach know, it's okay, *he* doesn't have to do this. Their concern for one another is evident always, but it's hard to imagine ei-

ther of them letting go or letting up anytime soon, especially after the events of November 1, 2009.

In the days leading up to the ING New York City Marathon, Meb was confident he'd run a strong race. Winning was something entirely different, but he knew he'd be competitive. His recent results showed he was flying—in October, just a month before New York, he'd set a new American 20-K record (57:52) in San Jose en route to an easy victory and personal best for the half (1:01:00). What was funny was that with all the indicators showing that Meb was in form, nobody seemed to take him seriously as a potential winner in New York. He was well down the list of pre-race favorites and wasn't even mentioned in a *New York Times* article about the likelihood of an American victor.

When Larsen told him a day before the race that "you match up, don't look at the times" Meb understood what he was saying. He was saying, "Athens." There, Meb had the 39th best time at the starting line and finished second. He figured he'd be patient and disciplined, stay close to the leaders, including four-time Boston winner Cheruiyot, and slug it out over the final 400 meters. "More

than a month earlier, I had a dream I won," says Meb. "When I woke up, I remember going to the finish line pretty strong."

At mile 24, only Meb and Cheruiyot remained. When Meb made a surge coming through two quick turns as they entered Central Park on 90th Street, Cheruiyot surprisingly let him go. Meb, who was wearing a white USA singlet, pushed into Central Park and saw the gap widen to five seconds. He never looked back. "What were you doing at mile 26?" David Letterman asked him, trying to inquire about his mile splits. Meb answered, "Celebrating."

Unforgettably, he was also paying tribute. As he ran past the spot where Ryan Shay had collapsed two years earlier, Meb made a sign of the cross. The "glorifying" gesture seemed almost otherworldly in its summoning, especially given the memory of his no-doubt blinding pain and the anxiety of a still developing break. "I thought about him throughout the race," says Meb, who didn't attend Shay's funeral because of his injury. "We ran hundreds and hundreds of miles together, took ice baths together, and when people were saying racial whatever on letsrun.com and questioning how hard I worked, he said,

RACE SPOTLIGHT

ADVERTISING SECTION



Charlotte's Thunder Road MARATHON

We would like to give a thunderous ovation!
Thank you to all those who made the 2009 Thunder Road Marathon possible!

Thank you to all the participants, volunteers and sponsors. Without you the event could not have been the success that it was.

Get ready to **"FEEL THE THUNDER!"** in 2010.
DECEMBER 11, 2010

www.runcharlotte.com



'You have to meet Meb and then you will change your mind.' He put his name on the line and stood up for me big time. I was always thankful for that."

Meb crossed the finish line in 2:09:15, 41 seconds ahead of Cheruiyot. For the last mile or so, Meb thought about all the people who meant something to him, the people whose stories he couldn't forget and didn't want to forget. Relatives back home in Eritrea, friends such as Shay who had passed away, Larsen's wife Sue...it wasn't like the last 18 months of intense recuperation passed before his eyes, it was like his whole life did. You might think he would've slowed down under the weight of those memories, but his 26th mile was 4:57.

After he crossed himself, kissed the ground, and knocked off a push-up, he caught his wife Yordanos's eye. "When she saw me—I can't put it into words," he told the *Wall Street Journal* after the race. "Here's a guy that couldn't walk, that couldn't turn in bed because of my hip fracture...so when we saw each other, we just broke down in tears." It was a like a levee in the deepest, most guarded corner of his soul had let go. Like 2007, he sobbed uncontrollably. Only this time, they were tears of joy.

Back in Mammoth, it's easy to see that Meb is a happy man in his home. The two-story house is in a cozy development off Minaret Road, where almost all the streets are named after alpine hills, like Kitzbuhel, Davos, and Courchevel. The new Infiniti G37x he and Yordanos bought after New York is parked in front of the garage, and his mother, Awetash, is upstairs helping to look after the girls. She gives the place, which is completing its transition from a sometime vacation house to *the* house, a welcome fullness, a connection to the siblings and relatives both he and Yordanos have left behind to pursue the dream of Boston, and beyond that, the London Games in 2012.

Back from his morning workout on the hospital treadmill, Meb is holding his newborn in the warm light of a south-facing window bench, reading *Goodnight Gorilla* to his older daughters, and serving the homemade coffee his mother has made for a visitor. "There will be three servings," cautions Meb, as his mother hovers over a two-burner camp stove on the plush beige carpet, roasting green Eritrean beans Meb bought from a specialty store in San Diego.

Over the course of a marathon five-hour visit, we drink at least four servings of coffee, share handfuls of traditional Eritrean flat

bread, and converse about child rearing, running and racing, and everything else under the sun. He says of his comparatively advanced age it is just a number. "Actually, I'm running faster than I ever have," Meb smiles, relating how he recently ran the Miramar Lake loop (which is just a shade under 10 miles) in 47:32, one second quicker than his best time in 2001.




He hopes to run a sub 2:09 at Boston—a time he's yet to hit in his 12 previous marathons—but thinks he can do it if he stays healthy, keeps to his training schedule, and employs the savvy tactical sense he showed in New York. He learned his lesson in Boston in 2006, he says, going out too fast (1:02:44 at halfway), only to bonk on Heartbreak Hill as Robert Cheruiyot loped away from him.

"Who has won New York and Boston back to back?" he asks rhetorically (a few legends have, of course). "I'm going to do my best to do that." He is a student of the sport and aware of his legacy, trusting that there is still more to be done. He knows that the average American fan thinks of two marathons above all others, New York and Boston. "There are going to be good guys at Boston who've beaten me in the past," he says, not needing to mention by name the so-called King of Boston, the aforementioned Cheruiyot. "But also, I'm the guy who had a PR in my last race at the age of 34."

In so many ways, Meb seems a confident and lovely unburdened man, almost beatific in this glow of love and caring, but what is never far from his mind is what he said in the living room a few hours ago. "Not failing." Not failing is more than important because of where he came from and because of what has been done for him.

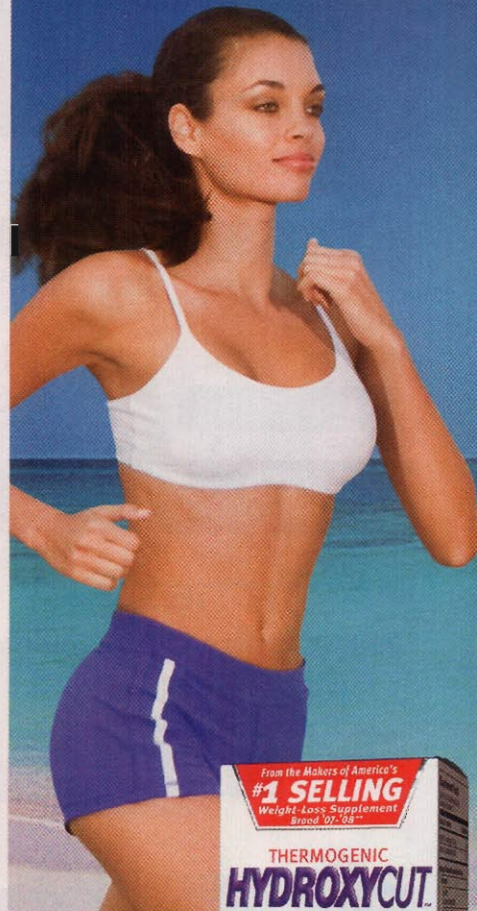
Later, at the Snowcreek Athletic Club, he surprises me when he says he is thinking about sneaking in another run after his weight training with teammates Deena Kastor and Scott Bauhs. It's not on the schedule, but the sun is setting and the mountains look sort of magical, and you know it's hard, always hard, to not find a perfectly good excuse to run a little farther. **EW**

RUNNER'S WORLD (ISSN 0897-1706) IS PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY RODALE INC. VOLUME 45 NUMBER 5, EDITORIAL OFFICES 33 E MINOR ST, EMMAUS, PA 18098 (610-967-5171). COPYRIGHT ©2010 BY RODALE INC. POSTMASTER: SEND ADDRESS CHANGES TO RUNNER'S WORLD, P.O. BOX 7307, RED OAK, IA 51591-0307. PERIODICALS POSTAGE PAID AT EMMAUS, PA, AND ADDITIONAL MAILING OFFICES. IN CANADA POSTAGE PAID AT GATEWAY MISSISSAUGA, ONTARIO. CANADA POST PUBLICATIONS MAIL AGREEMENT NUMBER 40063752. RETURN UNDELIVERABLE CANADA ADDRESSES TO RUNNER'S WORLD, 2930 14TH AVE, MARKHAM, ONTARIO L3R 5Z8. GST #R122988611. SUBSCRIBERS: IF THE POSTAL AUTHORITIES ALERT US THAT YOUR MAGAZINE IS UNDELIVERABLE, WE HAVE NO FURTHER OBLIGATION UNLESS WE RECEIVE A CORRECTED ADDRESS WITHIN 18 MONTHS.

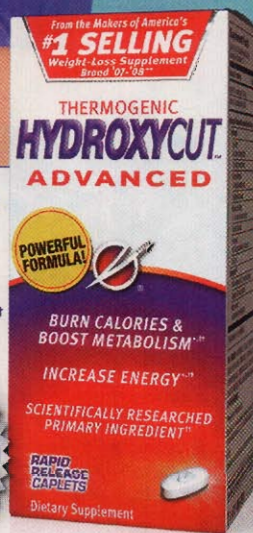
PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.






THERMOGENIC HYDROXYCUT™ ADVANCED



**Burn More
Calories
& Get
Energized!™**



HYDROXYCUTADVANCED.COM™

SuperCenters

GNC LiveWell
SHOP NATIONWIDE OR AT GNC.COM

Walgreens CVS/pharmacy

RITE AID

**The primary ingredient (Caffeine anhydrous [1,3,7 trimethylxanthine]) supports increased energy and boosts metabolism to burn more calories. This is not a weight-control product. Use as part of an active, healthy lifestyle. ♦♦Based on IRI F/D/MX sales data. Read entire label before use. © 2010