

## Jessica Smith is 2013 Female Runner of the Year



**Note:** The first time I met Jessica was about two years ago at the Trinity 5000 summer series at Trinity Park. After she had won the female's overall race, I noticed she looked young and asked her which school she attended. Masters runner Fiona Green looked at me and asked "How old do you think she is?" At that time, she was 34 years old. I would have guessed maybe 19. But as Fiona wrote in a report submitted about Jessica, she said that a person "could easily mistake her for a college runner with her petite frame and flawless complexion." Jessica has been running since fourth grade and excelled at Richland High School. She ran at Stephen F. Austin for awhile, competing in cross country and the 2-mile in track. Besides tending for a daughter who has methylmalonic acidemia, Jessica has overcome a diagnosis of low levels of iron and a fractured foot to become one of the top female runners in the DFW area. She has a current PR of 17:21, set last year at a 5K in Trophy Club, where she lives, and a 1:23 in the half marathon at Cowtown in 2013. It took Jessica Smith several weeks to get in the competitive running groove again after sustaining a broken foot about two years ago. But when she did start hitting her stride, she zipped to the front of the line at most of the races she entered. The 3 Trophy Club resident won at least 29 overall titles and closed out the year with a 17:47.46 at the New Year's Eve Run at Trinity Park. Among her other victories were the 5K at the DRC Half, the Lake Joe Pool 5K, Mayfest 5K and the 5K at the Irving Marathon. She also dominated the Trinity 5000 series.

By Jessica Smith



As a child I was really shy. I'll never forget the overwhelming feeling of being around so many kids in school and how I just couldn't wait to be home and by myself again, and I was a very independent kid. In the fourth grade, my teacher Mr. Benton decided to start a running club. He was a marathon runner himself. After our first mile time trial, Mr. Benton told my parents he thinks running should be something I stay involved in. I began to feel accomplished and like I have found something that makes me feel alive and accomplished...even at the young age I was. One regret I have is never telling Mr. Benton how important he was in my life. He died of a heart attack while running because of a heart defect he was unaware of.

So, I try and tell people how important they are to me as much as possible because we never know. I went on to continue my running career through middle school and high school. I was the team captain of the cross country team at Richland High School when I was a senior along with my friend Chaliese, a running friend who also began running in elementary school. (note: Jessica was the only student in Richland High School to ever make it to the State Championships all four years with the school team going three of those years).



A funny story real quick...in regionals my junior year....after the gun went off another girl stepped on my shoe and it came off. There were so many runners I couldn't find my shoe and just decided to take off. I'll never forget slipping and sliding as I ran through the freshly mowed grass that day. I finished the race and made it to state with one shoe! Pretty funny. I met my husband Trey my senior year of high school. After high school, I signed to run with Stephen F. Austin University, but I didn't run my full college career in order to focus more on my studies. I still ran on my own, but not competitively.

After graduating, Trey and I got married and I began teaching first grade. I was still running (not competing) in my spare time. My first child, daughter Madeline was born in 2002. After a couple days in the hospital, I was there was something seriously wrong with her and they didn't know what it was. They began a series of testing. During this testing they prepared us that there is a possibility she won't be coming home with us. After two teddy bear transports (ambulance trips) and two different hospitals, they finally diagnosed her with a rare metabolic disorder called methylmalonic acidemia.

After her diagnosis, they told us they are not positive she will ever talk, walk, or function like a regular person. We were finally able to bring her home and I quit my job to take care of her. She requires internal feedings every 2-3 hours, injections, and several medications. She is also hospitalized frequently from complications with her disorder. When Madeline was about 6 years old, I decided I needed to do something to get stronger mentally and physically for my daughter. I decided to go for my first run since Madeline's birth and barely made it a mile. It wasn't long before I began to feel that familiar runner's high I remembered from earlier. My best friend, Joanna Gafford, who has been an amazing and supportive person in my life since the 6th grade, convinced me to sign up for a 5K. I was skeptical about doing it but decided I would do it to make her happy! I won my age division and have been hooked on competitive road racing ever since. My son, Ryder, was born in 2005. He was a healthy baby boy. He is my little golfer!

My goal is to continue to work on my longer distance races. My favorite distances are the 5K and the 15K.

2013 was a year of me challenging myself in distances and PRs. I wanted to test myself against better talent and in longer distances. While having success in the 5K distance, I wanted to continue to try to drive my times down while also training for the 15K and longer distances which was a very big challenge. The best part of taking on new challenges in this running community is you have an army of support that helps drive you toward any goal you might take on.

I had a few setbacks, but not any that any other runner lining up hasn't already experienced themselves and that's the beauty of running, because everyone had to overcome something to get to that line. All the local runners and friends helped push me to get better and really test myself. I achieved some of my goals and others I'll have to go after in 2014, but the friendships I have are the greatest achievement of 2013.

As far as picking some of my favorite memories on the course in 2013, my favorite performance was in the Fort Worth Cowtown, where I was fortunate enough to break the course record in the 5K on Saturday, which was enough for a win, and then following on Sunday by breaking the former course record in the half marathon, which was enough for third place. Believe it or not, that was not my favorite memory though. My favorite race this year was traveling to the Runner's World Magazine 5K in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania with my mom. It meant so much to me to have one of my life's biggest fan, and now one of my best friends, (not to mention the one who took me to all those 5 a.m. practices when I was young) be there. It was great to win that race for her, but the time we got to spend together during that trip made it the race of the year for me.

I have reached a point now to where it is the people and the moments I get to spend with this running community that are the most important to me. I love to challenge my friends to get involved with this great sport, just as this sport and its runners welcomed me and has taken care of me over the many

years. Simply put, the relationships and the memories I had with all the other runners and friends over the last year, is without a doubt my greatest and most cherished accomplishment.

People ask me what I'm training for next, and honestly I am training for the strength to fight through some things on our horizon. Racing and competing will help me become a stronger person overall. So just like most of us... I am training for life really.

**Special recognition for other female runners:** Elizabeth Eder had an outstanding year by winning the Cowtown Marathon and qualifying for the marathon Olympic Trials in Chicago, and winning at least nine other races in the DFW area.; Dawn Grunnagle, the 2012 Female Runner of the Year, who collected at least 10 overall female victories, including the Allstate 13.1 Half and the Katy Trail 5K.; Kim Rogers-Tracy, who also had at least 10 victories, including the Too Cold To Hold 5-mile and the Too Hot to Handle 5K, apparently showing she can run in the cold and heat; and Magaly Soto, who went home with at least 11 overall titles, including the Rangers Labor Day 5K and the Mansfield Half.