

Lisa Larsen – Battle Creek Central 1979



In high school, Lisa Larsen was a star swimmer, good enough to earn a scholarship to Michigan. She also ran track, placing 5th in the Class A mile in 5:07.2.

At Michigan she concentrated on swimming first, scoring 81 points in the Big 10 Championships as a frosh. She qualified for the Olympic Trials, but when the U.S. boycotted the Moscow Games, she took the summer off. “I started to gain weight, and I used running as a form of fitness to get back in shape to start my sophomore year at Michigan. And I found that I really loved running. My roommate was on the track team, and she goes, ‘Oh my God, you can run.’” Flash forward: I ended up turning in my scholarship as a swimmer and walking on as a runner.”

Twice an All-American in cross country, she finished 6th in the 1983 NCAA 10,000. “My college coach, Ron Warhurst, was amazing. The biggest thing he taught me was how to hurt... and how to like it.” At the 1984 Olympic Trials Marathon, she finished a heart-breaking 4th in 2:33:10, missing the Olympics by 44 seconds.

The next year, running under the last name Weidenbach, she won the Boston Marathon in 2:34:06; not until 2018 did another American woman win the race.

Four years later, she seemed poised for the Olympic team, but her lifetime best 2:31:06 in Pittsburgh gave her yet another 4th place. “I guess I won’t be disappointed until I see the three women running in Seoul. The nightmare will become a reality at that point,” she said. That summer, she tried to make the 10,000 team and finished 5th in 32:15.88.

She came back with a vengeance, winning Chicago that fall in 2:29:17. The next year, she won again in 2:28:15.

Then came another Olympic Trials, 1992. Short on training because of a plantar injury, she ran to—unbelievably—another 4th-place finish. “I had a love-hate relationship with the Olympic Trials,” she has said.

Despite the Olympic frustrations, she enjoyed a career filled with major wins. She transitioned to the triathlon toward the end of her pro career. As Lisa Rainsberger, she currently coaches and is the mother of former Washington star Katie Rainsberger.