

# Sonya Kennedy realizes runner's dream

## Winnsboro native runs in legendary Boston Marathon

By Martin Mobley  
Editor

Winnsboro native Sonya Kennedy has realized the dream of many long-distance runners: to compete in the Boston Marathon.

Kennedy, who teaches physical education to 4th-6th graders in Flint, Michigan, used her spring break holiday two weeks ago to run in the legendary 26-mile, 385-yard event.

In only her second marathon, Kennedy finished with a time of 3 hours, 38 minutes and 37 seconds. That translated into a 6,367th-place finish. But to put that into perspective, there were 15,605 other runners.

Kennedy said the field was so large, and she was so far back in the pack, "it took me six minutes to get to the starting line."



Sonya Kennedy

Her first marathon, the Detroit Free Press Marathon last October, served as her qualifying time for Boston.

In the 40-44-year-old age division, she had to post a time of 3:50 or better to be eligible for the Boston Marathon. She finished in 3:41.

Disappointed that she wasn't able to post a personal-best time in Boston, Kennedy said, "it's a very difficult course."

Kennedy actually enjoys running uphill, and that helped in Boston. But, she says she finds downhill running harder.

Her training schedule to prepare her for that difficult course was an average of 50 to 60 miles of running a week. Normally, she runs between 35 and 40 miles weekly.

How did a former basketball player find her way to the road courses of long-distance running?

A trip to the doctor four years ago revealed that her cholesterol level was a little high, so she laced up the running shoes.

Kennedy began her competitive running with the shorter distances: 5K (3.1 miles), 10K (6.2 miles) and half-marathons (13 miles).

Her brother, Donald Kennedy, who lives in Reston, VA, ran in the 1999 Boston Marathon, finishing with a time of 3:08. However, a knee injury kept him from joining his sister in this year's run.

Kennedy is a graduate of Winnsboro High school, where she lettered in basketball.

She went on to play collegiately at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, where she earned her degree.

After graduation, she taught school in LaGrange, GA for four years, then moved to Flint for a year.

Returning to Tuskegee, she coached the women's basketball team for four years.

Kennedy returned home to Winnsboro in 1993, where she coached the girl's basketball team at Fairfield Central for a year.

Then, it was back to Flint, where she has been ever since, and where she says she plans to stay until retirement.

After that, she hopes to return to Winnsboro, where her mother, Viola Kennedy, still lives.

One of her favorite memories of Boston, she said, "besides finishing the race," was the "cheering section" from a girl's school located on the marathon route.

"You could hear the girls yelling and cheering from blocks away," she said. "It really gave me a boost."