

Greater Lowell Tech coach Rene “Butch” Dion to run Boston Marathon, pay it forward

Greater Lowell Tech track coach turning 26.2 mile trek into fundraiser



Greater Lowell Tech track coach Rene “Butch” Dion Jr., will be running this year’s Boston Marathon as part of a fundraiser, with all proceeds benefiting his team. It will be the Dracut resident’s first Boston Marathon. (Courtesy photo)

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PUBLISHED: April 14, 2023 at 2:58 p.m. |
UPDATED: April 15, 2023 at 8:32 a.m.

As he gears up to run his first Boston Marathon, Rene “Butch” Dion Jr., will be keeping pace with a purpose.

The Greater Lowell Tech track coach will be running for a reason, as he makes the 26.2 mile trek from Hopkinton to Boston on Monday. The fifth-year coach is raising money to add a

little spring in the Gryphons’ steps, supplying the team with new sneakers.

Dion, 56, is seeking sponsors to round off this ambitious endeavor, with all proceeds raised going directly to the Greater Lowell track and field program. The sneaker drive is a direct throwback to the days when Dion and former GLTHS coach Bob Dick would routinely make the fundraising rounds, stockpiling a closet full of equipment for the team.

“With the demographic of students here, a large percentage of them can’t afford sneakers just to run track,” said Dion. “Coach Dick and I use to acquired sneakers by donations, keeping them in a closet. Whenever a kid needed them, we just handed them out.”

In order to fully realize this objective, the coach has set a target goal of \$8,000.

“I’ve already raised \$3,500, with a little less than a week to go,” said Dion. “If I hit my goal, the company I contacted is willing to help out with pricing, so every kid on the team can get a new pair.”

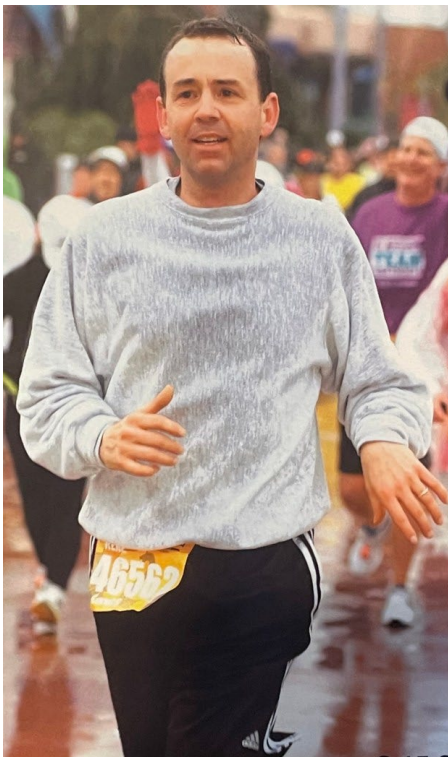
A Lowell native and Dracut resident, Dion didn't play sports when he attended Greater Lowell Tech, before graduating in 1984. However, the graphic arts instructor was lured into the program by coach Dick after joining the teaching staff in 2018.

"Bob has been there forever and recruited me as his assistant," said Dion. "He's been my mentor, and I've always kept in touch with him. He continues to ask about the team."

Dion has been a fixture in the athletic department ever since, taking the head coaching reigns of the indoor and outdoor track program five years ago, as well as serving as an assistant cross country coach.

A former marine, Dion is no stranger to the running world, or these types of long-distance events. The 5-foot-10, 178-pound marathoner previously competed 11 years ago in the Disney Marathon and Disney Half Marathon, and has been in perpetual motion ever since.

Although he's always wanted to run Boston, getting an official bib number proved elusive. That is until his wife managed to acquire one for him from a friend in mid-January, setting everything in motion.



"Boston has always been a bucket list thing that I've always wanted to check off," said Dion, who started heavy training 13 weeks ago. "And because I don't have to pay to get in, or be a sponsor for anybody, I thought I'd pay it forward with my own team. If I can raise enough money, I can buy enough sneakers to reload my closet. That's where this all came together."

Once he hits the streets, don't expect the Gryphons' coach to take a leisurely stroll. He'll be gunning for a respectable time in his maiden voyage through the streets of Boston.

"My goal is to run it in 4:30," said Dion, who completed a 20-mile practice run two and a half weeks ago. "People ask if I'm nervous, but the nervousness is gone. Once my wife told me I got that number, that's when the nerves set in. I thought about all this running I had to do for the next 13 weeks, but as we get closer it's gotten easier."

"That practice run was the worst part," he added. "But the training is over, now it's just about maintaining."

To sponsor coach Dion's drive visit: <https://www.gltpo.org/events/greater-lowell-track-and-field-fundraiser>.



Greater Lowell Tech track coach Rene Dion Jr., (back row, far right) will be running the Boston Marathon to raise funds for the Gryphons' track teams. All proceeds raised will go to supply the squad with new sneakers. (Courtesy photo)