

Local Sports

After I gained my MFA I returned to Boston and wrote a magazine article about Jock for the Boston Marathon program. He liked it, and based on that he asked me to write his life story.

Tom Murphy Co-authors 'Just Call Me Jock' – Boston's Mr. Marathon



A RUNNER'S MIND

CHRISTINE BLANCHETTE

The Boston Marathon is the oldest annually contested marathon since its 1897 debut and 120 years later, it's simply regarded world wide as the most prestigious of all road foot races. Jock Semple became known firstly as a fierce competitor at the marathon distance, later to become an iconic race director of the Boston Marathon. Tom Murphy, runner and author, along with John J. Kelley, co-authored the book 'Just Call Me Jock,' a memoir on Jock Semple, who is known today as Boston's Mr. Marathon.

In our Q&A, Tom Murphy shares his thoughts about writing the book while revealing Semple's passion for long distance running and being race director at Boston.

Q: Did you ever expect to write a memoir on Jock Semple?

I was teaching in Boston in the mid 1970s when I was given a chance to earn a degree in creative writing at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver. After I gained my MFA I returned to Boston and wrote a magazine article about Jock for the Boston Marathon program. He liked it, and based on that he asked me to write his life story.

Q: Was it easy to write his story, considering your running background and that you are writer?

I loved the research aspect of the project which involved my sitting in Jock's cramped cinderblock cubicle in the old Boston Garden day after day absorbing the liniment fumes and listening to him tell the story of his 50-year association with the Boston Marathon as he gave rubdowns to his "patients," which he called the athletes and businessmen who came to him for treatments. He ran his first Boston in 1929 and throughout the 30s and 40s he finished in the top ten nine times. He became the co-director in the late 40s and continued in that role until the early 80s. The Boston Athletic Association phone was "housed" in his clinic and so I was privy to those wonderfully irascible responses he would give as the "infernal phone," as he called it, would ring and some poor unsuspecting caller from the mid west would interrupt his treatments and get this response: "Yeah, whaddaya want? BAA? Yeah, this is the Boston Marathon office, such as it is. Me? I'm the stooge does all the work, whaddaya want?"

Q: What has the feedback been like so far? Were

readers surprised to learn that Jock Semple was a marathoner who supported women's athletics?

He had a reputation as a curmudgeon but he was wonderfully warm-hearted as well. His greatest love was the Boston Marathon, first as a runner, then as a trainer of marathon champions, such as John J. Kelley, who won the Boston Marathon in 1957 and was my co-author on 'Just Call Me Jock.' In his role as race administrator Jock will forever be known as the official who jumped off the press bus in 1967 to chase down Kathrine Switzer to get "his" number back. She had applied with only her initials, "K.V. Switzer," and Jock sent her a number by mistake, thinking "K" was "Karl or a Kevin." But this is important to note he had nothing against women runners, he was only "protecting the rules," as he insisted. The AAU prohibited women from competing in races longer than 200 meters – thinking women would "hurt" themselves – and Jock feared that if he did not get the number back from Kathrine that day the AAU might sanction the Boston Marathon and nullify the results. Truth be told Jock had a great smile, but not that day, and the legion of cameramen who caught his scowl as he chased Kathrine put his photo on front pages all across the world the next day. As Jock said, "I made Kathrine famous and myself infamous," and that he did! But it's important to note that Jock became one of the strongest supporters for women's running once the AAU changed its rules and women were allowed to compete. I could go on about this but as Jock always said in his Scottish burr, "It's in my booooooook!"

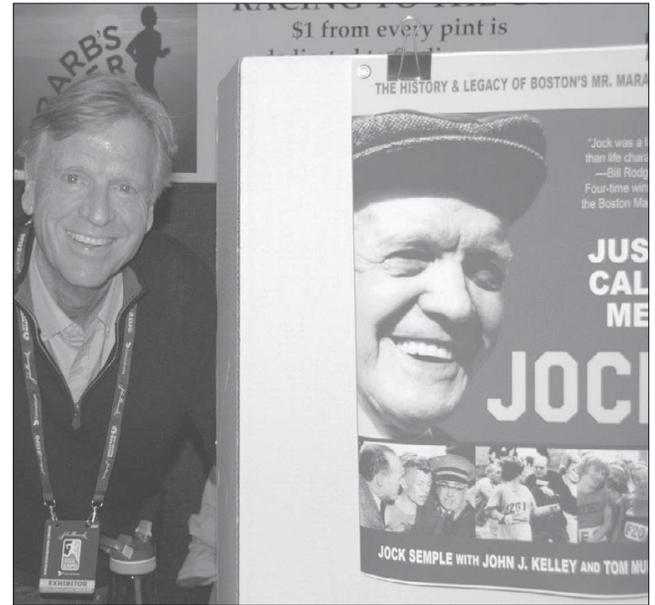
Q: What will readers take from the book?

People who want a first person history of the Boston Marathon during the 50 years of Jock's tenure, a collection of memories of the early days from his point of view as the race grew from a trek over dirt roads to a pathway to gold for elite runners can read the book and find great enjoyment. Johnny Kelley and I tell the tale as a first person narrative with Jock providing an endless stream of story-rich anecdotes while he offers his rubdowns in his clinic. It's like a play, with characters coming in and out, and Johnny weaving in personal recollections from his days in the 1950s when Johnny was Jock's pupil and American's top runner.

We had great fun writing it and folks will feel that infectious fun as they come to know Jock as a complex character in a sport we all love. The book came out in 1982 and it did well. It was excerpted in the NY Times. Jock passed away in 1988 and Johnny died in 2011. We brought the book out again this April to tie in with the 50th anniversary of Jock chasing Kathrine and make this wonderful story of Jock and Johnny's "father/son" relationship available to a new generation of runners and readers.

Q: Tell us about the book published by the Barb's Beer Foundation and how one can get involved?

My wife, Barb, was a marathon runner who developed non-smoker's lung cancer in 2007. She fought it for six years before passing away in 2013. During those six years Barb was a tireless advocate working



RICK LEVY

for a cure for lung cancer – the single greatest killer of women among all types of cancer. After she passed away we (family and friends) wanted to continue her action mantle. And so we created BARB'S BEER, a pale ale, to raise funds to help cure lung cancer. The logo for Barb's Beer is a silhouette of Barb crossing the finish line at the Boston Marathon, so we have an automatic tie in to running groups with the beer. We introduced Barb's Beer in Bellingham and Seattle, WA in 2014 and this spring we started expansion to Boston and NY and the east coast. Proceeds from the sale of the new edition of "Just Call Me Jock" go to support the Barb's Beer Foundation, a 501c3 charity, and the Foundation in turn supports cancerGRACE.org, a charity founded by Dr Howard West, Barb's oncologist at Swedish Hospital in Seattle and a leader working to cure lung cancer.

Q: Will there be a movie on 'Just Call Me Jock'?

Will the book be a movie? It certainly can be. Anybody who knows baseball knows Casey Stengel and the colorful character he was in that sport. Jock is the Casey Stengel of running, as folks who read the book will see and his life story – and the story of the growth of running during his 50 years with the Boston Marathon – would be a great tale.

Q: What is next for you and where can one get a copy of the book?

I've just finished a novel about the Boston Marathon and we're looking for a publisher. In the meantime, folks can purchase 'Just Call Me Jock' on amazon. They can know two things for sure: the stories will put a smile on their face, AND they will be helping us expand Barb's Beer and find a cure for lung cancer. See more at barbsbeer.org (where you can get a link to purchase 'Just Call Me Jock' as well.)

www.runwithit.ca

Twitter: @christineruns

Watch Run With It on YouTube - runwithit



Brome County NEWS

Jesse Bryant
Sales Manager

Let our readers know about your products & services

Tel.: 450-242-1188
Fax: 450-243-5155
email: jbryant@sherbrookerecord.com

I'M LEARNING FRENCH

Because...
more friends means more fun!

CPF Canadian Parents for French

Join CPF - for answers and support as they discover French. www.cpf.ca

