

# At 58, a Masters Marathoner Is Running Her Fastest Times Yet— And Helping Others Run Theirs

She averaged a 6:40 per mile pace at the Trials of Miles half marathon. Is a sub-3:00 marathon next?

By [Sarah Lorge Butler](#) Nov 25, 2020

Heather Knight Pech takes her running seriously, and to keep getting faster as she approaches 60, she devotes a lot of time to the extras.

She [sleeps](#) nine hours a night, works with a nutritionist, sees her physical therapist once a week, and is religious about her [mobility](#) and [strength work](#). A long car ride? She'll sit with a [lacrosse ball](#) under a hamstring. While waiting for service at the Whole Foods fish counter, she's stretching her hip flexors.

Advertisement - Continue Reading Below

"People look at me like I'm nuts," she said.

Of course, those are the little things. The big things are the 80 to 85 miles per week she runs during [marathon training](#), with grueling workouts midweek—for example, 15 x 1K repeats. Weekends are for tough, long efforts. During the peak of marathon training, [a long run](#) might be 10–13 miles at a steady pace (she calls it a "warmup") before finishing the last 6–8 miles at marathon pace, on tired legs.

And it's working—Knight Pech, 58, won her 55–59 age group at the [Boston Marathon](#) three years in a row, in 2017 (3:10:30), 2018 (3:10:15), and 2019 (3:11:31). A year ago, she ran her PR, 3:00:44, at the Indianapolis Monumental Marathon. The conditions were not ideal, and left her believing that on a better day, she could break the three-hour barrier—not that she was disappointed about her performance.

Advertisement - Continue Reading Below

"I couldn't be happier to have an over 10-minute PR on a 25-degree day, with 20- to 30-mile-per-hour winds," she said. "I rode the edge."

She met her coach, James McKirdy, at the finish line, and jumped into his arms—and then vomited all over him.

Knight Pech grew up in a family of elite athletes. Her brother, [Chip Knight](#), made three U.S. Olympic teams in downhill skiing, and two others siblings made U.S. national teams in skiing. A first cousin, [Hilary Knight](#), is one of the best women's ice hockey players in history.

But in her teen years, Knight Pech rebelled against the family devotion to athletics. "I sort of went the other way," she said, "set myself up to fail, quit, whatever, because I couldn't see my way to being my brother or sister, who were just larger than life."

She began running in 2003, after her father died suddenly, while running, of a heart attack at age 60. "I was trying desperately to find him," she said.

Heather Knight Pech celebrates her PR in 2019 at the Indianapolis Monumental Marathon.

MarathonFoto

## Advertisement - Continue Reading Below

In 2009, at age 47, she ran her first marathon ([New York](#)) in 3:58—and she quickly improved from there. In 2011, she ran Boston in 3:26. By 2012, she decided to leave her work in fashion, where she had a 28-year career, and dedicate herself to her family (she has three daughters who are now in their 20s) and see how much she could improve her running.

In 2014, Knight Pech started coaching. Now, she works with several high-school athletes in the area around Darien, Connecticut, where she lives. She'll train them in the summer, before the cross-country season starts, and in the late winter to get them ready for outdoor track. Her aim, she says, is to hand them back to their high school coaches fitter and stronger than they were for the upcoming season.

She also works with a number of masters runners, people she knows locally in southern Connecticut and others she was matched with as a coach for [McKirdy Trained](#). And that's where she might be the most inspiring.

## Advertisement - Continue Reading Below

She encourages [older runners](#) to love their running and give it the time and attention it deserves. For her, that's three to four hours a day. "Running rewards consistency," she said, pointing out that many of her coaching clients will run faster in their 50s than they did in their 40s because they have time to train properly and do the ancillary work.

Common [mistakes](#) among the masters runners she sees: Not getting enough sleep. Running every day at the same pace, what she calls "the grey zone." [Easy days](#) aren't really easy, and hard days aren't hard

enough. Neglecting resistance training.

"People talk about it but don't do it," she said.



**Do you love running? [Then you'll LOVE Runner's World+ All Access](#)**

Last weekend, Knight Pech got a rare chance to race, the [Trials of Miles half marathon](#) in Rockland State Park, in New York. She ran 1:27:24, by herself, in an event that had only 25 men and 25 women. Although she had hoped to be faster, it was a PR by more than a minute, and she averaged 6:40 pace for the distance.

Nike ZoomX  
Vaporfly NEXT%

**Nike** [nike.com](https://www.nike.com)

[BUY NOW](#)

Advertisement - Continue Reading Below

The time equates to a 3:02:27 marathon. The American record in the marathon in the 60–64 age group is held by [Joan Benoit Samuelson](#) (3:02:21). In the 55–59 age group, the world record is held by American [Jenny Hitchings](#), who ran 2:50:36 in 2019 in New York when she was 56.

Will Knight Pech continue her improvement? Sometimes she has doubts—she jokes frequently with her coach about the hourglass, and how her "sands of time" are falling so fast. He tells her that it's nonsense, at least for now, when she keeps setting PRs. It's an attitude she tries to impart to the masters she coaches.

"So much is mental," she said. "I try to message that your potential

increases with age."

[Sarah Lorge Butler](#) Sarah Lorge Butler is a writer and editor living in Eugene, Oregon, and her stories about the sport, its trends, and fascinating individuals have appeared in Runner's World since 2005.