

History of the Greater Boston Track Club

BY PAUL C. CLERICI

In all of the history of American marathoning in the first running boom, there is no more storied running club than the Greater Boston Track Club. Composed of a ragtag gang of Beantown local running stalwarts, and specializing in everything and nothing (from sprints to the marathon), operating on a shoestring (and a broken one at that), and led by perhaps the sport's most eccentric and often brilliant coach Billy Squires, the GBTC burst onto the marathoning scene when "Boston Billy" Rodgers won the 1975 Boston Marathon in record time while wearing a bargain basement shirt with "BOSTON GBTC" inscribed on it using what looked like crayons.

The storied club, a club that had room for "Boston Billy" and Boston Marathon race director Dave McGillivray to Alberto "The Rookie" Salazar and bartender extraordinaire Tommy Leonard to 1983 Boston winner Greg Meyer and Olympian Pete Pfitzinger, had a depth of talent seldom seen before or since.

Paul Clerici, who knows the Boston running scene as well as anyone writing today, has put together a 128-page history in pictures and text of the GBTC that is entertaining, astonishing, funny, somewhat melancholy, and filled with adventures—and more often misadventures—that redefine "colorful."

Clerici is the perfect author for this book: besides being steeped in Boston running lore, he has been working with Coach Squires to construct his biography, a task perfect for the stalwart and the patient.

Clerici runs the history of the GBTC chronologically and breaks it down into chapters roughly a decade long. The story begins in 1973 and ends in 2013. In his usual meticulous research, we doubt if he managed to miss even one member of the famed club. And, of course, being a running history, there are plenty of times recorded, and many of them are still fascinating reading today, especially when one puts them into the context of 1978 or 1981. The depth and range of the club was staggering. They had someone who was good at virtually every distance or event, from indoor track to cross-country, the 400 meters to the marathon. And, of course, then there were the relay races. The GBTC fielded some classic relay teams.

Clerici is so thorough and inclusive that he even details the day the producers

of the TV detective show *Spenser: For Hire* came calling at the GBTC looking for runners they could use as a backdrop as they staged their own Boston Marathon.

Although there are some rare runners who can train long and well by themselves, one of the underlying themes of this history is how much better many runners can learn to perform if they are training with and racing against club members. It is not likely the GBTC would have reached the heights it did if it hadn't been for both the competition and the camaraderie within the club.

One envies Clerici sitting down to listen to and record stories from the storied members of the GBTC. It might be worth editing the tapes out to put together a Best Of CD.

And then, of course, there's the Pied Piper himself, Coach Squires. Clerici has spent countless hours interviewing The Coach, and knows his stories inside out, so that Coach becomes the shoelace that holds the shoe on the foot. Or something like that. Coach would understand.

What is astonishing is how loyal the club members were at following workouts Coach weaved together for them, often on the underside of paper bar napkin, when the workouts often seemed flimsy or fanatical. When Shakespeare used the phrase "There's method to his madness," he must have had an early run-in with Coach.

And then there are the photos - page after page of prime black and white testimony to the club's achievements and the fun that held them together. Pictures like the portrait of Alberto Salazar and Billy Rodgers at Boston College in 1975 raises the profound question: Were we ever really that young?

If there is one drawback, and it isn't the author's fault, it's that the publishers, The History Press, are charging \$21.99 for the book.