

Running commentary

By **Charlie Kanzig**
Correspondent

When I heard that elite runner Lauren Fleshman would be making an appearance at Sisters Athletic Club (SAC) last week, I was not sure what the focus of her presentation would be. After all, in addition to being one of the finest distance runners in America during the past decade, she is also the co-founder of a business that produces athletic performance bars, an author, a wife, a mother, and a coach.

In a humble and honest manner, Fleshman proceeded to weave many of the components of her life — including the challenge of coping with injuries — into an inspirational and meaningful message.

Host and SAC owner Tate Metcalf began the evening by showing some clips of Fleshman performing in high level meets as well as one in which she was featured in a Nike ad and another which was a spoof ad produced by her latest sponsor Oiselle, a running apparel company focused on promoting and supporting female athletes.

In the first clip, at a Diamond Level meet in Europe, Fleshman is shown bursting away from the field with two laps to go in such dramatic fashion the British announcers thought she had miscounted the laps. In reality, she had simply decided to make the uncharacteristic, risky move in order to win the race, which she accomplished going away.

Fleshman, a five-time NCAA champion while

attending Stanford, where she graduated with a degree in human biology, lives in Bend with her husband, Jesse Thomas, a graduate of Mountain View. The pair met at Stanford where they both ran cross-country and track.

Fleshman described one of her finest moments in which she placed seventh in the 5,000 meters at the 2011 World Championships, where she ran with the leader through 11 laps of the 12-1/2-lap race before falling victim to three Kenyans and three Ethiopians, who “seemed to simply have another gear and moved like a single organism” at the end of the race. Regardless, her finish was the highest by an American up to that point in history.

After her success in 2011, Fleshman believed that the next year, 2012, would provide her the best opportunity of her career to qualify for the Olympics after missing by one place in 2008. Sadly, an injury kept her from any sort of normal training, from November to June. Since she had a qualifying mark for the Olympic Trials in Eugene, she had a guaranteed place on the starting line for the 5,000 meters. She decided to give it a try against the odds of a positive result.

“The only actual running I could do was sprinting for short distances, so prior to the race I had not run more than a mile non-stop in months,” she said. “I wanted the fans to know what I was doing, so I blogged and tweeted about my situation and even suggested my followers hold up their hands in the form of a

‘C’ for ‘courage.’”

The fans at Hayward Field, well known for their support of distance runners, especially those with ties to Oregon, responded fully with hundreds of hands aloft, lifting up Fleshman before the race even began.

“I ran with all those people in my heart that day,” she said. “It was so exciting to hear the crowd.”

The support she garnered from the fans at Hayward Field, along with a strategic, slow pace, helped her to actually qualify for the final.

“It came down to a sprint, which I had actually been practicing, and I earned the sixth spot in my heat for the final,” she said.

The final had an entirely different outcome, however, as Fleshman struggled throughout and finished last.

Therein lay part of her message for the audience of about 50. She said, “Every time you race there comes a point where you have the opportunity to be brave.”

She clearly did something brave by allowing herself to be vulnerable and stepping to the starting line and then seeing it through.

Going further, she said, “What gives you courage is when they realize that failing does not make you a failure.”

Beyond running, she has branched out with her business producing Picky Bars, which she described as being “performance and real food bars”, authoring a guided journal for female runners (called the “Believe Training

Journal”), and coaching three elite women, as well as doing some public speaking.

As is often the case, the philosophy and lessons shared by athletes can be transferred to other parts of life. Fleshman clearly has the will to take risks and learn from them. I appreciated that she is clearly motivated to support women and girls in their life endeavors. She even agreed to come out to cross-country practice in Sisters next year in order to speak to the team.

Even though most of us

are not elite runners, we can still relate to someone like Fleshman, who described her love of running outdoors as “a chance to breathe fresh air and let the wind blow through your brain.”

Her message of grit, goal-setting, humility, balance and being your best came at a good time for me, and I believe she inspired everyone else in the room as well.

You can learn more about Lauren Fleshman at www.asklaurenfleshman.com and about Picky Bars at www.pickybars.com.

All that jazz...



PHOTO BY SUSAN SPRINGER

SMS and SHS band instructors Tyler Cranor and Julie Cash led Jazz Band and Jazz Combo students to Eugene’s Lane Community College to perform at the 2016 Oregon Jazz Festival for fellow student musicians and clinicians from around the northwest.

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