

Joe Boyle, known for his coaching, has an elite background

Joseph Boyle has been coaching at the Texas Running Center in Kennedale and often is at area races to watch his runners compete. Many runners know he's a coach. But what many don't realize is that Joe could have dusted most of them when in his prime. Maybe dusted is not the right word; it would be more like smoked them.

He was an elite amateur and professional runner. He has many awards, and said now he's giving back by helping runners of all levels while he continues to compete on the senior level. He also had a frightening experience with spinal meningitis in 2008 that he overcame.



Runner
in
the Spotlight

Before delving into some of his achievements, just look at some of his personal bests he when he was running professionally from 1972 to 1984 and it's easy to understand why he was among the nation's top runners. His PRs included: 1:48 in the 800 meters; 3:36 in the 1,500; 8:19 in the 3,000-meter steeplechase; 13:12 for a 5K; 23:04 for five miles; 28:56 for a 10K; 48:30 for 10 miles; 1:04 for a half marathon, and 2:19 for a marathon.



Joe started his running career in 1960 when he was a freshman at Pierson High School in Sag Harbor, LI, NY. In his senior year, he won the Suffolk County Cross Country Championship.

“A history teach (Mr. White) convinced me to join the cross country team,” he said. “Coach Pietre and Coach Vistino (both basketball coaches) encouraged cross country as conditioning for basketball.”

Joe said a Coach UTZ soon took over and with the encouragement of Coach UTZ and Principal Mr. Crozier, he continued to advance his running skills. He said he also had “the good fortune to be supported and encouraged by my mother, (his dad died when Joe was 7), brothers, sisters, educators, great coaches, teammates, training partners and competitors. Running became a healthy lifestyle for me and continues to reward me with opportunities to share the experience and knowledge I was blessed to receive throughout my life with the runners I coach and still run and race with.”

He organized the Texas Running Center, he said, “for the purpose of promoting the running lifestyle to members of the community that I live with.”

Among his achievements as a Senior Masters (60-64) including winning the 2009 Southwest Regional Championship in the 200 and 800; taking sixth at the 2009 Huntsman World Games in the 200 and 800, and placing second in the 2009 1-Mile Trail Race. Masters awards include winning the 1,500 in the 1987 Texas Masters, the 1987 TAC Gulf Coast event, the Texas Southwest Masters, and the TAC National Masters Track & Field Championship. He also won the 1991 Masters Elite 5th Avenue Mile NYRRA.

Much of his impressive amateur career came in 1968 when he was among the athletes at the 1968 Olympic Training Camp at Alamosa; was fifth in the NAIA National Championships in the 1,500; third at the USTFF National Championships in the 3-Mile; set a mile record at the Kentucky Relays; was a USTFF All American in Cross Country; won the Arkansas Intercollegiate Conference Championship Mile and the 800. At the same event, he was second in the 2-mile, on the third-place mile relay team and second in the cross country event. He also was the 1968 AAU Cross Country Champion. In 1970, he won the AAU National Steeplechase Championship, and was second in the AAU National Track and Field Championships 6-mile. He also had stellar showings in junior college and high school, where he was chosen the outstanding senior athlete in '64, was voted MVP in Cross Country in '63 and '64 and won the 1964 Babe Ruth Sportsmanship Award. Joe has had many memorable moments. He reflects on some of them:

By Joe Boyle

As for performances that impacted my racing career started with the Mt. Sac Relays, Pomona, CA, where I anchored Phoenix Junior. College Distance Medley. This was the first time I ran in front of a "huge crowd." Our 800-meter runner dropped our team to 4th place and 200 meters behind the leaders when I received the baton. With 500 meters to go, I passed the lead runner and built a 30-meter lead going down the back stretch. The crowd went wild and I thought they were cheering for me; however they were cheering for a sub 4-minute miler who had just arrived from London and was anchoring Ceretios JC, a California team and was closing in on me. Thinking I must be turning in a great performance, I decided to leave everything on the backstretch and worry about the finish later. When I hit the last turn, completely gassed, I felt the guy from London on my shoulder and at the same time, my 800-meter teammate who put us behind yelled at me "you are going to blow the race." I remember forgetting about being "gassed," grunted with "Ugggghhh" and the next thing I knew everything became a vacuum, no noise, slow motion, relaxed; then I hit the tape in first place, won the race by 8 seconds and passed out!!!. After being revived, I realized there was another level to push through and that feeling was amazing.

Later on, while running for Harding College (Searcy, Arkansas) at the Kansas Relays, my coach entered me in the steeplechase. Until that day I had never trained over hurdles, steeplechase, etc. The US National Champion, Doug Brown, was in the race along with a group of some of the best steeplechasers around. In those days, we ran on a clay track with $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch spikes. The night before the race it poured rain. Jim Ryan was attempting to break 3:54 in the mile so the maintenance crew stayed up all night, covered the track as best they could and in the morning dug it up and used burners to attempt to dry it out, and rolled it for the events.

Well, I stepped every hurdle because I did not know how to hurdle and on the third lap my right hand was pinned to the hurdle by another runner who also was stepping the hurdles. At the time, I was even with the top five competitors. When I hit the ground, I pulled the spiked shoe from my hand, got up and continued the race. By the fifth lap, I was back up with the leaders. On the seventh and final lap going into the last turn and final water jump, it was Brown, myself and another runner hitting the 4x4 at the same time. I missed and went right into the deep part of the water, ducked as other runners were coming over as I waded out. I went on the finish third overall behind Brown by about 50 yards. That race told me that, with a little training, I could contend for the National Championship and that launched my steeplechase career.

My senior year at Harding, while doing my student teaching assignment at Searcy High School, the cross country coach, Mr. Jackson, who had won numerous state high school championships and who I was assigned to, walked into the locker room and overheard me telling his team members about how my college teammate and I raced and dominated all our XC and track races. Coach Jackson interrupted me saying "I thought a race was two guys running neck-and-neck to the finish line, not 30 seconds behind." Up until that point my teammate had beaten me every time we raced. Well, after that "insightful" and very embarrassing experience, I realized that I had been content with finishing second. So, in the Arkansas AAU Championships, I defeated my teammate and won the 5-mile race with a time of 24:02. After that, he never beat me again. Back in the summer of 1970, I raced in the New Milford, Conn., 8-mile road race. The inaugural year for this famous race was in 1968 and is held on the last Saturday of July. The course has changed a bit over the years and today it is 7.81 miles (12.57KM). However, on that day in July 1970, I defeated Patrick Bastick and Peter Squires, setting a course record 44:02. Today, the race is a bit shorter than when I won it and the times are faster, but its winners are a who's who of runners from around the World. So, that race is special to me.

Then, of course, my mile record at the Kentucky Relays in 1968, which stood for 15 years and was the first time I won a watch. From there, the six months a year I spent overseas meeting and racing in Finland, Sweden and UK were all a great experience.

At age 35, anchoring the sprint medley for the Army at the Penn Relays with a 1:50 half mile was special, and holding off the World Record Holder to defeat the NYAC team added icing to the cake. At age 45, coming out of retirement and running a 4:11 in the 5th Ave. elite Master Mile and a week later traveling to Troy, New York, and winning the half marathon through the mountains with a personal best of 1:04 was a significant milestone in my career. In 1987, winning the Texas Master 1,500, The TAC Gulf Coast Master 1,500, and The Texas Southwest Master 1,500 Championship was pretty neat. Then in 2008, going in the VA Hospital with spinal meningitis on April Fool's day and being told I was 72 hours from death and there was a good chance I would never walk again provided me with the motivation to walk out of the hospital on May 1st. I set my sights on training again, then

800m at age 63. That last event led me to re-evaluate my life, thank God for all the wonderful gifts he has blessed me with over the years and give back to my community by establishing the Texas Running Center and sharing my racing and coaching experience.