

Sub 3 hours marathon after age 50 an elusive but not impossible goal

By Vince Juliano

A sub 3 hour marathon was the accepted gold standard for a serious young male runner learning his trade, but few imagined glancing up at the finish clock and seeing “2” displayed as the hour digit for a senior runner age 50.

HMRRC Hall of Famer Jim Tierney has numerous career accomplishments in the sport of distance running, and has directed the Bill Robinson 10K Masters Championship for the past 15 years. Tierney competed on a 50+ team that won a national championship in Pennsylvania, and won several age-group titles in the HMRRC Grand Prix. However, for some marathoners setting their sights on age 50, Tierney is singularly known for a rare and distinguished feat; he was the first local athlete to run a sub 3 hour marathon (2:59:08) at Boston at age 51. Few other local runners have accomplished this feat in the 25 years since.

Brian Debraccio 47 will run his 16th consecutive Boston Marathon this April and certainly respects Tierney's accomplishment. Says Debraccio, “I have run several sub 3 hour marathons in recent years, but have not done it at Boston since 1996. Tierney's feat is special and remains a goal of mine when I turn 50”.

Ed Neiles, who has a 2:44 PR among his 63 marathon finishes and currently coaches marathon runners, said “It is very difficult to do on old legs. My best after age 50 was 3:17”

Lowell Montgomery one of the top distance runners during the 1980's ran sub 3 hour marathons 15 times, and finished his final marathon at age 49, also a 3:17. Montgomery quipped “my knees just couldn't handle the stress anymore so I began riding a bike for fitness.”

The first local athletes to not retire from competitive distance running after age 50 were Ted Bick and Lee Wilcox. These two talented distance runners set the bar quite high as they both ran sub **2:50** marathons after their 50th birthday.

Bick 82 was a math professor at Union College and one of the great master's runners of his generation. He ran a 2:46 at the Boston Marathon in his early 40's and matched that superb time at the Berkshire marathon after age 50. Wilcox was a former director of the MHR Marathon and an intense competitor who ran close to 50 marathons. He ran a remarkable 2:48 at the Twin Cities Marathon after age 50. Wilcox retired from an administrative position at RPI, moved to Florida and in 2007 was inducted into the HMRRC Hall of Fame.

Since 2000, several local athletes have also accomplished the sub 3 hour marathon post 50, and most did it at the very fast MHR Marathon Course or the equally fast Twin Cities course that often hosts the USA Masters championships.

IF you came in contact with Dennis Fillmore or John Parisella you might think you were entering the Wrestling Hall of Fame, but these Clydesdale framed athletes are also among the select few to accomplish this goal on the MHR course. Ballston Spa's

Fillmore posted up in 2:57 in 2002 at age 50, and Schenectady's Parisella 50 finished in 2:58 in 2008.

Bill Venner, a well respected top distance runner from Granville NY and a regular competitor on the USATF ADK circuit, posted an impressive 2:53 on the MHR course in 2009, also at age 50.

Kevin Dollard from Hopewell Jct. competes often in the Capital region and has accomplished the unique feat at the Boston marathon (2:59) and the MHR marathon (2:57) in same year (2010) at age 54. The following year Johan Bosman 51, of Niskayuna ran a 2:59 at the Boston Marathon matching Jim Tierney's feat. The same year former Stockade-athon Champion Dan Predmore ran a swift 2:54 at age 53, on the MHR marathon course.

This begs the question, who is the local athlete to accomplish the elusive sub 3 hour marathon at the oldest age? The answer is the remarkably durable Lee Pollock of Glens Falls. Pollock is one of only 30 known male athletes (and 1 female – Joan Benoit Samuelson) to have run sub 3 hour marathons in 5 consecutive decades. Pollack started his run in 1978 with a 2:32 marathon at the Empire State games in Syracuse. In 1980 he ran a 2:26 at mile high Denver, followed by a 2:49 at the NYC Marathon in 1992. In 2007 he posted a 2:57 in the Philadelphia Marathon at age 55 and completed the MHR marathon in his 5th decade with another 2:57 at age 58 in 2010. Instead of retiring from marathon running after this remarkable accomplishment, Pollock then posted a 2:58 at Twin Cities last year at age 60.

As for worlds best, the legendary Canadian marathoner Ed Whitlock remains the only athlete to run sub 3 hours after age 70. Whitlock, born in England in 1931 and a peer of the first sub 4 minute miler Roger Banister, made international headlines when he ran a 2:59 marathon in 2003 at age 72. At 73, he established the current marathon world record of 2:54:48. Current WAVA age-graded tables suggest an equivalent marathon for a 20 year old would be 2:03. Whitlock would go on to post a sub 3 hour marathon for the final time a year later at 74, when he finished in 2:58.

USATF has a motto, "a sport for everyone, a sport for life". With modern medical science continuing to find ways to prevent, manage and cure disease, lifetime athletes continuing to test the boundaries of human athletic potential. The feat of a sub 3 hour marathon will likely continue to be reached by more athletes at ever advancing ages. However, it is doubtful that we will witness another distance runner like Ed Whitlock.

Note: The near equivalent of a 2:59 marathon at age 50 for men would be a 3:25 for women. Two noteworthy HMRRC Hall of Fame female distance runners have bettered this mark considerably. Martha Degrazia 51 ran a 3:13 at the Boston Marathon the equivalent of a 2:48 marathon by a male athlete at the same age. During the past 6 months, Nancy Briskie 55 ran a 3:10 marathon at Philadelphia and a 3:12 marathon at the Rock and Roll Arizona Marathon. The equivalent would be 2:43 – 2:45 range for a male athlete at the same age.

Year	Name	Age	City/Town	Time	Course
1981	Ted Bick	50	Schenectady	2:46	Berkshire
1986	Jim Tierney	51	Albany	2:59:08	Boston
1988	Lee Wilcox	50	Troy	2:48	Twin Cities
1994	Ed Bown	52	Broadalbin	2:59:35	Vermont City
2002	Dennis Fillmore	50	Ballston Spa	2:57:22	MHR
2007	Lee Pollock	55	Glens Falls	2:57	Philadelphia
2008	Kevin Dollard	53	Hopewell JCT	2:58:15	MHR
2008	John Parisella	50	Schenectady	2:58:33	MHR
2009	William Venner	50	Granville	2:53:14	MHR
2010	Kevin Dollard	54	Hopewell JCT	2:59:08	Boston
2010	Kevin Dollard	55	Hopewell JCT	2:57:27	MHR
2011	Lee Pollock	58	Glens Falls	2:57:24	MHR
2011	Johan Bosman	51	Niskayuna	2:59	Boston
2011	Dan Predmore	53	Ballston Spa	2:54:13	MHR
2012	Lee Pollock	60	Glens Falls	2:58	Twin Cities
2013	Jay Thorn	50	Valatie	2:58:32	Boston