



Jordan Hasay Will Outrun You. While Smiling.

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Until recently, the Nike track star seemed destined for burnout. But last year in Boston, after a wave of disappointing races and a personal tragedy, she ran a record-shattering debut marathon. Will the new distance of 26.2 miles save her career?

Mar 8, 2018

Jordan Hasay stood at the starting line of the Boston Marathon last April, feeling a sense of calm she didn't recognize. She was used to being jumpy and trying to quiet her mind, which starts racing long before her body does. In the past, she was so nervous that she brought coloring books to give her jittery fingers something to do. Once she's running, she's in her element. But waiting for the gun is the toughest part. That morning, though, she was steady and still.

Hasay had run hundreds of races, but never a marathon. And yet it felt like she'd been training her whole life for this one. People have been calling her a phenom since she was 12, a young track star from Arroyo Grande, California, who won nearly every high school race she entered. After a commendable four years competing for the Ducks at the University of Oregon, she turned pro in 2013, joining running coach Alberto Salazar's Nike Oregon Project (<https://nikeoregonproject.com/>) and fulfilling a lifelong dream. But after a year and a half, the successes stopped. In September 2016, seven months before Boston, Hasay and Salazar had

discussed parting ways if she wasn't able to pick up the pace. That November, her mother, Teresa, passed away suddenly at age 56, devastating Hasay and her close-knit family. At the starting line in Boston, Hasay had something to prove.



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Redemption on Heartbreak Hill (Audio version from A...

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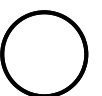
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During the race she kept up with the lead pack, fronted by elite marathoners Edna Kiplagat, Rose Chelimo, and Desiree Linden. If they had been running a 2:19 or 2:20 pace, Hasay would have fallen back, tucked in behind some man running 2:22, and gone it alone. *Good job, Paula, good job, Paula*, she told herself, recalling her mom's nickname for her, a nod to marathon world-record holder Paula Radcliffe, Hasay's idol. It was unseasonably warm for April—later, about 20 runners would need to be submerged in ice baths. But not Hasay. The heat just took her home, to the California beaches and hills where she first ran six-mile loops with her mom, keeping a slight lead because she could.

Kiplagat pulled away right before the course's notorious Heartbreak Hill (<http://archive.boston.com/marathon/course/stage4.htm>), blowing through mile 20 in just five minutes and two seconds. She finished the race 59 seconds ahead of the next runner. Still, when Hasay hit the final Boylston Street stretch, she knew she'd crushed it—she was footsteps behind Chelimo, who crossed the finish line nine seconds before she did. Hasay took third place in the women's race and, at 2:23, clocked the fastest marathon debut time (<https://www.outsideonline.com/2269966/best-running-moments-2017>) by an American woman. Her dad was crying. Her coach was crying. She clasped her hands together and bent down, thanking God.



When local CBS reporter Steve Burton snagged her for a finish-line interview, she responded to his questions with characteristic exuberance, superlatives spilling from her mouth. But when he asked her how the crowd helped, in a city whose marathon will forever be marked by grief, she faltered, her face crumpling like a piece of paper. “I know that a lot of people out there lost loved ones here, and that really just lifted me up. I was thinking about all of them,” she said. “I know they’re with us all in spirit, and I know that my mom would be really proud.”

She started to cry, and Burton wrapped his arms around her. “I love her so much, and she’ll always be with me,” she said, an amalgam of tears and smiles and achievement and longing spelled out on her face. It was an outpouring of emotion that made her the star of the race. And somewhere in it was the knowledge that she might have just saved her career.



“Do you mind if I eat?” Hasay asks politely, as she unearths a PB&J sandwich and a ziplock bag of green grapes from the depths of her backpack. We’re sitting next to a lake outside the cafeteria at Nike’s headquarters near Portland, Oregon, and it’s hard to tell if the late September warmth is coming from the sun or Hasay herself. The 26-year-old is childlike, with the small frame of many elite runners—she’s five foot five and weighs 104 pounds—and she uses spirited language. She’s excited! Honored! Thrilled! When we meet, she doesn’t just hug me, she flings her arms around me. When she giggles, her face emits energy like a firework. Even here, among her tribe, she stands out so brightly that it seems like she might be plugged in, eyes and whispers following the tiny, deeply tanned running machine in a vivid royal blue hoodie, her long blond “Jordan braids” swishing behind her. “It’s been a hard year,” she says. “But I’m very thankful!”

The Nike campus has a retro-futuristic look—employees sporting Nike swooshes sit on Nike-orange chairs eating food from Nike-orange cafeteria Tupperware as workers glide by on Nike-orange bicycles. The robotic feel befits an elite Oregon Project runner’s life, which seems downright monastic. Hasay lives in a two-bedroom condo a quarter mile from where we’re sitting. She runs 100 miles a week, once in the morning on the track behind the Nike campus and once in the evening, often on her treadmill at home. She grills steak outside her condo to hit her 5,000-calories-per-day goal. For fun she watches *Harry Potter* or *Frozen* for the gazillionth time. She sleeps ten hours a night and naps an hour every afternoon. “When I’m not running, I’m trying to rest,” she says. The remainder of her time is spent in guided meditation, massage therapy, acupuncture, and physiotherapy, and on flights to races all over the world.

Hasay’s grand plan—the one she wrote in her running log as a teen, to run professionally for Nike—started to take shape when she won the national Foot Locker Cross Country Championships as a high school freshman in 2005, the second freshman ever to win the 5K event. She won the race again as a senior. She set national Junior Olympics records in the 1,500 and 3,000 meters. Throughout high school, she was nearly unbeatable, a star on running blogs and in the local media. Girls have been asking their parents for Jordan braids ever since.

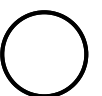
In 2008, after a record-setting run for a high schooler in the 1,500 meters at the Olympic Trials at the University of Oregon’s Hayward Field—4:14.50, if you’re wondering—she made it to the final but didn’t qualify. Hasay was sent off by the crowd in Eugene, a.k.a. Tracktown USA, with a thunderous cheer: “Come to Oregon! Come to Oregon!” She did, enrolling the next year to study business and joining the Oregon Ducks track team, competing in 1,500-, 3,000-, 5,000-,

and 10,000-meter events over the next four years. Despite finishing college as an 18-time all-American and the most decorated runner in the university's history, Hasay didn't do a whole lot of winning at Oregon. Though she helped lead the Ducks to national titles, won two individual titles, and broke countless personal records, she was often narrowly beaten and faced criticism for letting stress get the better of her at the end of a race. She couldn't deliver a kick—a fatal flaw in a runner with no other discernible weakness. She tackled that vulnerability with extra training, extra hamstring stretches, extra grit.

“We've seen a lot of phenoms, a lot of high school kids who are really good when they're young, and by the end of college they're done,” says Maurica Powell, Hasay's primary coach at Oregon. “Everything about running made Jordan happy. It wasn't just the satisfaction of winning. She loved putting one foot in front of the other.”

But Powell couldn't ignore that Hasay was starting to plateau at shorter distances. In her senior year, Powell moved her to longer events, and Hasay made her 10,000-meter debut at a meet at Stanford. “Most people, when they run their first 10,000, they're dead for weeks, they're trashed. The first thing she said when it was over was, ‘I can't wait to do it again,’ ” Powell says. Later, Hasay would run one of the fastest 10Ks in NCAA history. “She did whatever it took,” says her University of Oregon teammate Allie Woodward. “If foam rolling and an ice bath every single day were going to get you the win, then she did that.”

In Hasay's senior year, former marathoner Alberto Salazar came to Eugene on a mission. Both devout Catholics, they met after Salazar delivered the keynote speech at a Christian leadership conference. “During his speech, he said, ‘I drove all the way from Portland for this, and now I get to meet one of the best collegiate distance runners in the country,’ ” recalls Hasay. She was stunned. She'd wanted to run with him for years.



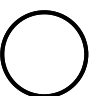
In June 2013, the day of her last race as a Duck, Nike signed Hasay. The morning after, she was on a plane to Park City, Utah, where Oregon Project athletes train at altitude using sauna suits and both antigravity and underwater treadmills. The week she arrived, she ran her longest distance ever, 18 miles, in sweltering heat before collapsing on the floor. “This is the real deal,” she wrote in her journal.

It’s a widely acknowledged occurrence in track that high school prodigies don’t often have the longevity to turn pro. Maybe they lack the dedication, or after a while their bodies begin to break down. With a core made of steel, a wildly lucky injury-free stretch, and exceptionally long legs on a small frame, Hasay had always been different—more resilient than the other runners Powell had coached at Oregon.

But in 2015, a year and a half into her professional career, Hasay suffered her first real injury, a bout of plantar fasciitis that knocked her out for most of the season. At her first race back that December, she missed the 10,000-meter Olympic qualifying time by a large margin—31 seconds—and placed eighth. Eight months later, she had two disappointing finishes at the 2016 Olympic Trials. She placed 13th in the 5,000 meters and ninth in the 10,000. Making the Olympic team was a childhood dream she had relentlessly pursued. She’d missed making the team in 2008 and 2012. Failing as a pro was almost too much. Hasay flew home to California for her summer break. She wasn’t sure anymore how badly she wanted a running career.

On September 22, 2016, the day after Hasay’s 25th birthday, Salazar and Darren Treasure, the team’s sports psychologist, sat her down for what she calls “a real heart-to-heart.” They told her that despite everyone’s best efforts, she simply wasn’t racing well enough. “They said that if I didn’t get my act together, Alberto couldn’t coach me anymore,” Hasay recalls. “I was really sad about it, but I’m realistic. I didn’t want to just be struggling. It was mutual, but it was hard.”

Hasay left that meeting knowing she had one more shot, and it was 26.2 miles long. She had dreamed of being a marathoner, and she and Salazar had talked about the race being the final stretch of her career, a natural progression that many track athletes take.

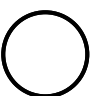


Salazar and Hasay adjusted her training and race schedule, moving away from a tactical focus on finishing speed and adding a weekly 20-mile run and two weight-lifting sessions. That October she won her first race in two years, the USA Track and Field 10-Mile Championships in Saint Paul, Minnesota. When she won, she felt like she belonged. Online speculation lit up like a wildfire. Was it a freak success? Could she replicate it? Would this be the comeback?

The day we're together at Nike, Hasay is all optimism and forward momentum when I ask her about her early pro years. She's not sure why she stopped succeeding. She prefers to focus on how well she's doing now. "I always thought that I would be better at the marathon," she says with a shrug and a grin. But for the girl who hates to lose, it's hard to believe it's that simple. "She's very dedicated," Salazar says. "Even if she's not feeling good, she's never going to seem down. You have to drag that out of her."

Tomorrow morning she's leaving for Philadelphia, which means she'll do her first run of the day at 5 a.m. "Which isn't too bad!" she chirps. She'll be there to run a half marathon, and Meseret Defar, a 5,000-meter Olympic champion from Ethiopia, just joined the field. Hasay knows she can't beat Defar, and Salazar thinks she should focus on maintaining pace and not a win. "I don't know if he's going to be upset if I try to win and run faster," she says. "But it's hard to just let someone go, isn't it?" She smiles. (Defar took first place, Hasay third.)

American women are making huge gains in the marathon right now. Olympic runner Amy Cragg took bronze at the World Championships last summer in London. Shalane Flanagan (<https://www.outsideonline.com/2281741/shalane-flanagan-how-achieve-peak-performance>), a 10,000-meter Olympic medalist, won the New York City Marathon in November, the first American woman to tear the tape in 40 years. Three other American women placed in the top ten that day, too. Still, Hasay's time in Boston (2:23) was faster than Flanagan's New York victory (2:26:53) by a stretch. And in October, in what was just the second marathon appearance of her career, Hasay posted the second-fastest time ever by an American woman—2:20:57—to place third in Chicago.



Some runners weren't sure what to think about Hasay's Chicago performance. While it's important to note that she has never been implicated, there have been a series of news reports and a long-standing investigation by the United States Anti-Doping Agency (USADA) (<https://www.usada.org/>) into the Oregon Project, examining allegations that Salazar pushed his athletes to take medications for conditions they didn't have and abused protocols that allow athletes to use certain banned substances if there's a viable medical rationale. After Chicago, where another Oregon Project runner, Galen Rupp, won the men's race, Flanagan—who is sponsored by Nike but runs for the Bowerman Track Club—told reporters, “There's still an investigation going on, so it's hard to truly and genuinely get excited about the performances that I'm watching. We don't get to choose our parents, but we certainly get to choose our friends and our coaches and who we want to include in our circle and put our faith and our trust in.” She added, “Who you choose to allow in says a lot about you.” (Flanagan declined to be interviewed for this story.)

Hasay isn't named in any news stories or in an interim USADA report, which was leaked online last year, but according to *The New York Times* and *The Times of London*, some of Salazar's current and former protégés—like Rupp, an Olympic medalist—are mentioned for allegedly taking thyroid medication inappropriately (<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/19/sports/nike-oregon-project-alberto-salazar-dathan->



ritzenhein.html?_r=0) and using prohibited infusion methods. (The USADA has never confirmed that the leaked report is authentic.) Salazar flatly denied the allegations in a statement

(http://www.oregonlive.com/trackandfield/index.ssf/2015/06/alberto_salazar_and_galen_rupp.ht to *The Oregonian*. Two years before, he responded to doping allegations

(<https://www.propublica.org/article/records-in-nike-oregon-alberto-salazar-doping-investigation-do-not-match>) published by the BBC and ProPublica in a detailed, two-part open letter published on the Oregon Project website. Rupp, who Salazar noted in his letter suffers from asthma and a thyroid condition, has also denied the allegations numerous times and has never tested positive for performance-enhancing drugs. Nor has Hasay, or any other Oregon Project runner. The USADA says it can't comment on investigations that are ongoing. A Nike representative confirmed that Salazar stands by his earlier statements.

Hasay says that she's not involved in the investigation and denies ever using performance-enhancing drugs. "Everyone asks about that now," she says ruefully. "If you get to know Alberto, then you know he's not like that."

After Flanagan won in New York, Hasay Instagrammed a congratulatory photo of the two of them together. On April 16, fans will get the showdown they've been waiting for (<https://www.outsideonline.com/2262036/why-running-needs-shalane-vs-jordan-showdown>) when both athletes line up for Boston. The two have never competed against each other in a marathon, and an American woman hasn't won the race since 1985.

Hasay seems to thrive on the uncompromising pursuit of a dream. This is a woman who excitedly texts a friend that she has to practice peeing her pants for the marathon, and who, faced with an afternoon that includes three minutes in a minus-250-degree cryotherapy chamber, is downright chipper: "It only gets cold the last 15 seconds, really." She doesn't just run; she endures. "She can put herself in some pretty dark places," Powell says. "She can keep her mind really calm when her body's in a world of pain."

Competing seems to be in Hasay's DNA. When her parents, Joe and Teresa, first met at a Gold's Gym in Los Angeles, in 1987, he was a body builder and she was a competitive swimmer. The Hasays fostered a culture of devotion in their California home—to each other, to God and the Catholic Church, to exercise. As a kid, Jordan would stand in the driveway with her boogie



board, waiting for her parents to finish their morning workouts. She and her younger brother, Jedd, would set up race courses around their cul-de-sac for the neighborhood kids. Basketball games in the pool were so rough they drew blood.

“She’s just incredibly determined to be the best,” says Joe, who owns an aerospace-services company. Jordan has always run on rocket fuel, the adults around her trying to rein her in. When she was in fourth grade, the school principal called a special meeting with her parents to ensure that she’d be able to handle the emotional strain of joining the junior high track team. (She beat the other girls handily.) She began accompanying her mom on runs through the hills of Arroyo Grande every morning, a ritual that would provide an anchor after her mother died in November 2016. (The family is keeping the details of Teresa’s death private.)

Hasay was at the Pittsburgh airport on her way to a race when she got the call about her mom from Salazar. He said that Teresa had been found dead at their home in California. Salazar arranged for the race officials who picked up Hasay to take her to the nearest Catholic church so she could talk to a priest.

After Hasay opened up about her mother at the Boston finish line, the volume of messages from fans reaching out to her became overwhelming. The high of taking third in the marathon had worn off, and she felt adrift. “I can’t be that hero to people if I’m not healed myself,” she says. “I felt like I was somewhat being a hypocrite.” She pulled back from social media and returned home to California. On nights when she struggled to sleep, she put on her shoes, ran the loop she once did with her mom, and watched the sun come up. Still, she’s trying to avoid using training to cope. “I didn’t want running to be the replacement or the therapy for what happened,” she says. “Running’s not always going to be there.”

Instead she turned to God, hanging a rosary from her rearview mirror, just like the one that hung in her parents’ car when she was young. She went to church every weekend. She and Salazar recited the Lord’s Prayer and the Hail Mary before Boston. The day of the half marathon

in Philadelphia, she went to mass with her father and his friends. She reads more, too, and looks at online testimonials from others who have lost parents.

“How’s it been going now?” she asks when I tell her that I lost my father six years ago. She adds, “I went through a period where I was like, This is really hard and everyone says it gets better over time, why am I going backward? I always want to be trying to bounce forward.”

The Nike track, a 90-second jog from Hasay’s condo, looks like it was airlifted into a *FernGully* forest. Hasay shows up for a training session in a white zip-up shirt that makes her skin appear incandescent in the early-morning light. She begins to stretch, her upper and lower body coming together as neatly as the covers of a book. Salazar emerges from the trees, and they begin an easy back-and-forth about a new heart-rate sleeve he’s hoping she can wear, electrolyte packets he wants her to try, and a rosary he brought her for luck.

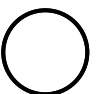
Salazar counts down her intervals. She’s running sets of 600, 400, 300, and 200 meters, at 112, 71, 51, and 32 seconds, respectively. “A very easy workout for her,” Salazar says. “Just enough to turn the legs over.”



There aren't many more easy workouts in Hasay's future. After the half marathon in Philadelphia, she ran Chicago in October, her last 26.2-miler before Boston. Long-term, she's aiming for a medal in the marathon at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and is looking even further out. "L.A. is going to get the 2028 Olympics, and I'll be 36," she says. "I would love to run an Olympics in our home country. That's the goal that keeps things in perspective when I get really nervous."

"A little fast, slow down," Salazar yells out. "Watch your shoulders." Her face doesn't flicker; only her bottom lip jostles with the cadence of her feet. She doesn't sweat. Two girls shuffle along slowly in the outer lanes, Nike employees who have come to take advantage of the facility. Galen Rupp stops by for a sprint. "With Jordan, I'm convinced there's something about her metabolism, her stride, her body that makes the half marathon and marathon her sweet spots," Salazar says before running out to adjust her shoulders and tighten up her arms.

Hasay doesn't yet know that in Chicago she'll shave two minutes off her Boston time, making her one of the fastest runners in U.S. history. Today it's just her and the sun and her coach and the track and the trees. To her right a squirrel keeps pace, and to her left an older man jogs on. For just a moment, they're lined up as though at a starting gate, and then Hasay surges forward, her final 200 meters, 30 seconds of bliss.



This is Katherine Laidlaw's (@klaidlaw (<https://twitter.com/klaidlaw>)) first story for Outside.

Front of the Pack

The elite field at the Boston Marathon has never been more stacked. Here are the other top American women to watch on April 16.

—Molly Mirhashem (<https://www.outsideonline.com/2039871/molly-mirhashem>)

Shalane Flanagan

Flanagan (<https://www.outsideonline.com/2281741/shalane-flanagan-how-achieve-peak-performance>) is a local favorite—she's from nearby Marblehead—and each of the previous three times she's run the marathon, there's been chatter about whether she could win. Her time from 2014 (2:22:02) is the fastest ever run by an American woman on the course—good enough for seventh place. The closest she's come to winning was fourth place, in 2013. Last spring an injury

