Three MIT students experience the marathon

By Glenn Brownstein

Fred Silver II, Frank Kenney, and Tom Richard are three Boston Athletic Association (BAA) Marathoners and several others over the past few years.

Frank Kenney is a member of the MIT track team who “read about the race in the papers and thought it’d be really interesting for me to try one.”

Rudolph was a relative novice to the sport of distance running, having started only a year and a half ago. He set his sights on the Boston Marathon as a personal goal to keep him running and would have succeeded if not for a hidden peril of late-night jogging in Boston.

There are probably about 5,000 such stories every year that go with a Boston Marathon, 3,000 of them official entrants who have run under a prescribed time limit in a race within the last twelve months, and almost as many others who compete unofficially.

And there are other stories as well: the evening crowds that bend the street, aptly named “Heartbreak Hill” near Boston College, nearly 20 miles into the race, where scores of runners every year drop off their intended pace; the “wheelchair marathon,” which receives a finisher head start from the Hopkinton starting line after in order of finishing times, compared to the best marathoners; and the weather, always a factor in terms and the level of attrition, used to be a subject he belittled to officially-entered MIT students; one of them, Silver, a track star, might not have been considered. Several other students ran unofficially, sporting times anywhere from three to four hours.

What is it that sends many of the best marathoners to Boston every April? What is it that makes Marathon running all about? Here are thirty of these 5,000 stories.

Frank Kenney has been running track for the last five years, two years in high school and three at MIT. When he heard about the Marathon in the papers, he decided to try it once and set out to qualify for the 1977 running.

His first attempt came in the ill-fated SoCal meet in December, 1977. He set a personal record in the 5000 meters, and, still cold, Kenney completed the course in just over three hours. He failed to qualify to be eligible to run, but also placed him 19th, a fringe member.

The course marshals have taken to special detours in an attempt to keep the weather conditions under control and at a minimum. Many miles in a downpour, and still cold, Kenney completed the course in just over three hours. He failed to qualify to be eligible to run, but also placed him 19th, a fringe member.

Ironically, although Kenney’s track experience was a big factor in his preparation, he was able to enter the Marathon at the expense of participating in the varsity program this spring. “It’s team policy, that anyone who runs in the marathon has to give up track for the term because it interferes with training,” he notes. Even though Silver’s varsity team might probably have been back to normal by the next meet (held two days later), Kenney was determined to represent his school and three at MIT, when he entered a Veterans of Foreign Wars cemetery race, but no dietetic-type junk.

The course itself is “it’s different from ordinary.” Once I got into running, I thought that I might as well try to do the Boston Marathon.”

Richard succeeded in qualifying for the Boston Marathon in his first marathon, the Ocean State Bicentennial Marathon in Newport, RI last September. “I ran 10 and a half miles each day for two or three months before the race. I qualified, but I decided that I’d run Boston for the first time because I felt I needed it after my Rhode Island experience—it really hurt at the end of the race.”

“It was a bad winter for training. I was able to get out only when the snow finally melted around late February. Once I started running, I decided that the week before the marathon I’d go down to 10 miles each day for three days, then do just three or so miles a day for the last few days before the race. But then I got injured... it’s really a blow.”

Likewise, marathoners, however, Richard’s year-long quest to run Boston was not a “one-shot deal.” He’s determined to reach the starting line in 1978. “I’ll do it again next year, and I’ll make it. I won’t make a mistake training.”

For Fred Silver, Frank Kenney, and Tom Richard, the BAA Marathon is something special, something unique. Marathoning is one of the only sports in the world where a first-time competitor can compete side-by-side with world-class athletes. Importantly, it’s a sport where winning is not crucial, except for the victory of the spirit over the body—true—was not designed to continuously run 26 miles.

All of Boston shares in that spiritual triumph every Patriots’ Day. It is their joy, combined with the runners’ effort that have made this Boston Marathon, what it is today, the most publicized, best-known, largest annual marathon in the world. It is an experience that several MIT students among thousands of other runners achieve each year, and one that many of us less inspired spectators come out to enjoy each spring.