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Stew Salowitz '76

Illinois Wesleyan University, iwumag@iwu.edu

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Going the Distance

On U.S. national team, Joe Binder '04 finishes among world's best.

By Stew Salowitz '76



For the competition in Gibraltar, Binder (shown above) trained daily, averaging 85 miles a week.

encouraged me so much while I was running at IWU. I would have never gotten to where I am as an ultra-marathon runner without his support, and it means a lot to me.”

Says Schumacher, “Joe was the hardest-working athlete we have ever had. I told him he could run around the world and it turns out that he has.”

Binder plans to be even stronger next year to help the national team take a shot at the gold medal. “I’m training seven days a week and, leading up to the competition, was averaging about 85 miles a week,” he says.

Running for more than seven hours at a time or training by running more than 80 miles a week is definitely not something for the weak of legs or faint of heart. But for Joe Binder '04, a former Titan cross country captain, such rigorous discipline has led to being part of a U.S. national team that finished second in the world.

The 27-year-old Binder, who lives and works in Berkeley, Calif., was a member of the 2010 Team USA squad that competed in the International Association of Ultrarunners 100km World Championships, held Nov. 7 in Gibraltar. The second-place finish was the highest in a decade for the U.S. men’s team. Binder placed 25th individually with a time of 7:16:43.

“Despite coming down with a cold the week before, I was able to stick to my race plan,” says Binder, who majored in physics and chemistry at IWU. “It was an amazing experience to get to represent the United States in an international athletics competition.”

Binder qualified for the U.S. national team in April, when he ran his first 50-mile road race in 5:37:46, and heaps praise and credit on his college coach Chris Schumacher. “Coach Shoe

During the competition in Gibraltar, Binder soaked up the experience and, of course, climbed to the top of the rock to see the Spanish and African coastlines. “Flying in was great — the airstrip is built on the isthmus that connects Gibraltar to Spain with the only road to the Spain built across it,” he recalls. “So all traffic on the main road has to stop when a plane comes in. The runway is also pretty short, which makes for an exciting landing.”

As for the race course setup, options were limited. “In order to run 100K, we did 19 5K loops through the town and the industrial port zone after running a 5K to the beginning of the first loop,” he explains. “While it was repetitious and not especially scenic, there also were not many surprises.”



Binder (second from right) with his U.S. National teammates

Binder works for BP Biofuels, using his Illinois Wesleyan scientific training to produce sustainable biofuels from dedicated energy crops. “My work includes evaluating energy grasses to see how much and how well they can be converted into fuels,” he says. “In Berkeley, I also help coordinate bioenergy research at the Energy Biosciences Institute, BP’s \$500-million collaboration with the University of California, Berkeley, and the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.”

At IWU, Binder was among 49 college students recognized for excellence by the Lincoln Academy of Illinois in 2003. A Presidential Scholar, he also earned the 2002 American Chemical Society Polymer Education Committee Award for Outstanding Organic Chemistry Student.