

# Local resident praises running group 'family' for Boston Marathon finish

By William A. Baltz  
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BOSTON — The road to the Boston Marathon is not easy. Just ask Nicolette Cole of Three Rivers who finished her first Boston Marathon on Monday, April 20, after years of competing in other marathons to qualify and gain entry into the nation's oldest and most prestigious marathon.

"When I turned right on Hereford and left on Boylston and saw the finish line I really got emotional," she says. "We had five amazing runners in the race and I was fortunate to be one of them. They were a big reason I was about to achieve my dream."

Cole says she began running in sixth grade. "I fell in love with the fact that I could run a 5k, but felt I could keep running. I trained for a marathon my senior year in high school, then found out I couldn't run it because of my age. I started running with my TR running group in the fall of 2020 when I was 40 years old. That's when I really wanted to qualify for the Boston Marathon. I call these amazing friends my family because you go through a lot together."

Her training partners in the 130th Boston Marathon were Julie Allen, Tammy Shuler and William Baltz. Though veteran Boston marathoner Kathy Griffin was registered for the race, due to caring for an injury and preparing for the 2026 Sanlam Cape Town Marathon, South Africa, in May, she opted not to run and instead lent moral support to the group.

In her quest to qualify for the Boston Marathon, Cole competed in several marathons during the past five years, including the Detroit Marathon twice. But qualifying for the Boston Marathon remained elusive until she finished the 2024 Kalamazoo Marathon and

met the time standard.

Qualifying, however, does not necessarily mean acceptance into the Boston Marathon. The Boston Athletic Association (B.A.A.), which produces the marathon, takes the fastest qualifying times until the number of spots available for each male and female age group are filled.

"I did qualify at Kalamazoo, but I was 45 seconds over the cut off time so I didn't get into the Boston race last year," Cole recalls. "That was a major blow. I only let Julie see my tears for a short second. But I was really hard on myself and had a lot of doubts after that. Did I take too long at a fuel stop, did I not push myself a little harder and faster at the hill, or could I have gone faster down the hill? You train for so many miles and months for one race, and anything can happen in 26.2 miles."

Then, along with Allen and Shuler at the 2025 Revel Mt Charleston Marathon near Las Vegas, she again qualified for the Boston Marathon and this time received the coveted notice from the B.A.A. that she had made the cut.

As a single mother with a full-time job and a high schooler involved in cross country and track, she says marathon training is extremely challenging. "After work, I like to get a workout in at Beacon Health and Fitness where I work part-time, so my runs usually start around 4 a.m. I had a little health concern during my training, and I am currently going through treatment."

Marathon training typically begins the first week in January and goes until a few days before the race. It entails weekly short, medium and long runs with a mixture of speed drills and workouts to build strong legs capable of conquering the arduous Newton Hills on the Boston Marathon



Nicolette Cole of Three Rivers was all smiles after finishing her first Boston Marathon: "It was a long and sometimes hard journey to the race, and I savored the experience. My amazing running family helped me get there and across the finish line." Photo provided

course. It also can mean wearing winter running gear, strapping on lights for sight and safety, and heading into a cold north wind on dark, snow-blown roads for a 16-mile run when others are fast asleep.

Standing on Main Street with thousands of other runners in Hopkinton, Massachusetts, where the Boston Marathon starts, Cole says she was in awe. "I got choked up because I am so thankful for my running group and how much they pushed me to be a better runner. This was going to be my victory lap."

Thousands of cheering spectators—many holding humorous or inspirational signs—lined the 26.2-mile course from the exhilarating start to the jubilant finish in downtown Boston. The race always occurs on Patriots' Day, a state holiday, so the boisterous crowd is eager

to celebrate and root on runners with music blaring and a party atmosphere.

"The Boston Marathon has the absolute best cheering supporters," Cole says. "I have never felt so much excitement and energy for runners. The course was just amazing. I remember starting—really pumped up. I started zoning out and running hard. Then I saw the famous Scream Tunnel of Wellesley College where girls are cheering and I told myself to slow down and take it all in. I loved all the signs that peo-

ple held up. But what I loved most was seeing blind people running the race with a buddy assisting them. I began to wonder what that experience was like, and whether they felt the emotions I was feeling. When I returned home, someone commented on how slow I was. Yes, it was my slowest marathon ever. But I said to myself, you got into this amazing race—the hard part is over—slow your roll and savor the experience."

Cole is correct about the hard part. The B.A.A. said it received

33,249 applications from qualified runners during the registration period last September, but the official field was capped at 30,000. Once spots for charity runners, professionals, and para athletes are factored in, only 24,362 qualifiers were accepted. That left 8,887 runners shut out, despite having achieved what's called a Boston qualifier. To make the cut this year, runners had to be at least 4 minutes, 34 seconds faster than their age- and gender-based standard, making it one of the toughest years on record to qualify.

"After I crossed the finish line, I met up with Julie—who's also a running coach at Beacon—and began to cry. I followed her training plan and she's been my rock through this whole journey. Kathy, Tammy, Bill, Julie and I, along with friends and family, later celebrated at a fabulous seafood restaurant. It doesn't get any better than that."

Watching her teenage son, Bryce, compete in the inaugural B.A.A. Youth Mile event held on the Saturday before the marathon made the festive weekend even sweeter. "The fact that he got the personal record (6:07) he wanted in Boston was extra special to me. Again, the tears flowed."

Cole said she also marveled at the historic buildings and places in Boston. "I love history, and even more as an adult, being able to see it in person brings things to life for me." Another bonus: "We saw the Tigers beat the Red Sox in historic Fenway Park. It was cold, but so worth it."

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