SPORTS

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Ultra-marathoner runs down her dreams

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Jessica McBride began running at her lowest point.

Once weighing over 300 pounds, she decided she needed to make a change to enjoy a full life with her children. Now, she has been ultra-running for nearly 10 years, and was recently chosen to represent Alberta for the Association of Canadian Ultrarunners (ACU).

When she was much younger, running wasn't something McBride actively sought out as a sport. In fact, quite the opposite, because of a medical condition that affected her gait.

"I have an ortho difference from other people, so my feet turn out when I run," McBride said. "As a child though, they didn't know that my bones were literally turned out because it was the '90s and no one cared. So I had a gym teacher that would point me out to the class and tell everyone, 'Look at Bishop, she runs like a girl.'"

Because of this experience, she refused to run in front of others.

"I failed the mile in high school intentionally because I would not run in front of other people," she said.

Things spiralled, and at one point she was 300 pounds. She knew it was time for a change.

"After I had my third daughter I had to have this 'come to Jesus' moment that I had three children under three, and I was killing myself," she said. "And if I wanted to be around to raise my children I had to save my own life."

She started losing weight, and after that, looked for ways she could further challenge herself. Running stood out as an immediate option.

"In a year from the day that I started running, I debuted on the marathon," she said. It was a monumental achievement for her, especially coming from a family of distance runners.

"My mom ran the marathon when she was young. My biological father was a competition triathlete. So the genetic components were there, and I was good at it," she said.

Her first road marathon was in Red Deer in 2017, a race that she loves to this day. She calls it the "finest road race in Alberta."

"It's a beautiful race and very well run," she said. "In comparison to like Calgary or Edmonton, it's much hillier, right? It's a more difficult course than either one of those."

Always up for a challenge, she's dedicated and willing to sacrifice sleep to get where she wants to be.

"I am someone who sleeps about three and a half hours a night. That's just how my life is to make things work the way they need to work," she said. "On Tuesday and Thursday when my son's in preschool, I'm in the gym doing sprints for an hour and a half or two hours, because I have to make the most of the time that I have."

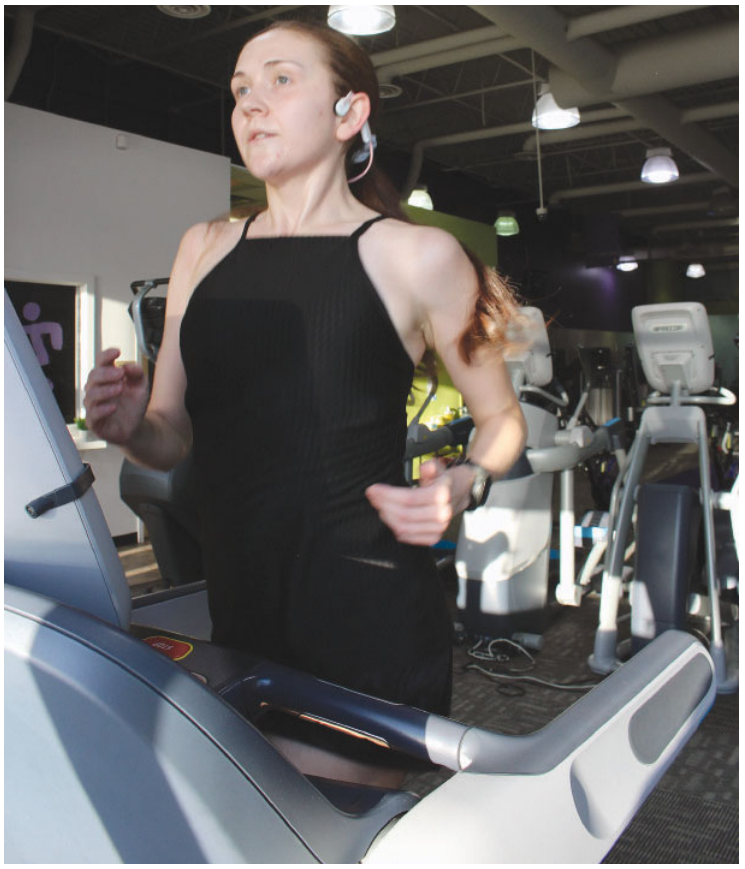
"On the weekend when I have to long run, I'm up at three or four in the morning to make sure that I am back before they're into the swing of the day. I have to make sure that my children are obviously the first priority in my life, no matter what. And to make sure that everything happens in the sport the way it needs to happen, I have to be willing to sacrifice on my end," she said.

After years of sacrifice, she was named the Alberta representative for the Association of Canadian Ultrarunners on Jan. 17, allowing her to represent the ACU at events held in Alberta.

"In addition to that, if we have any awards or any records broken, I'm able to appear in official capacity to present things to athletes in Alberta," she said.

President of the ACU Bernadette Benson was looking for someone who could represent the qualities she feels are important to the sport.

"It's really about someone who is a really good advocate for the sport. Who exemplifies all the qualities of good sportsmanship and fairness in sport," Benson said. When she put a call out that the ACU was looking for provincial reps, McBride put her hand up for Alberta. Benson thought she made perfect sense.



TRISTAN ORAM/St. Albert Gazette

Jessica McBride runs on a treadmill at Anytime Fitness.

"She's been an incredible ambassador for the sport in Alberta. I found her on social media," said Benson, who lives in Australia.

She said McBride was great at engaging with other runners.

"She made best friends it seemed with everybody on the course in India," she said. McBride ran for Team Canada at the International Association of Ultrarunners (IAU) 100km World Championships in India in December 2024.

McBride said she's excited to help grow the sport and hopes it can be her "flagship achievement."

"I have some decent ambitions this year of being able to go to regular road marathons to promote the ACU. Because there are people out there like me that want more and don't know if it exists," she said. "I would really like to make ultra-marathoning — at least the knowledge of it — accessible to the Albertan running community at large." ■

