

Marathoner just won't quit

◀ EAST DENNIS, Mass. (AP) — In Wellesley, just past the midpoint of Monday's Boston Marathon, proprietors of a sporting goods store plan to hang a banner bearing the words, "Congratulations, Johnny Kelley."

Kelley will not win the marathon. In fact, thousands of runners will pass under the banner before he does.

Kelley ran his first Boston Marathon when Calvin Coolidge was in the White House and the Great Depression was around the corner. When the starter's gun is fired in Hopkinton at noon Monday, the 73-year-old Kelley will set off on his 50th Boston Marathon.

"I'm enjoying my running more so now than ever," said Kelley, who lives in this Cape Cod town. "For 36 years I worked for Boston Edison and I was always rushing to find the time for training.

"I don't know how I ever did it. I'm retired now and I can take my time. It's wonderful."

The white-haired runner has failed to finish the 26-mile, 385-yard course only three times — his first two attempts in 1928, when he lived in Medford, and 1932, then in 1956 when "I had a poor winter training and a bad leg."

A U.S. Olympian three times, Kelley finished 18th in the 1936 marathon in

Berlin and 21st at the 1948 marathon in London. He was on the 1940 team, but World War II stopped those Olympics.

The first of Kelley's two Boston Marathon victories came in 1935. He has finished second twice and was in the top ten 19 times. This year, he's shooting for a time of three hours, 30 minutes. The top runners figure to finish around the 2:10 mark.

"I want to finish this marathon more than any other I've been in," Kelley said. "I know that if I get tired near the end I'll get a lift from the fans."

Kelley ran the first of his 107 marathons March 17, 1928 in Rhode Island, from Pawtucket to Woonsocket and back to Pawtucket. He went the distance, finishing 17th.

"A month later I ran my first Boston. I ran 22 miles and then weakened," Kelley said. A man picked him up in a car and drove him to the finish line.

"Will Cloney, the marathon director, says I am 'the spirit of the marathon.' Everybody looks and waits for me. I'm identified with Boston. I'm Irish, too. You see, there's thousands of runners now and they come from all over the world, but people just don't know them.

"They know me. I'm part of the furniture."



AP Wirephoto

MARATHON MAN.
73-year-old Johnny Kelley