

Running a pure pastime for Haskell.

■ Veronica Haskell topped hundreds of women in her first marathon but maintains a modest perspective about the event.

A few years ago, Redding's Veronica Haskell had a fiery desire to become one of the country's top female distance runners.

At the time, Haskell lived in a city full of serious endurance athletes — Boulder, Colo. — and even worked with a personal coach.

But eventually the pressure to become the best turned her fiery desire into simple burn-out.

These days, Haskell runs purely for enjoyment.

The 28-year-old moved to Redding 1½ years ago with her husband Will, a civil engineer at CH2M Hill Inc. The couple has an 11-month-old son named Jack.

She may just do it for recreation, but Haskell still can run with the best.

On March 3, she won the women's division at the 18th annual Napa Valley Marathon in her first marathon ever.

She finished the 26.2-mile race in 2 hours, 53 minutes, 48 seconds. The event featured 1,281 runners.

"I just wanted to do one," Haskell said, matter-of-factly. "I was really happy because I wanted to (finish in) around three hours. I would have been happy with that time before I had a kid."

Haskell will compete in Saturday's 10-mile portion of the 28th annual NorCal John Frank Memorial Run in Shasta Lake. And though she cares very little about winning the race, her entry makes her an immediate favorite.

"Before I really tried," Haskell said. "Now there's no pressure, no grand dreams. I just do it for fun and if something happens, great."

She runs 65-75 miles a week with no expectations. She runs because it was something she enjoyed in high school and at the University of Southern Maine. She runs because it's a great way to stay in shape.

Beating a few hundred women in Napa in a 26-mile jaunt is only impressive in a certain context.

"I won (in Napa) because there wasn't anyone else better that day. None of the top women were there," Haskell said. "It wasn't a piece of cake, but I don't think it was all that impressive. If I was still in Boulder it would have been like, 'Oh yeah, that's nice.' There, you're only good if you go and win the New York or Boston marathons."

Her running stopped while she was pregnant, but it gave her something to look forward to during the recovery. Ten days after she gave birth she went for a run. Three weeks later, she competed in a 10-kilometer race.

She won the Redding Medical Center Turkey Trot in November and was a member of Skirts to Chase, the winning women's team at the Whiskeytown Relays in September.

Haskell said she has no immediate plans for her next marathon, but will likely do another within a couple of years. The top women cover 26.2 miles in about 2½ hours.

For now, dreams of the top fall far behind her family and peace of mind.

"I love running. It's just a part of my life," she said. "I can run forever without knee problems and I have to exercise. Plus it's a good way to get out of the house."

Saturday's John Frank kicks off with the one-mile fun run/walk at 9 a.m. at Margaret Polf Park in Shasta Lake. The three- and 10-mile races start at 10 a.m.