



**Featured Athlete**  
**Erik Weber – Road Race and Track & Field**



## Running for a Greater Goal

Erik Weber is not your typical Masters track athlete. But then, little about his life has been conventional.

As an athlete, Weber competes in track events and road races at a range of distances from 400 meters to marathons. At 28, he has earned a bachelor's degree, master's degree and law degree.

He's written two books, and a third is underway. This year, he started a track team called the "Skybirds" for athletes of all ages with various "diffabilities." Team Skybirds competes in Special Olympics track meets.

All that is even more remarkable because Weber has autism.

"The message I'm hoping to share is to keep pursuing your passions," says Weber, who lives in San Diego. "Along the way, if you're able to, you should help others through your example."

### Finding His Voice Despite Autism

Weber was a typically developing child until he became ill at age 2 ½ and developed a high fever. After he recovered, his mother, Sandy, noticed that he no longer responded to her voice or made eye contact with her. Alarmed, she took her son to a neurological specialist who diagnosed him as severely autistic and intellectually disabled. When he turned 5 years old, Sandy received more bad news: her son might never progress past the cognitive level of an 18-month-old.

Sandy responded by turning to prayer. She regularly asked God to identify windows of opportunity for guidance in her son's care and development. She also accepted Erik as he was and set out to help him maximize his potential.

With the help of teachers, specialists and a special childhood friend, Weber began to speak at age 7. From third grade to high school, he attended a private school that helps children with disabilities become independent. Weber did so well academically that he was able to skip a grade.

He went on to college, then to graduate school, and next to law school at California Western School of Law. He passed the bar exam in 2015 on his first try and now practices special education law.

"I do document review, attend IEP (Individualized Education Program) meetings with parents, and advocate for students and parents," he says.



But that's not all. Weber has also written two books about autism, one of which is a personal memoir, and has a third book underway.

He credits running for helping him maintain his focus and balance in life.

"When I'm running, I feel so well connected," Weber says. "I'm able to take in a lot through the senses and just feel like I'm flying through the air."

### Finding Himself on the Track

Weber began running at age 9 after his father, Richard, died unexpectedly while on a business trip. His mother signed him up to compete in Special Olympics with the hope that he would find courage, friends and strong role models. Weber connected with running and competing immediately.

"It's kind of the same as riding on the back of my dad's motorcycle – the speed and wind in my face," Weber says.

He excelled in his sport, winning more than 100 Special Olympics medals. And in 2016, he placed second in the San Diego Race for Autism 5K.



Weber plans to compete in both track and the 5K road race at this year's USA Masters Games in San Diego. An extremely versatile athlete, he plans to run in the 400-meter, 800-meter, 1,500-meter, 5,000-meter and 10,000-meter events on the track, and in the 5K road race. Weber regularly completes 5K races in under 19 minutes and thinks the road race will be his best chance to win a medal at the USA Masters Games.

"Road racing seems to be when I'm at my best," Weber says. "When I'm out on the road race, I don't have to worry about being in the right position to lap anyone or catching someone at the wrong part of the track."

Weber also has completed several half marathons and marathons. He says he doesn't do anything special to run such a wide range of distances, but practices Zumba to warm up his hips and legs.

He also runs with the members of the Skybirds, which he started through Special Olympics. "Most of the teammates I have are actually on the autism spectrum and under the age of 14, and they just love running," Weber says. "It is fantastic to be able to help them find confidence and chase their dreams, and see them support each other."

Weber's goal at the USA Masters Games is to improve his personal best times in each event. But it's not the only thing that will be motivating him this summer.

"Running is a great community of people who support each other," Weber says. "My drive is to help others with 'diffabilities' to be champions."

