

Patrick Doherty, second place winner in the 1973 race, shares his memories of the first Falmouth Road Race

By Olivia dePunte

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Four brothers showed up to race to the Brothers Four bar at the inaugural 1973 Falmouth Road Race. Patrick Doherty, the oldest of the pack, recalled, “We tried to get my younger brother Tim to run because the four of us thought it would be kind of fun – the four brothers running to the Brothers Four, but it was too long for him.”

The family of nine; four brothers, three sisters, and two parents; were cooped up in a vacation home further down the Cape. The weather had been less than ideal, and the boys were on the hunt for a rainy day activity to expel some energy and to get them out of the house.

Doherty had heard about the race a few days before. “There was an advertisement in the Herald for the race, it was a small little blurb with a phone number to Tommy Leonard at the restaurant he was working at. I remember calling him, talking to him briefly, and we maintained a friendship over the years.”

There was no sign-up beforehand, “Tommy said just show up that day and sign up.” The family packed up the car that Wednesday and drove down with a storm brewing and no way to be sure if the race was even still happening.

“It was a crummy day, what else were you going to do?” said Doherty. “So we drove over to Falmouth in the rain and ran the race, got our prizes, drank our beer and came home.”

Little did he know, their rainy day activity would turn into one of the world’s leading competitive road race events. Of course, it took some working out the kinks to get there. First, Doherty recalled the double-decker bus that led them to the starting line. With a top level open to the elements, everyone was squeezed in down below. Then there was the old rail bridge dilemma; “it was really low on the course so we had to stop, back up, and go another way back to the starting line.”

After a delayed start, the race was “kicked off with a bugler,” Doherty muses. He was at his prime, a 20-year-old cross-country and track athlete at Boston State College, which was acquired by UMass Boston years later. Braving the gusty wind and rain, the race was tight between him and Dave Duba of Central Michigan University.

“He didn’t know where the finish line was, and I had some idea where it was but I didn’t know about the last hill,” said Doherty. “I was catching him towards the end, I remember him looking back a couple times but then he saw the finish line and really pushed forward.”

Despite coming down that last hill to only a few scattered spectators who had braved the elements left to cheer them on, spirits were incredibly high. The rest had chosen libations and warmth, heading into the Brothers Four for beers by the roaring fireplace.

Runners and fair-weather spectators alike celebrated the “Falmouth mini-marathon” in the Brothers Four that night with beer, bologna sandwiches and prizes. Duba was awarded a new blender for his victory. “They had these little plastic cups for beer, and I remember Johnny Kelley grabbing my arm and saying let’s go over here and get bigger mugs,” said Doherty. “There was a shelf over the fireplace of these big mugs, so he grabbed a couple and filled them up for us.”

Doherty returned in 1974 to run an even better time than the prior year but he placed further back. Word spread fast, and the field was stacked with professional runners by the second year. “A whole bunch of better runners came out including Bill Rodgers and it just took off from there,” reflected Doherty. “It’s a beautiful course, but I’ll always remember that first year in the rain between me and Dave.”