

Going the Distance

Elizabeth Pehota Redefines MS Diagnosis Through Marathon Races, New World Record Title

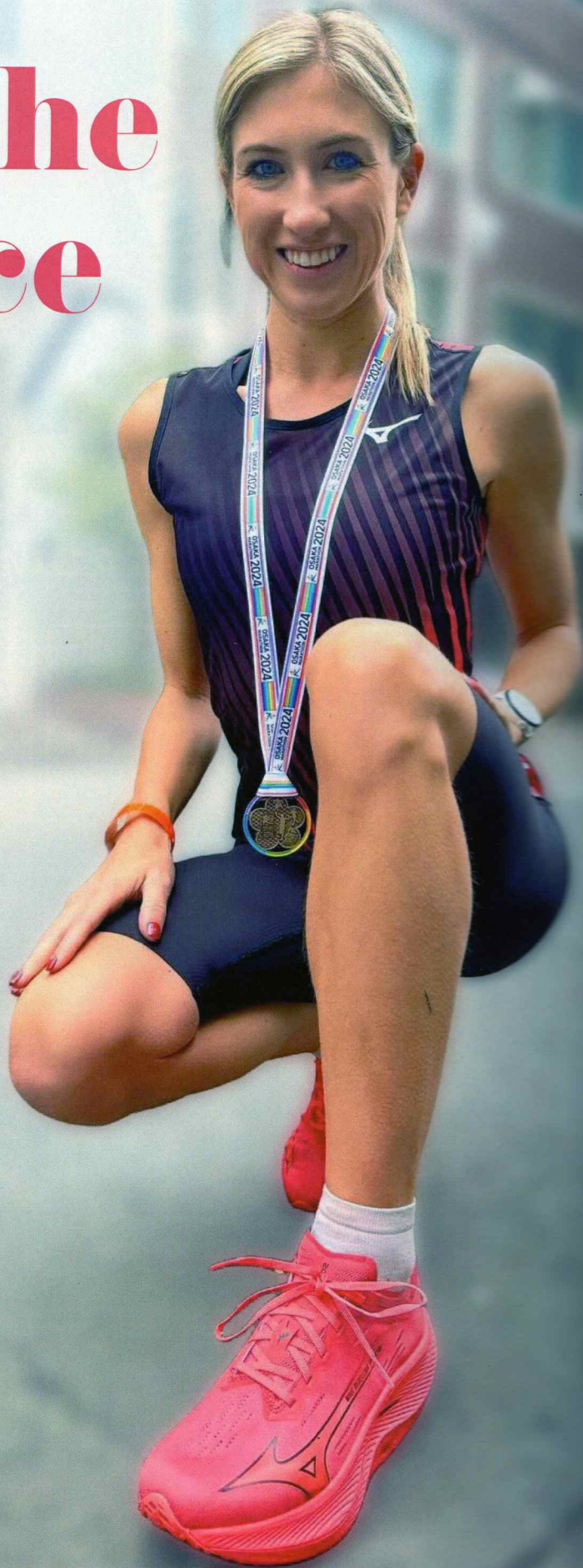
By April Baker

Homemade pizza has become a dinner tradition for Elizabeth Pehota and her husband on the eve of the Boston Marathon.

“It’s going to have sauce, cheese, onion, peppers... maybe some mushrooms on it,” Pehota cheerfully lists the toppings this year’s pizza will likely have. “It’s the perfect way to carbo load before a race.”

On April 20th, Pehota is among the 30,000 people participating in the 2026 Boston Marathon. For the 32-year-old, this will be her 17th ultra race, but her first time running as a Guinness World Record holder.

Last October, the former Celtics cheerleader and New England Revolution sideline reporter skillfully ran 26.2 miles faster than any other woman in the world with multiple sclerosis (MS).



“I’m going to try to break my own Guinness World Record by running sub 312—3 hours and 12 minutes on the Boston course,” Pehota says.

“Boston has always felt like it was such a big, important day in my life. And I thought, ‘how can I make this more meaningful.’”

This year, Pehota also is racing to raise money for the National Multiple Sclerosis Society (NMSS) – a nonprofit that offers education and support to those living with the incurable disease.

According to the National Multiple Sclerosis Society, one million people in the U.S. are living with the disease, which affects the body’s central nervous system and can lead to symptoms

like fatigue and brain fog.

Existing research shows MS usually impacts people in their 20s to 50s, with more women diagnosed than men.

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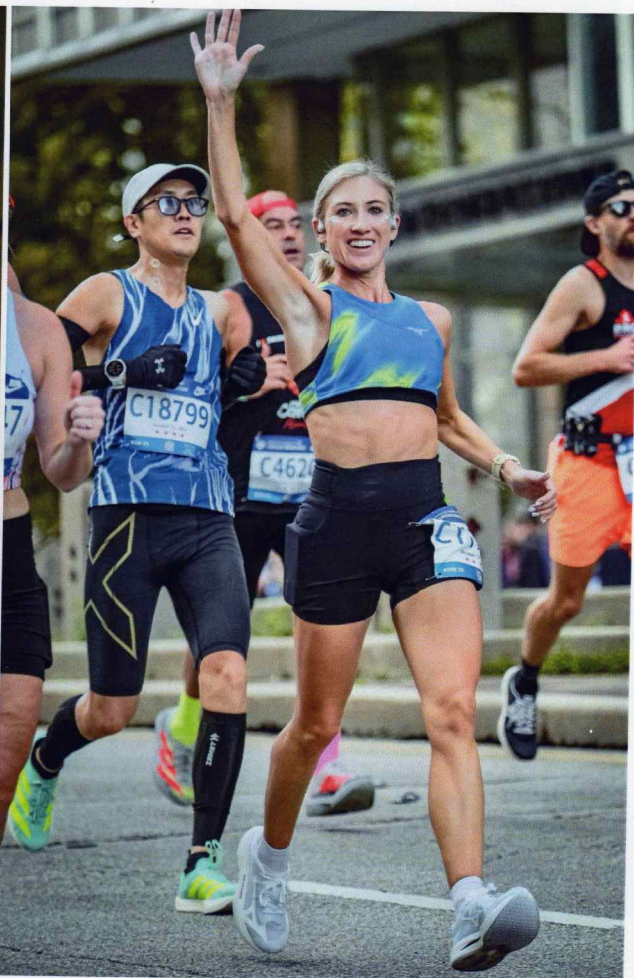
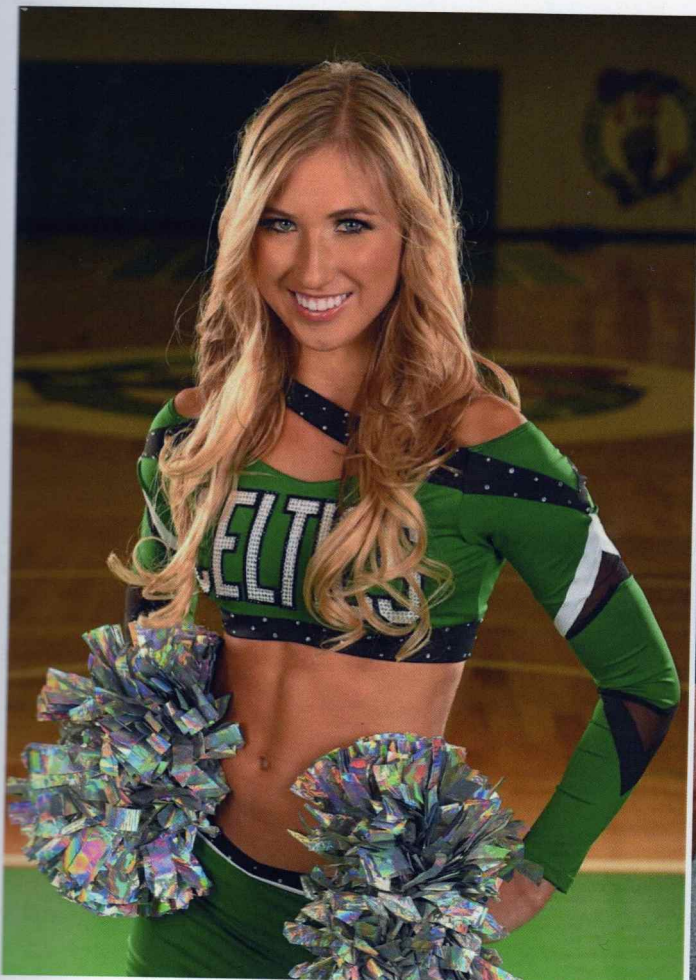
“I learned not to take my diagnosis as a life sentence,” Pehota articulates.

Self admittedly, she wasn’t always open about having the chronic illness.

After an MRI scan confirmed Pehota had relapsing-remitting MS in 2022, Pehota kept her diagnosis and symptoms mostly under wraps over the next three years. She says she wasn’t ready for the world to know who she was past her athletic achievements.

According to NMSS, 85 percent of MS cases diagnosed in America are relapsing-remitting. People with it experience symptom flareups that can last for weeks or months at a time.

“I think that’s a really common fear that people who have MS, or any kind of chronic illness have when they’re diagnosed, because they want to always think of themselves in the same way,” Pehota shares.



While Pehota may have kept MS a secret, she didn't keep her love of running marathons hidden. She successfully finished several national and international marathons during that time, including one in Berlin Germany in 2022 that she considers a "pivotal moment in her life."

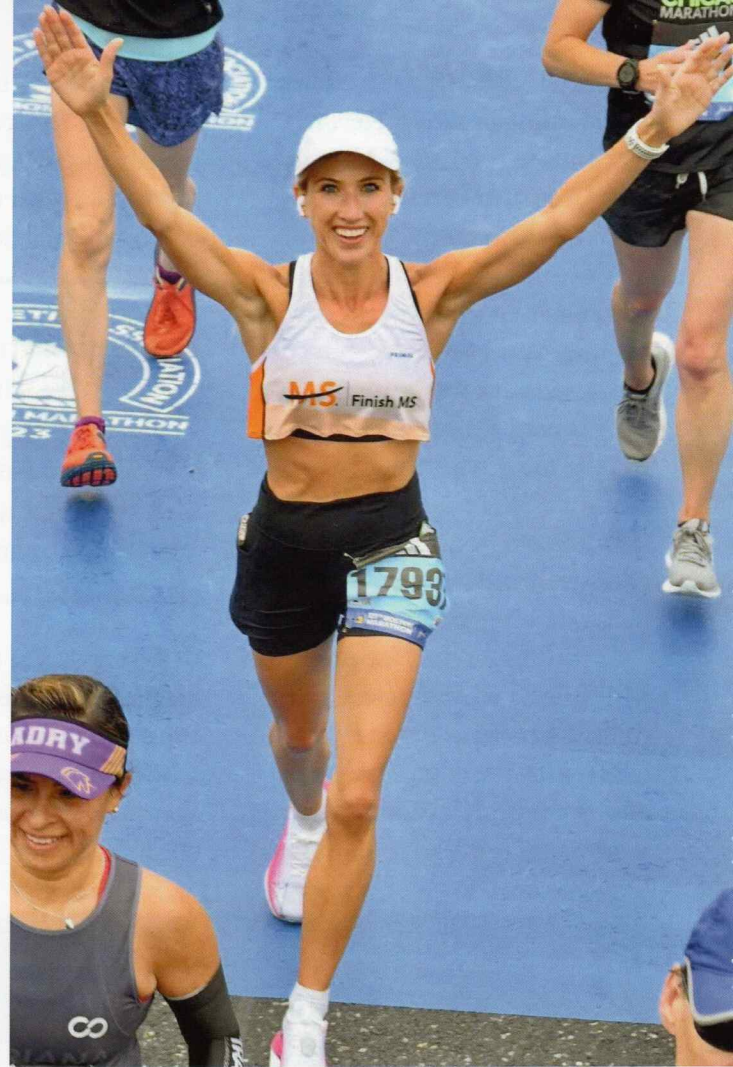
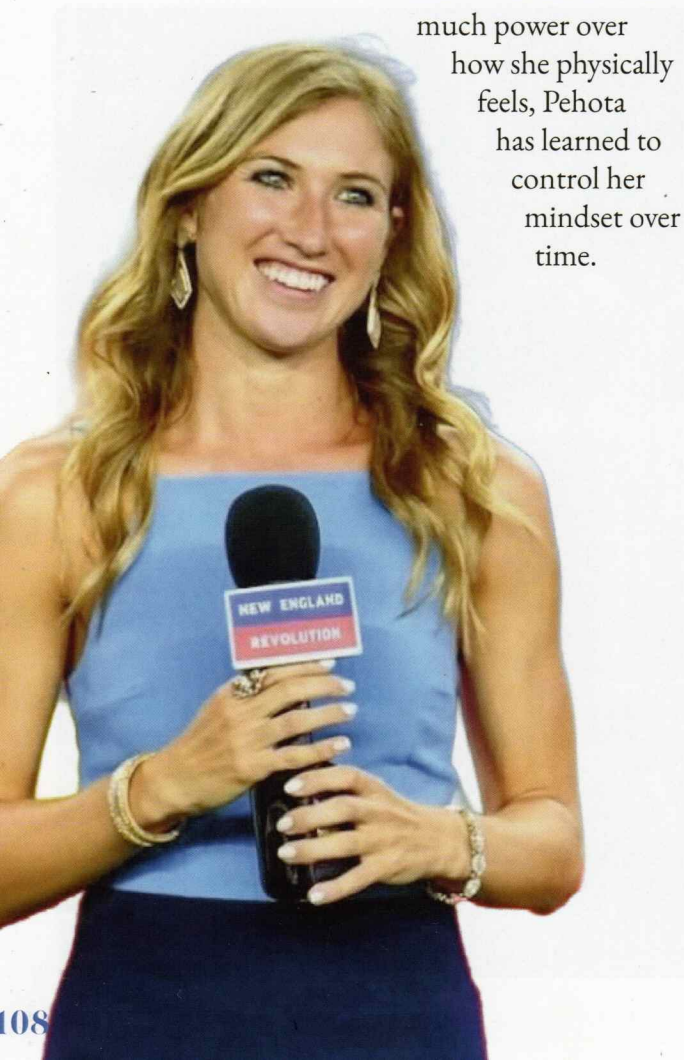
She recounts, "I showed up to the start line. It was hard for me to move my feet. You could hear them dragging on the ground."

While crossing the finish line was in question through most of her run, she proved her self-doubts wrong, "It ignited a spark in me that I didn't even know was there. It gave me hope."

Today, Pehota makes it her mission to be a source of hope to those struggling with MS, even as she faces worsening physical and cognitive conditions. That entails losing some mobility in her left hand.

"I never know what I'm going to get on a given day when I wake up, and I just kind of have to go through [the day] and see what happens."

While she doesn't have much power over how she physically feels, Pehota has learned to control her mindset over time.



"I never know what I'm going to get on a given day when I wake up, and I just kind of have to go through [the day] and see what happens."

"If you choose to live life positively, you can still find joy in life. You can find deeper meaning and silver linings that you never expected," she reflects.

For Pehota –her biggest silver lining has been giving back and offering support to those affected by MS.

"When I'm not feeling 100 percent, I just remind myself that I am a fighter in everything that I do with MS, whether I am thrown a work challenge, whether I'm thrown any sort of adversity, I will get through it. I am a fighter." ❖