

If any of Canada's Boston champions ran and drank and roistered, as Tom Longboat was caricatured to have done, the description probably belongs most accurately to Jimmy Duffy. He lived his short life to the hilt, flexing legs and elbow with equal ease. Duffy loved nothing more than a good time and seldom passed up a party. When he burst victorious across the finish line at Boston in 1914, and was helped into the BAA Clubhouse by trainer Tommy Thompson, his first request was for a cigarette.

"And, true enough," the Boston Post recorded the next day. "Thompson drew from his pocket a silver cigaret case and handed the young Irishman a cork-tipped cigaret, and then held a match while Duffy sat down and enjoyed his first cigaret since twelve o'clock. And no sooner had Duffy been weighed and examined by physicians at the clubhouse than he asked for a bottle of beer, and this in turn was supplied to him."

Outgoing and self-assured, Duffy loved action and people and was loved in turn by all who knew him. He had an ear for song, befitting his Irish roots, and made friends wherever he went, his rollicking lifestyle a contrast with the moderate lives of most marathon runners. Trainers wrung their hands at his tendency toward reckless abandon but it was hard to be angry with him. Instead he evoked in friends the urge to protect him from his faults. This was evident in a Hamilton Herald editorial congratulating him on his victory at Boston.

"Duffy is an athletic marvel — all the more so because he does not take such care of himself as successful athletes generally do, does very little training and is by no means abstemious in his habits. He should be a member of the team which will be organized to represent Canada at the Olympic games in Berlin in 1916. But during the time intervening he should be in the hands of trainers under obligation to see that his physical condition two years hence will be such as to enable him to do justice to the wonderful powers with which nature has endowed him. "

How much Duffy abused his body and fell short of his athletic potential is uncertain. At his death one writer described him as an inveterate smoker who loved his pint of bass, forcing trainers to work him twice as hard to compensate, and the assessment seems fairly accurate. Newspapers made frequent references to his freewheeling habits. But his athletic record spoke for itself and the fondness for him was such that there was a reluctance to criticize.

The Boston Post quoted Duffy as saying that cigarettes and beer were a fixed part of his training regimen. When The Spectator got hold of the account and reprinted it for readers in Hamilton it raised eyebrows and caused considerable gossip, prompting Duffy to issue a denial. Claiming that The Post printed a retraction the day after the story appeared (a), Duffy complained that his reputation had been unfairly soiled. "Why shouldn't I be sore over a story that is not true?" he asked. But the protest seemed half-hearted and if Duffy did try to mend his ways, in keeping with his status as Boston Marathon champion, it didn't last long. He soon fell back on his old happy-go-lucky lifestyle.

Duffy was born May 1, 1890, in Sligo County, Ireland, but moved as a child to Scotland and grew up in Edinburgh, the site of Powderhall Stadium and the celebrated marathon races that were billed as the world professional championships of the day. Duffy lived with his parents at 12 Mary Street. He appears to have been an only child.

In 1911, Duffy emigrated to Canada, part of the population migration of the day, and found work as a craftsman in Toronto. He worked first as a tinsmith and later as a stone cutter, spending his leisure hours at the Central YMCA where Fred Smith, the director, spotted his talents as a runner. Duffy told Smith he had run cross-country races in Scotland, winning enough of them to make something of a reputation for himself. Impressed, Smith dressed him that fall in the Y's colors and entered him in the Ward Marathon, the biggest Toronto race of the year. Duffy ran so well he might have won the twenty-mile event had he not stopped along the way to argue with supporters of a rival runner. He had to content himself with second place after being overtaken by Bob O'Brien, a runner from Gananoque, Ontario.

The following spring Duffy went to Hamilton for The Spectator Marathon, a rival event to the Herald's race around Hamilton Bay. The Spectator race of 1912 served as the Canadian trial for the 1912 Olympic Games in Stockholm, Sweden. Shortened to nineteen miles that year at the request of the Canadian Olympic committee, since it was thought unnecessary to put runners through a full marathon to select the team, the race was run May 24 over the course around Hamilton Bay. For competitors, it was a blessing that they did not have to run twenty-six miles because the day was smotheringly humid. Roads were soft and soupy from overnight rains and high winds buffeted the runners over much of the course. A time limit of two hours and fifteen minutes was imposed, after which stragglers were ordered out of the race. Twenty-five runners started. Only eight finished.

"Training in damp cold weather, the runners were far from prepared for a hot day," noted The Herald. "The sun gave them all kinds of trouble, even the eight who did finish showing this in the time that was made and the manner in which they ran. Their one demand was 'water.' Seemingly they could not get enough of it."

Because it was an Olympic trial, special rules applied. All runners had to produce a doctor's certificate, proving they were fit to compete, and they were also required to pass examinations the day of the race. Attendants were barred from the course and the stricture against drugs was rigorously enforced. While it was a national trial, however, the race was open to all amateurs, including foreigners, and several Americans were entered. One of them, Harry Jensen of New York City, turned out to be the winner.

The victory was one of experience. Jensen paced himself carefully, allowing rivals to speed to the front as the field threaded over the spit of land across the entrance to Hamilton Bay and swung into the rolling terrain on the opposite side. Jimmy Duffy, his impulsive nature on full display, led the way in defiance of the

oppressive conditions, at one point building up a half-mile margin over his nearest competitor. But he paid dearly in the closing miles, wilting on the brutal Valley Inn hill and fading as he headed back into downtown Hamilton. Jensen surged past him in the final mile, sprinting down York Street to win in 2:01:15. Duffy lost by twenty seconds but was the first marathoner named to the Canadian team.

The Stockholm race turned out to be another broiler, run under a cruel sun on the afternoon of Sunday, July 14, 1912. That morning, Duffy went to mass with several other Roman Catholic athletes, Americans as well as Canadians. The mood was strained and gloomy on both sides. Runners from each country felt their chances in the race had been compromised by overzealous coaches whose ignorance of marathon subtleties had left them too drained for a peak effort over twenty-six miles. The soaring mercury and clear blue sky as they left the church only added to the foreboding mood. Duffy started the race cautiously, respectful of the heat and mindful of his lesson at Hamilton. Setting a pace he felt he could hold he let others gamble this time as the field of sixty-eight runners struck north from Stockholm toward the marathon turnaround point near a church at Sollentuna. So far back when he reached it that his position was not recorded, Duffy's strategy began to pay off nonetheless. By the first return checkpoint he had recovered to sixteenth place and with four miles remaining he had moved all the way up to fourth, overtaking one flagging runner after another. The rest of the race became a battle to hold onto fourth spot as Duffy found himself locked in a duel with Andrew Sockalexis of the United States. Sockalexis prevailed by eleven seconds and Duffy settled for fifth with a time of 2:42:18, six minutes off the winning time of 2:36:54 run by Kenneth McArthur of South Africa. Duffy was the top Canadian, followed by Edouard Fabre of Montreal who finished eleventh in 2:50:36.

A tragic footnote to the marathon was the death, apparently by sunstroke, of Portuguese runner Francisco Lazaro. Rushed by ambulance to hospital after falling to the ground at nineteen miles, he tossed about in a delirious state through the night, still imagining himself to be in the race, and died in the morning. Another debate on the humaneness of marathon running ensued, reminiscent of the one that took place in 1908 when Dorando Pietri was helped stumbling and half-conscious across the finish line at the Olympics in London.

Duffy competed in the Olympics as a member of the Eaton Athletic Club of Toronto and reigned as the club's foremost runner on his return to Canada. That fall, on October 3, 1912, he won the Ward Marathon, atoning for his loss the previous year, but the circumstances of his triumph were criticized. Supporters following his progress by auto hurled so many insults at his chief rival, a French runner from St. Mary's, Ontario, named James Dellow, that the abuse was said to have affected the outcome.

Duffy spent much of the fall of 1912 in Hamilton, a city that appealed to his rambunctious Irish heart, training under the guidance of Tommy Thompson, a famous athletic trainer of the times (b). Thompson urged Duffy to move to Hamilton, and Duffy found the invitation appealing, but he put off making a decision.

The Ward Marathon, questionable sportsmanship aside, made Duffy one of the favorites for the race around Hamilton Bay three weeks later, on October 28, 1912. Thanks in large measure to Thompson, he was fit and full of confidence when he checked in at the Herald offices the morning of the race. The lone drawback, for Duffy and all other runners, was the condition of the roads. Often in poor repair, they were almost nightmarish in 1912. Several weeks of rain had left them sloppy and badly rutted, conditions so severe in the vicinity of the Jockey Club that the way was all but impassable. Thompson gave Duffy last-minute instructions at the starting line and handed him a bottle that he carried throughout the race. The newspapers noted that it contained a solution of "dope" but Duffy never made use of its contents. He didn't need to. Springing into the lead at the crack of the starting pistol, he never once trailed. Two pacers tried to stay with him but quit exhausted at twelve miles and climbed into a carriage. Jim Corkery also fought a losing battle to keep Duffy within range. Duffy skipped over ruts and danced around puddles as though the outing were a lark, the outcome never in doubt.

The course record going into the race was 1:48:43, set in 1904 by Sammy Mellor of New York, the man who in 1902 succeeded Jack Caffery as champion of the Boston Marathon. Mellor was in Hamilton that day, handling a runner named John D. Gallagher who had travelled up from Washington to run the race, and it never occurred to him or anyone else that the mark might be threatened. But Duffy smashed it nonetheless, dashing through the final miles all alone to cross the finish line in 1:46:15. Timekeepers double-checked their watches to make sure there had been no mistake, scratching their heads in amazement when the clocking was confirmed. Mellor could only echo their surprise. "I didn't think he'd do it," the New Yorker said.

When Duffy accepted the Herald's victory trophy, presented that night between acts of *The Merry Widow* at a Hamilton theatre, he had made up his mind to accept Thompson's offer of full-time coaching. The Herald trumpeted the news the next day. "Jimmy Duffy, winner of yesterday's record-breaking race and holder of a record that will take some beating, will not go back to Toronto. Duffy has been here for the past six weeks and he has taken a liking to the city under the mountain, so much so that he will stay here. He ran under the colors of the Eaton A.A. of Toronto yesterday, but hereafter will represent the Ramblers club, along with George Richards, winner of last year's race."

Thompson brought out the best in Duffy. In one stretch under the Hamilton trainer's tutelage, Duffy won seven straight marathons, including Boston and a taxing marathon at Yonkers, New York. When Duffy went to Boston in 1914 marathon racing was a shadow of the sport it had been. Public fascination with marathoners had waned, the professional craze was all but dead and newspapers, to a large extent, had turned their attention elsewhere, their interest taken up with baseball, horse racing, football, hockey and bowling. In the years when Hamilton sent no runners to Boston, a sign of the times in itself, city newspapers scarcely mentioned the grand old race.

Duffy changed things briefly. His string of spectacular successes coupled with the force of his engaging personality revived interest for a period — so much so that the entourage accompanying him to Boston echoed the days of old, a ragtag assembly of runners, trainers, sycophants and well-heeled gamblers.

Thompson was there as was Stuart Allan, the Canadian ten-mile champion of the day and one of Duffy's closest friends; J.W. Bryan of the Hamilton Herald; David Goldberg, Duffy's manager and owner of the New Commercial Hotel; and the irrepressible Webber Bessey, now proprietor of the Mountain View Hotel. Goldberg, Bessey and Thompson were armed for a killing, having carted along fifteen thousand dollars among them to gamble on the race. Unfortunately for the trio Duffy's reputation had preceded him and Boston bettors were wary. If the Canadian was likely to win, as seemed the case, they would not be burned again. As a result, the Hamilton gamblers searched in vain for bets, offering odds as high as three to one as the race neared. But no takers were to be found. For Bessey in particular, whose Boston Marathon windfalls went back to the days of Caffery, it was heartbreaking. Duffy was a walking gold mine and they couldn't make a nickel. Not a single bet was made. "Consequently," the Boston Globe noted afterward, "the three Hamilton bonifaces are going back with their fifteen thousand dollars — all save what they spent in Boston. They are loyal good sportsmen and fellows and ever welcome to the Hub."

If the trip was a financial flop, it was an athletic triumph for the Canadians, a race destined to stand as one of the most memorable in the annals of Boston. Duffy ran like a champion from start to finish but needed every ounce of strength he could muster, pushed as he was the entire distance by another Canadian, Edouard Fabre of Montreal. Duffy and Fabre knew each other from Stockholm, where they ran together in the 1912 Olympics, and they exchanged light-hearted barbs as they ran. But the joking belied the fierceness of their struggle. Duffy tried time after time, in his headstrong way, to pull away from Fabre but the Quebecker matched every surge for the first twenty-four miles of the race.

Hundreds of automobiles, their access to the route unimpeded, tried to follow the race, throwing up a boiling pall of dust and exhaust. In places the jam was so bad the vehicles functioned as a blockade between the leaders and the rest of the field. Of the eighty-one starters, the last to challenge the Canadians were Joe Lorden of Cambridge and Ville Kyronen of Brooklyn. But they, like so many before and since, succumbed to the rigors of the Newton Hills, leaving Duffy and Fabre to fight it out to the finish. At Lake Street, with the last of the hills behind, all but the vehicles bearing flags of the BAA or the Boston newspapers were turned away by police, and here the race became one of titans. Sixteen times over the next three miles, until the pair reached Coolidge Corner, Duffy tried to pass Fabre and sixteen times he failed. Each time he surged a few grim inches to the front, Fabre snatched the advantage away with a burst of his own.

The outcome was decided in the final mile when Duffy, gathering the last of his strength, threw it all into one furious assault and inched slowly ahead. Fabre tried with a final surge on Exeter Street to close the gap but Duffy was too far ahead to catch. Duffy won by fifteen seconds, breaking the tape at the clubhouse

in 2:25:01. Shouting supporters picked him off his feet and shouldered him inside while Fabre, exhausted and scarcely able to speak the few words of English he knew, was helped from the finish line by two Boston policemen. The two runners met in the clubhouse and shook hands, Fabre consoling himself that in four races over the Boston course it had been his best marathon. Joe Lorden finished behind him in third, with a time of 2:28:42 1/5 while Walter Bell of the Shamrock Amateur Athletic Club in Montreal was fourth in 2:30:37 2/5, giving Canada three of the top four places.

"I made up my mind at Coolidge Corner that I was going to make a fight of it right then and there," Duffy said. "I passed Fabre. My trainer told me I had about twenty yards on him and this I figured would be hard to hold. I felt a little cramp in my stomach when near the Beaconsfield hotel but this passed off as quickly as it came. I came in feeling as fine as when I started with the exception of a few blisters in the sole of my right foot, caused by the gravel which sifted into my shoes."

That night Duffy was guest of honor at the Colonial Theatre where he watched *The Queen of the Movies*. The race seemed scarcely to have tired him at all, judging by the questions he had for his hosts about the production. Most of them, it was noted later, concerned the female members of the cast. The next day he was honored at a banquet given by the BAA. Toasts were raised in his honor, a band played and he was presented with a souvenir by George V. Brown — the shell of the cartridge fired to start the marathon at Ashland.

While Jimmy Duffy was being honored a marathon postmortem was going on in Boston athletic circles, led by Arthur Duffey of the Boston Post. Duffey was a former sprinter who thought Boston deserved better than the one finisher it had managed to place in the top four runners.

"The time has come when local marathoners will have to wake up if they want to retain their prestige as real distance runners," he wrote. "There is no reason why America or New England should not produce just as good runners as they do across the border.... The trouble with many of the local grinders is that they don't know how to run the race. Such runners as Joe Lorden, Tom Lilley and Festus Madden, and other pluggers who could be mentioned, are as good marathoners as any in the game but they don't seem to run their best on the local course. Considering that the Ashland to Boston course is right at hand, and they have a chance to get thoroughly acquainted with the course, it is hard to understand why the great race should go to some athlete outside New England."

The lament was music to the ears of the Canadians as they departed Boston and journeyed back to the celebration that awaited in Hamilton. The first man to shake Duffy's hand as he stepped from the train at the T.H. & B. Station was Jack Caffery, the memory of his own Boston victories bound up with the occasion. Duffy was placed at the head of a fifteen-car parade and, preceded by the 91st Band, carried through downtown streets to the Ramblers clubhouse, thousands cheering as he passed. Caffery rode behind with his old trainers, Tommy Powers and Dan Donovan, and was persuaded to say a few words in tribute. Duffy, in turn, spoke of Caffery's glory days and heaped praise on Boston and the BAA,

something no one had felt inclined to do in earlier times. "I doubt if I ever had a better time in my life," Duffy said. "Nothing was too good for me. The mayor of the city went out of his way to make our stay there a pleasant one. Autos were placed at our disposal for the entire stay and we had the free run of the theatres and ball park. I can't tell you just how well they treated us." Duffy's trophy, large and ornate, was placed on display in the front window of the Herald offices and scores stopped to admire it, gathering in clusters on the sidewalk.

The next Olympic Games were scheduled just two years away at Berlin and the talk was happy and confident that Duffy would win for Canada the marathon victory that had eluded Tom Longboat in 1908. The matter quickly became academic, however. Shortly after returning from Boston Duffy decided to take a fling at professional running, the little of it that remained. The announcement was made, his loss to amateur ranks mourned and his first professional race arranged. It took place June 3, 1914, at Kingston and his principal opponent turned out to be Edouard Fabre. Fabre had not turned professional and was, in fact, mired in a dispute with the Quebec branch of the Canadian Amateur Athletic Association trying to preserve his amateur status. Why he chose to run against Duffy, knowing if found out it could only worsen his case, is a mystery. But the assumption is that he was so anxious to avenge his Boston loss to the Hamilton runner that he took the gamble. They raced five miles on a half-mile track normally used for horse racing and Fabre won by three hundred yards, waiting until Duffy attempted to break away and then flying past the Irishman with a feverish sprint of his own.

Duffy earned a mere one hundred dollars for his professional debut and some of his closest friends wondered openly whether he had made a terrible mistake by throwing away his amateur status so casually. But Duffy entertained no such doubts, setting out instead to line up as many professional races as he could over the balance of the season. Yet they were races, for the most part, that he was destined not to run. Instead, the outbreak of war in Europe intervened and when the call for Canadian soldiers went out Duffy was among the first to enlist. Although he was urged to complete the races he had arranged before leaving, he refused to hear of it. The war to Duffy was irresistible, appealing to his patriotism and sense of adventure. He could scarcely wait to leap into the fray of battle. When the train carrying Hamilton volunteers pulled out of the T.H. & B. Station Duffy was described as the happiest man on board. Before leaving he promised friends he would run in only one direction while overseas — "Toward Berlin."

Duffy took the oath of entry into the Canadian Army at Valcartier, Quebec, on September 23, 1914, one of dozens of Hamilton men who enlisted on the same date. He was assigned to the 91st Argyle Regiment and plunged happily into military life. Superiors noted in his regimental file, "His habits are good." A few weeks later he was transferred to the 16th Battalion (The Canadian Scottish) of the Canadian Expeditionary Force and that fall he sailed for England aboard the HMT Andania. Duffy stayed in England until the following spring when the 16th Battalion crossed the English Channel to the battlefields of France and Belgium. On April 19, 1915, Duffy was not in Boston, as he thought a year earlier he would

be, defending his Boston Marathon crown. Nor could he know that another Canadian, one he had matched and beaten before, was running to victory in his place over the storied Massachusetts course. Duffy was huddled that day with the men of the 16th Battalion in dank trenches dug into the rolling countryside outside Ypres, a small town in west Belgium. Ypres is recalled with particular horror in the annals of the First World War because it was the place where poisonous gas was first used in human combat, catching Allied troops unaware and cutting them down en masse. The soldiers of the 16th had been outside Ypres for several days, shoring up positions held by French soldiers they had been called in to relieve. The task was a messy one of reinforcing parapets, constructing latrines and removing the putrid flesh of the dead. Duffy looked forward to the following day when the Canadians were due to be relieved themselves and would retire to billets for a welcome rest.

Relief came on schedule but the break was short-lived. Two days later the Canadians were back at the front, fighting alongside other Allied troops to hold a three-mile front that was the only remaining barrier between advancing German armies and the strategic channel port of Calais. The fateful moment occurred at five o'clock on the afternoon of April 22. Suddenly and silently, after what had been an almost beautiful day of warmth and spring sunshine, clouds of gas billowed up from the facing German lines and drifted on prevailing breezes toward the Allied trenches. French soldiers, to the left of the Canadians, took the brunt of the attack, floundering in defenseless bewilderment. Choking and gagging, they stumbled in retreat, allowing the Germans to surge forward into the vacuum.

The charge gave the Germans control of the French trenches and they also took command of a small wood containing four British machine guns. But the Canadians managed to regroup and form a new line that held the advance from going further. Then as darkness fell, and with it a tense silence, Canadian soldiers received orders to counterattack under cover of night and retake the captured wood. The task, one that was little short of suicidal, fell to the 10th and 16th battalions, a direct charge into the face of concentrated German troop fire. A few minutes before midnight, the wood no more than a blur before them in the starlight, the Canadians moved out, almost certainly knowing the fate that awaited them. They advanced in eight lines, overcoats and packs removed, bayonets fixed in place. What gave them away was the faint sound of bayonet scabbards clinking on a wire hedge. A German flare was sent aloft to check. When the light exposed the Canadian advance the German guns erupted. The slaughter is recorded in the 16th Battalion's official war history.

"The battlefield became as bright as day. The ranks wavered and swayed for an instant; they got their balance; they merged one into the other; the charge recovered momentum, and the mass went lunging ahead. The crash of rifle fire bewildered the senses. The bullets made resounding cracks on either side and hit the eardrums like blows of a hammer." The Canadian attackers did manage to rout the Germans from the Bois des Cuisiniers that night. But the cost was terrible. Bodies fell in lines, toppled by the staccato chorus of German machine guns, and in heaps, as men were cut down trying to leap the corpses of those who

had fallen before. At dawn, when it was over and the guns were silent, the casualties could be picked out by the color of their kilts, the yellow stripe of the Gordons, the white of the Seaforths, the red of the Camerons, the dark green of the Argylls. Of three hundred soldiers and five officers in the 16th Battalion, only twenty-seven survived the night. Jimmy Duffy was not among them.

Fatally wounded, Duffy was carried to a field hospital set up in a nearby farm house. He died within hours, battlefield doctors unable to do more than comfort his final moments. The date of his death was April 23, 1915. On that same day, far across the Atlantic in Montreal, newspapers were trumpeting the homecoming of Edouard Fabre, the new champion of the Boston Marathon. Duffy, like scores of soldiers who died with him, was buried in West Flanders. A simple white cross, one in the endless acres of white crosses that remain as a memorial to the human lives lost in deciding the outcome of the First World War, marks his grave in the cemetery at Vlamertinghe — Plot 1, Row F. Grave 14. The news did not reach Hamilton until a week after the fact, and was a blow to Duffy's many friends and admirers when it arrived. The war seemed all the more real and harsh because of the widespread affection Duffy had generated in his brief time as a resident of the city. Tributes poured forth and a day of remembrance was planned in his honor.

Tommy Thompson, Jack Caffery, Billy Sherring and others mourned his passing and recalled him fondly, Thompson especially so since only days earlier he had received a letter from Duffy indicating that all was well. "He was a real good pal as well as an athlete," said Thompson. "I feel his death keenly .... I know that Jimmy received his wounds like a hero. He was one of those fellows who did not have the slightest idea of what danger really was." George Richards, an accomplished runner and friend, had trouble accepting the news. "I hoped that the report of Duff's death was not true, " Richards said. "He and I were the best of pals and I can't convince myself that he is dead. He was a great runner and a fine fellow." On May 1, 1915, on what would have been Duffy's twenty-fifth birthday, the Hamilton Evening Times appeared with the following verses penned in his memory.

Forgetful of himself he went to fight the country's foe  
His mind upon one object bent: to answer blow with blow;  
And thus he faced the shrieking shell, nor faltered in his pace,  
And thus he fought and thus he fell and thus he ran his race.

True lover of an honest game; a leader in the run;  
He left it all for country same, and marched against the Huns.  
The grit which won him many a race now urged him 'gainst the foe,  
Nor did he falter from his place til death had laid him lowe.

Down through the years Jimmy Duffy's name shall never be forgot;  
Though rough the course it found him game, exchanging shot for shot;  
He served his king and country well, nor feared the foe to face;  
And thus he fought and thus he fell and thus he won his race.

Robert J. Devine