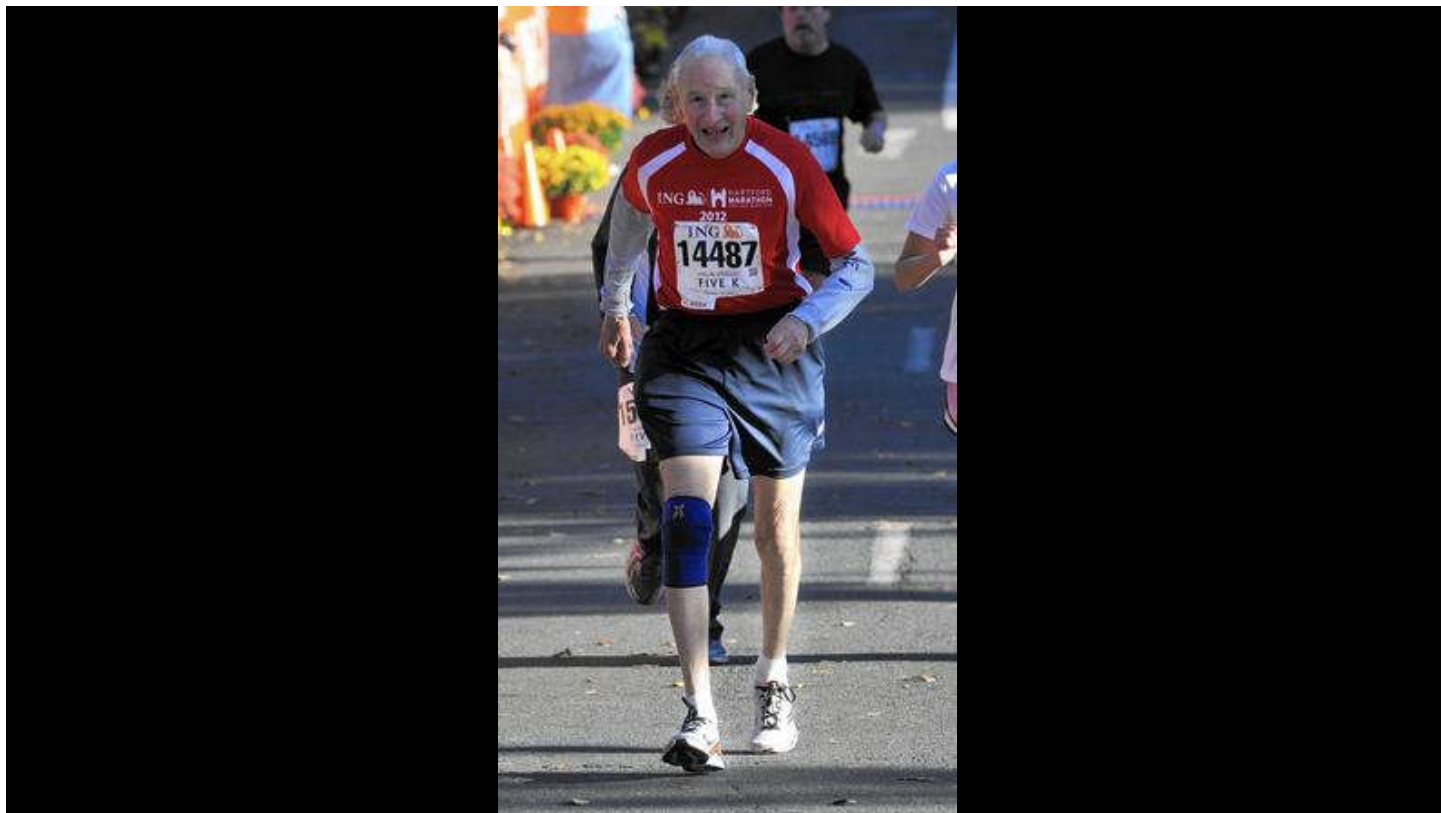


Sports

# Bill Tribou's Running Days May Be Over, But He's Still The Inspiration



Hartford, CT - 10/13/12 - Bill Tribou, of Granby was 91 years old when he finished the Hartford Marathon's 5K in October. BRAD HERRIGAN | bherrigan@courant.com (Brad Horrigan / Hartford Courant)



By **Lori Riley** · Contact Reporter

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**T**he first time I ran a 5K road race, in 2001, I thought it might have been the hardest thing I had ever done — except maybe childbirth.

I sweated my way through the 3.1-mile race in New Britain, alternately walking and running, and finished in 42 minutes. I was proud that I had done it, although I knew my time wasn't exactly fast. People congratulated me, high-fived me and said, "Good for you!"

Well, everybody except my friend Bill Tribou.

"How fast did you run?" he wanted to know. I didn't want to tell him. He went and looked at the results. He couldn't believe it. He was 80 years old and had finished the race in around 25 minutes. I was 36.

It became a joke between us, me, the newbie runner/running writer and Bill, the trash-talking national-class 80-year-old from Granby. "You know, Lori," he'd say, "maybe at my funeral, I'll have the hearse slow down and then you can pass me."

Ha-ha-ha. I wanted to beat him so bad.

My chance came a few years later. I had had ACL surgery on my knee. I had lost weight. I was probably in the best shape of my life. I started running on an indoor track and found that I was much, much faster.

Maybe, I thought, I could beat Bill now. He was 83 at this point and still running pretty fast — he could finish a 5K in 27 or 28 minutes.

I picked a race I knew he would run, the Lobster Loop 5K in Canton in August. I trained and trained. I didn't tell him I would be there. I wanted to surprise him.

I was nervous when I arrived. I saw Bill. He didn't see me. The race started. I was behind him.

Around the first mile marker, I spotted him ahead of me. He was running and talking to a woman. I knew this was it.

I passed him and casually waved and said, "Hi, Bill."

Then I ran like hell.

I knew if he caught me, I would never hear the end of it. I didn't look back. When I crossed the finish line in 27:40, Bill's wife, Nancy, saw me and asked where Bill was. All I could do was gesture vaguely behind me.

Bill finished almost a minute later and congratulated me. He couldn't get over how I had gone by him in that first mile and waved and said hi. He still talks about it, years later.

"How does it feel to beat an 80-year-old?" one of his friends asked me that day.

"Pretty good," I replied. And it did.

He gave me the race medal he won for his age group. He said I deserved it. I still have it.

After that, we ran other races together through the years (noted occasionally in Bill's running log: "Lori beat me."). Five years ago, when Bill turned 90, we ran the Chilly Chili 5K in Orange on New Year's Day, a race that caters runners age 90-plus. I told Bill I would pace him, and he ran a pretty fast time, 37:31. Later that year, he would run 36:53 at a 5K in Simsbury. (The American record for a 90-year-old is an amazing 33:46.)

That year, he was honored as USATF's national runner of the year for the 90-94 age group. He won the award again in 2013 and 2014. He had already been inducted into the New England 65-Plus Runners Club Hall of Fame.

We've always had a lot of fun. One year, Chilly Chili race director Joe Riccio called Tribou and the other 90-year-olds "legends" during a prerace talk.

"Legends?" Tribou asked, rolling his eyes. When a car slowed to pass us during the race, he said, "Must be stopping to look at the legend." He had received a new pair of running shorts for Christmas, but they were big and he thought they might fall down when he was running. A friend jokingly asked him if he was wearing underwear. "Legends don't wear underwear," he said.

A few weeks ago, Bill turned 95. I was thinking about him this week because we were planning to go to the Chilly Chili race on Friday. He was going to walk, mostly. He hasn't been able to run much this year because of health problems. But then he decided he just couldn't do it.

The last race he tried to do was a 5K in June. He walked and ran for two miles and his legs started to give out and he knew he couldn't make it the rest of the way. When the sweep car came, he accepted the ride. And that was that.

You had a good run, I told him Tuesday night. (To his credit, he laughed at my bad pun.) Tribou was one of UConn's first All-America athletes, in the 1940s. He ran the 11th-fastest time in the world in the mile as a senior in 1942 (4:14, when the world record was 4:04) and was part of the fastest mass finish in the mile (five runners under 4:15) in the world at the IC4A Championships. He stopped running after college, then, after a 20-year hiatus, took it up again in 1967 and ran all over New England and the country. As he got older, he won national titles and Senior Games championships. He still holds three age-group records at the [Manchester Road Race](#): 80-84 (41:33), 85-89 (59:37) and 90-up (1:05:05).

"What did running teach you?" I asked him Tuesday.

"To keep running," he said simply.

But now he can't. The spirit is oh, so willing. But his body won't cooperate.

"I'm very sad about it," said the man who inspired me to be a runner.

So am I.

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