

SPORTS

# Hopedale running coach Joe Drugan keeps on the move with his team, job at Gillette at 78

**Special to the News/Ryan Martin**

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After Joe Drugan's wife, Andrea, stepped down from coaching field hockey at Hopedale High in 1993, the longtime coach sprung an impromptu challenge on her husband during his 50th birthday party a year later.

"She said 'I'm retiring. Hey, let's see what you can do!'" Drugan recalled. "I had no inclination (to coach). I looked at her for maybe 10 seconds and finally said 'Are you crazy?!' ... I thought it over and said 'You know what, let's give it a crack.'"

Soon after his birthday celebration, Drugan, a lifelong runner, volunteered to help coach the Hopedale cross country team. A few years later, he took over as head coach in the fall and even added spring and winter running to his repertoire.

"I took the ball and ran with it," Drugan, 78, said.

## Rolling with the punches

The same year Drugan began coaching at Hopedale, the resident of Hopedale started working at Gillette Stadium in team operations as a football and soccer supervisor.

Drugan has seen it all through his three decades at 1 Patriot Place during New England Patriots and Revolution events. From Gronk spikes to Taylor Twellman goals. And everything in between.

In 2015, Pats owner Robert Kraft invited Drugan to travel to Arizona to watch Super Bowl XLIX between the Patriots and Seattle Seahawks.

"I thought they were going to give the ball to 'Beast Mode!'" Drugan said of the Seahawks' infamous decision to call a pass play instead of run with Marshawn Lynch.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Drugan's job responsibilities changed at Gillette Stadium.

He transitioned from supervising those who watched Tom Brady (or Cam Newton) throw the deep ball to assisting medical professionals administer vaccines. The pandemic turned the home of the Pats and Revs into one of the most utilized vaccination spots on the East Coast.

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Although his day-to-day operations were adjusted, Drugan was up for the challenge.

"To me, I just went with the punches," he said.

## **'Just gotta keep on moving'**

With Gillette Stadium transitioned back now to a sporting venue, Drugan is excited to regain a sense of normalcy: both in Hopedale and Foxborough.

Drugan's pulling double duty by supervising Pats training camp while prepping for the Hopedale cross country season.

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Entering his 29th year with the Blue Raiders, the four-time state champion as a coach hopes to see a big season from a few of his runners, including senior captain Ryan Hayes.

"Running under Coach Drugan has been an amazing experience, mostly because he prepares us mentally, not just physically to succeed," Hayes said. "I think the mentality part is what sets him apart from so many other coaches."

Through the three decades of coaching, Drugan's appreciation for his family is what has kept him going strong. He credits his wife for her fateful prodding.

"If it wasn't for her, I don't think I'd be coaching cross country," Drugan said. "She gave me the challenge and I went with it."

Tim Maguire has coached with Drugan since 2010 with the Hopedale cross country, indoor and outdoor track teams. Maguire, like many, doesn't see Drugan hanging it up anytime soon.

"I think people have whispered 'Oh, he might retire' for the last decade. I don't think he's gonna retire until he's under ground," Maguire said. "I don't think I've ever met any coach (as passionate about his runners). ... He just loves the kids."

As for Drugan, he's just putting one foot in front of the next. He kinda likes this whole coaching thing.

"No time frame for me," he said. "Just gotta keep on moving."