



Pioneers Athletic Trainers Lend a Hand at 2009 Boston Marathon

Staff, Students Assist Runners at Event

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Student athletic trainers (from left) Brittany Howell, Giana Albruzzese, Monique Gerald, Marc Voicechovski and Nicole Callaghan, along with WP assistant athletic trainer Jaclyn Norberg, volunteered at the 2009 Boston Marathon.

On April 21, six Pioneers volunteered to assist with the medical treatment of runners competing in the 113th Boston Marathon. Jaclyn Norberg, an assistant athletic trainer and clinical instructor at William Paterson, as well as student athletic trainers Giana Albruzzese, Nicole Callaghan, Brittany Howell, Monique Gerald and Marc Voicechovski, shared their experiences with wpupioneers.com.

Jaclyn Norberg, MS, ATC; William Paterson Assistant Athletic Trainer/Clinical Instructor

This past April, I had the opportunity to, once again, volunteer my time in the finish line medical tent at the 113th running of Boston Marathon. Of my three experiences working this event, this year was the most rewarding for me. Not only was I able to help the amazing athletes that run this extraordinary event, I had five of my athletic training students, Giana Albruzzese, Nicole Callaghan, Brittany Howell, Monique Gerald and Marc Voicechovski, with me to experience what it is like to cover an elite event like this. Giving them the opportunity to cover an elite event like this is something I think they will never forget.

For the second consecutive year, I worked in the medical tent next to the finish line. As a certified athletic trainer, we are assigned to our own section with doctors and other medical professionals to aid the runners who need medical attention upon the completion of the race. At times, the tent is absolutely chaotic due to the volumes of people that cross the finish line at once during the third and fourth hours of the race. There is so much to do, it is unimaginable what these people would do if there was not a medical tent there to help them out. One of the most memorable runners I treated was an ambulatory challenged runner who found out he broke the world record for single leg prosthetic runner to finish a marathon by two minutes. It was such an incredible moment for him and being right next to him made me feel so honored to be there helping this extraordinary runner who overcame a handicap to finish one of the most difficult races in the world in record time. He was also incredibly grateful for all of the volunteers who treated him and thanked us all about a dozen times. It is those kinds of people and moments that make me love what I do and happy that I volunteer my time at this incredible race.

Due to the amount of medical volunteers that work the Boston Marathon, most of the student volunteers do not get the opportunity to work inside the medical tent. All of my students were assigned to the medical wheelchair sweep team. Their responsibility was to assist the runners into the tent they felt needed medical help by "catching" them in their designated wheelchair and getting them to the medical tent. Although they were not able to be part of their treatment once they brought the athletes in to the tent, they were able to see first hand how finishing 26.2 miles can take a toll on the runners' bodies and how walking the 20 feet to the medical tent can be almost impossible after running such a long distance. Each of them realized that even though they were not providing medical assistance to them directly, the runners they were helping out appreciated their jobs in aiding them to the medical tent just as much as they appreciated the medical staff treating them in the tent. A few of the students had runners come find them after their treatment in the medical tent just to thank them for helping them out. The students said that just having someone say thank you was more rewarding than if they had gotten paid to work the event. I believe it made them appreciate becoming a medical professional even more than before this experience.

It is amazing to realize how much of an impact one can make on someone's life just by volunteering their time. With the experiences my students and I had the pleasure of encountering at the Boston Marathon, it is without a doubt that we all will be helping out again with next year's race.

Giana Albruzzese

This past week I was given the opportunity to attend the Boston Marathon to work on the medical team. Although we woke up early and the day was cold, I would work the Boston Marathon again and again each year. I was placed on the wheel chair sweep team with athletic training students from all different programs. Our job was to decide which runners needed medical attention and which runners were just experiencing normal running issues. Once these athletes were weeded through, we help them in to our wheel chairs and brought them to the medical tent. It was very interesting to watch the athletes as they went from running the marathon to recovering. Some athletes looked as if they could keep going and run another 26.2 miles. Others were having more



difficulty making the transformation. I was able to experience people going from what they thought was fine to a complete drastic down fall. I saw a man vomit five times and proceed to tell me he was fine. By the time I got him to the medical tent, he was convulsing with dehydration, had subnormal body temperature, and was starting to become slightly delusional and disorientated. Seeing people in these kinds of states is not what I am used to seeing in collegiate athletes. I feel it was a great opportunity for me to witness and work with people going through maximal distance running and seeing what this kind of work out can do to the body.

During the time before the race I was able to speak to other students in my wheelchair group. It was very interesting to talk about the many similarities and differences between our programs, such as clinical rotations, classes and the preparation for the BOC exam. It was amazing the things that varied and that were similar between a Division I and a Division III school. I am very grateful that I was given the opportunity to be a part of such an amazing event.

Nicole Callaghan

My experience at the Boston Marathon is one that I will never forget. The Boston Marathon has been my best athletic training experience to date. It was amazing to see all of the actual planning and organization that goes into an event on such a large scale. You can't see all of the organized chaos going on in the background while watching from your television set at home. The experience in person compared to what you see on the television is very different. They are so many behind the scene individuals that are never shown on television and that no one knows about and that don't even receive any real recognition. None of this ever occurred to me before until I experienced being at such a wonderful event that I hope to become a part of next year and many years to come.

The competitors were the most gracious individuals that I have ever met. I helped one individual by wheeling them into the medical tent via a wheelchair and they actually came looking for me just to thank me after they received medical treatment. It simply blew my mind, how grateful these people were to the medical staff. I received numerous "thank you's" as competitors that had just finished the race passed me going through the chute. It was a remarkable experience, seeing these individuals not only finish such an excellent feat but also run for so many different causes. It was a heart warming experience that makes you realize that there are still great people in the world. I am proud to have been a part of such an amazing experience that is hard to put into words and that might not ever be fully understood unless it is experienced.



Monique Gerald is interviewed about her experience.

Monique Gerald

Being able to work the Boston Marathon was one of the best experiences, not only of my career as an athletic training student, but of my life as well. When I first got chosen to work the wheelchair sweep, I was a little disappointed because I thought that I would be missing out on most of the cool stuff that was going to be happening in the medical tent. I also wasn't quite sure what to expect. At first, I imagined it being quite boring because I figured anyone with a real medical emergency would be snatched up as soon as they came across the finish line and taken into the tent to be treated. On the morning of race day, we went to meetings and it was explained to us exactly what we would be doing. Marc was with Jaclyn in the medical tent so they had their own separate meetings and set of orders to follow. Giana, Brittany, Nicole, and I were all in the wheelchair sweep together so our plan was to stick together the whole time. Unfortunately, we got split up during our meeting into two different groups, but we still ended up being in pairs of two so it was good.

At our meeting, we were told that we were responsible for taking the athletes that needed medical attention to two different medical tents. There were six or seven different zones that we were placed in. Giana and Nicole were placed in zone one, which was directly behind the finish line and Brittany and I were in zone two. We were with other students from various different colleges like the University of Connecticut and Boston University. They were really nice and also offered a lot of help because most of them had done this about three times before.

We had RNs and doctors stationed in each zone with us who also helped look at the athletes as they came through to their buses and family members. It was good having them there because some of the athletes would refuse attention for a while, but then would eventually listen to what the professional staff had to say and would allow us to take them to the tent. One of the more rewarding parts of the wheelchair sweep was that the runners showed so much appreciation for our small part. I just thought it was amazing for this person to be congratulating me on a job well done, when they had just run their body ragged doing 26 miles. They just genuinely appreciated everyone for being there and helping everything function properly.

Overall, I think I made about 30 trips to the medical tent and I learned something new about each runner I took. Most of them had run a personal best time. One man told me that he cut off about seven minutes from his last marathon, which, to me, is absolutely incredible. For one woman, it was her very first marathon and she ran a personal best. Another man I met was running his 225th marathon. There were just so many interesting stories to be heard and I was absorbing it all. To see people of all ages and circumstances coming through the line, all running for different reasons, it's really inexplicable. It was a lot of hard work and at the end of the day I was absolutely drained, but if you asked me if I would do it again, I would say in a heart beat. It was a truly amazing experience and I am grateful for every moment I spent there. Hopefully next year I'll be able to go and make even more incredible memories.

Brittany Howell

Volunteering for the Boston Marathon this year was an experience I will never forget. It was a lot of firsts for me; the first time I had ever been to Boston, volunteering for a large event, and the first time I was in the behind-the-scenes portion of a sport. It was something unbelievable.

Before the event I was told that I would get to see very many serious injuries and get experience working with problems that don't tend to arise in our normal college setting. I was excited to see different injuries, I was expecting it to be a pretty gory place at the wheel chair sweep, and it was made out to be quite a big deal. At first when I ended up only having the runners that were too tired to walk, or had bad cramps in their legs and needed to be brought to the medical tent for the massages, I was almost disappointed. Not that the athletes weren't hurt, but that I wasn't getting the "full experience".

Then I started talking to the athletes, not just the ones in my chair, but also the ones that were just walking by eating their bananas and bagels. Every single



person was so grateful that we were there volunteering, they said thank you to me so much. Everyone was so unbelievably gracious; it made the entire experience worthwhile. It didn't matter that I didn't see people with crazy injuries, or suffering from heat exhaustion. All that mattered was that I had given a few hours of my time to help people who deserved all the respect in the world for even being able to complete a marathon, and yet they were acting as if I had done something extraordinary. This was an experience that I would not trade for anything and that I would do again in a heart beat.

Marc Voicehovski

Volunteering at the 2009 Boston Marathon was one of the most interesting and rewarding experiences I have had as a student athletic trainer. Part of my volunteering duties was to be on the wheelchair sweep team that was stationed at the finish line of the race. As part of the wheelchair team it was my duty to assist ailing runners to the

medical tent where they could then be treated by certified athletic trainers, physical therapists and physicians. I had no idea what to expect while volunteering besides that it would be physically demanding, which it was, more than I expected. Being at the finish line, I was able to see the duality of sports right in front of my eyes. These runners have trained for months and even years to run in this marathon and when they crossed the finish line they didn't hold back their emotions at all. With about 400 runners crossing the finish line every minute I had never seen so many tears being shed, whether for happiness or pain, and for those who couldn't even walk it was a privilege to help them to the medical tent. It was almost unfathomable how hard these runners pushed themselves for 26.2 miles and to see them not being able to walk or stand for the last 100 yards to the medical tent was shocking. I had no problem assisting them to get the treatment they needed after the culmination of months and years of training to make it across the finish line. It was something I will not be able to forget and I plan on volunteering again next year.

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