



Carolyn Thornton



R.I. running legend Bobby Doyle dies

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BY CAROLYN THORNTON

Journal Sports Writer

The running community has lost the most prolific marathoner ever to come out of Rhode Island.

Seven-time Ocean State Marathon winner and two-time U.S. Olympic Marathon Trials qualifier Robert “Bobby” Doyle, of Tiverton, died early yesterday morning after suffering an apparent heart attack, according to his older brother, Jimmy.

He was 58.

“Bobby truly defined long-distance running in Rhode Island,” said Don Allison, race director of the Amica Insurance Breakers Marathon in Newport, which this year honored Doyle by making him the honorary starter and grand marshal at the race. “When the running boom of the late 1970s was at its peak, Bobby emerged as a world-class marathoner, truly a source of pride for the Ocean State. He remained true to his roots throughout the decades, promoting and supporting the sport in his home state. He will be missed by all distance runners in the region, and remembered as the greatest marathon runner Rhode Island has ever produced.”

This is the second tragedy to strike the Doyle family this year. In June, Doyle’s son Brendan, a Rhode Island state trooper, suffered a near-fatal brain injury when he was punched and hit his head on the pavement outside a downtown club while attempting to subdue an allegedly reckless driver.

With family members, including his father, staging a bedside vigil, Trooper Doyle made a miraculous recovery and continues his dramatic comeback.

Jimmy Doyle said that his brother began having chest pains at about 6 a.m. yesterday. When the pain persisted, Bobby’s wife, Lori, began driving him to the hospital, at which point he went into cardiac arrest.

Lori Doyle immediately took her husband to the nearby North Tiverton Fire Station, where rescue personnel then took him to St. Anne’s Hospital in Fall River.

“We are all devastated,” said Jim Doyle, adding that he never went a day without talking to his brother, whether it be just to chat or to ask him training advice. “We are just in disbelief. It’s like a terrible dream.”

Living the early part of his childhood in Pawtucket before moving with his family to Providence, Doyle was an All-State cross-country runner and state record-holder on the track in the 2-mile, both indoor and outdoor, at Hope High School.

He went on to become an All-American cross-country runner at the University of Texas-El Paso, where in 1969 he led his team to the program's first NCAA Division I Championship.

Doyle returned to Rhode Island shortly after graduating with a degree in biology and joined his brother in operating Doyle's Sporting Goods in Pawtucket from 1972 to 1993. In recent years, he was a devoted stay-at-home dad.

Venturing into marathoning in 1975, Doyle won the inaugural Ocean State Marathon in Newport in 1976 and went on to win that race six more times — in 1977, 1978, 1982, 1984, 1985 and finally in 1990, at the age of 42.

He also competed in the Boston Marathon four times, finishing 15th or better in each attempt, running a personal best of 2 hours, 14 minutes, 4 seconds en route to a seventh-place finish in 1979. In his best finish at the famed race, Doyle placed fifth in 1985 with a time of 2:21:31.

Following that finish, he was invited to compete for the United States in the marathon at the Pan American Games.

He also ran in the U.S. Olympic Marathon Trials in 1980 and '84, clocking a time of 2:18 in his second trials attempt despite battling a painful pelvis injury.

But Doyle's road racing accomplishments hardly stopped there.

"He ran so many races; sometimes he would win two races in one day," said Jim Doyle, adding that his brother inspired him and countless others also to take up running. "He'd go to a 10K in the morning, then come back in the evening and win another 10K."

A true student of the sport who never hesitated to share his knowledge, Doyle had been coaching high school track and cross-country runners since the early 1990s, for the first couple of years at La Salle Academy and then at Woonsocket High School ever since.

Doyle also used his stature in the running community to assist the fundraising efforts of numerous charities, including Special Olympics and the Rhode Island Chapter of the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society's Team in Training program.

"Just about any organization that would ask Bobby to be at a race, he was there," Jim Doyle said.

"... He was always there to lend a helping hand."

The son of Dorothy Doyle Dugdale and the late James Doyle, he is survived by his wife; four sons, Patrick, Brendan, Brian and Connor; and a daughter, Mackenzie. In addition to his brother, he leaves a sister, Peggy Darling Doyle. He was the former husband of Maureen Adams.

Funeral arrangements are being handled by the Manning-Heffern Funeral Home in Pawtucket. A funeral is scheduled for Tuesday at St. Joseph Church, 193 Wolcott St., Pawtucket