

## Meet Mary White, the Boston Marathon's Massage Coordinator



The 2023 Boston Marathon's John Hancock pro- and para-athlete massage team (L to R): Mary White, LMT, Doreen Rossi, LMT, Anna Gammal, LMT, and Joe Frazer, LMT. Photos courtesy of Mary White.

**More than 22,000 runners qualified for the 128th Boston Marathon taking place Monday, April 15. They will race along a 26-mile course that winds through the heart of Boston and past many historical markers, parks and buildings.**

When they finish the course, muscles, ligaments and tendons will be more than ready for massage therapy.

Mary White, LMT, is Massage Therapy Team Coordinator for the Boston Athletic Association's pro- and para-athlete team at the [Boston Marathon](#), a position she has held since 2011. White, 58, has provided massage at 28 Boston Marathons, beginning in 1996.

In 2013, White was instrumental in connecting the Massage Therapy Foundation (MTF) with the [John Hancock Marathon Non-Profit Program](#), which until this year provided Boston Marathon bibs to runners representing select non-profit organizations as a fundraising opportunity. This program resulted in more than a half-million dollars being raised for the MTF, which provides research training and community service grants in the massage field. Bank of America is the marathon's new sponsor.

White graduated from the New Hampshire Institute for Therapeutic Arts in 1991. Her hometown is Limerick, Ireland, from which she moved to the U.S. in 1986. Today she lives in Hyannis, Massachusetts, with her husband, Chris. She has two stepchildren, three grandchildren, and a cockapoo who is a trained therapy dog.

White sat down with massage therapist and business coach Felicia Brown, LMBT, LMT, via a Zoom interview to talk about her work with athletes at the Boston Marathon and how she has seen sports massage evolve.

**Felicia Brown:** What prompted you to go into sports massage?

**Mary White:** I went to college in Ireland and graduated with my diploma in sports and recreational management with the intent of going into some kind of national sports center.

In the 80s, I secured a job with a company that was opening up health clubs with hotels. I was in my 20s and a runner at the time when I met a massage therapist who was on staff. I had never had a massage and I couldn't believe how good I felt after getting my legs worked. Then I met another massage therapist who inspired me to get involved in sports massage.

When I went to school, I decided to do sports massage and work with athletes.

If there's one person whose work inspired me, it was Bob King. Bob encouraged me to find the path I was passionate about and go for it. By following him for some years, I saw how he changed as a therapist and an educator. He kind of morphed from sports massage to chronic pain management, which is what my practice is today. Chronic pain management and sports massage, they simply go hand in hand.

My colleague, Doreen Rossi, and I decided we wanted to test onto what was called the National Sports Massage Team at the time. Back in the day, Jim [James] Waslowski was definitely involved, as were Elliot Green and Bob King. These were some of the people who really were inspirational with regard to working with athletes.

We had to do a lot of events. We would be on the road every second weekend, going to triathlons, half Ironmans, doing pre-event and seeing the athletes after, really getting our hands on people. These were intense events and we learned so much. Then we did testing at one of the AMTA conventions, with a sit-down paper test and a practical, where they role-played for pre- and post-event.

**FB:** How did you get started at the Boston Marathon?

**MW:** I had been going as a spectator first and then volunteered for three or four years. I heard of this other team that was working with what we called then, “the elite athletes.” I sent in an application and got invited to work with people who were running their first marathon.

The team that I now work on was administered by somebody else. They lost a person on the team and asked if I would join. In 2011 I became the team manager.

It's very exciting. It's very intense. You do feel an immense obligation to these athletes. They show up in town, usually on Wednesday and Thursday, and we work with them until after race day when they see us in the recovery room right after they cross the finish line.

In the recovery room, there are five therapists and 10 tables which allows for somebody to chill out after the massage, while we move to another table. We used to have 40 to 50 athletes, and now with the para wheelchair athletes, we have as many as 70 athletes.

You only get in there if you're an athlete. They can have a plus one if we have an issue where we know someone needs a family member or there is a language barrier.

The host hotel is amazing in helping me with the laundry, sheets, towels, everything that you need in a treatment room, plus taping, ice, hot broth, Gatorade, water, hot tea, depending on what the conditions are. We also have a podiatrist.

In 2018 there was a full-on headwind, rain nonstop and 30-degree weather. We spent the weekend prepping for hypothermia, quizzing each other. We had hot towel cabbies so that we could have hot towels and get the athletes warm.

**FB:** What types of techniques do the Boston Marathon massage therapist provide most often, pre- and post-race?

**MW:** Pre- and post-race are different, as pre-race you want to stimulate and warm up the muscles with jostling, friction compression and stretching. Post-event is very different as every event is different.

Post-event you need to first triage and identify if the athlete is under any stress or is recovering normally without duress, then you address the muscle tissue.

Post-event we use passive stretching, compression, effleurage—but always remember the athlete's body dictates. We are trying to help the body recover and need to listen to the body and pay attention to the athlete. How is their breathing? Are they hot or cold? Are they sweating? The weather plays into it, as does the athlete's performance.



Mary White kneels at the finish line of the 2022 Boston Marathon.

**FB:** Do you work on the same athletes repeatedly, or do they get whoever is available?

**MW:** At Boston, a lot of times we do see the same athletes because sometimes while the [elite, pro athletes](#) change over the years as they time out, coaches and agents don't. But they also know, as a team, that we're all qualified.

Sports massage has obviously evolved in general, as has the field of massage therapy. When I started working with athletes, many of them had not had massage therapy. All these athletes now get massage therapy on a regular basis. It's part of their training program. They'll actually tell us what they're dealing with and what their therapist has been doing. It's taken it to a whole other level.

**FB:** Do you ever go fan girl if you're working on an athlete that you really admire in that you feel nervous, or are you way beyond that?

**MW:** Every athlete is the same to me, because every athlete has given it their 100%. It's an honor, you know, to have Des Linden on my table, Shalane Flanagan, but they're getting the same work as, you know, you are.

You hold it together because you're a professional, and because of that, she needs something from you. So, you're there to give it.

**FB:** Is the Boston Marathon the only event you work?

**MW:** The last few years, yes. When I moved to Hyannis, I got involved in all the races that were going on around the Cape. Because I was starting to build my practice, I didn't mind giving up my weekends.

My practice is very busy now. When it comes to the weekend, I really need to preserve myself. If I spent my weekend doing massage therapy events, and then went back to work on Monday, that doesn't serve my body well. So, I phased out of doing them, passed it on to somebody else. Now I run those events, and it's such a joy to me.

**FB:** Do [other marathons](#) have paid massage therapy teams like Boston?

**MW:** I believe other major marathons do, but Boston was the first.

**FB:** Do you have a favorite memory from the events?

**MW:** The high point was having Des Linden win that marathon in 2018. I had worked with her that week and some previous years. I was so happy for her.

**FB:** Do you have suggestions for someone interested in getting involved in sports massage?

**MW:** Take courses that help you understand sports massage is not a technique. It's a combination of things pertaining to the events you're doing. Understand, whether it's running, figure skating, or swimming, the key muscles that people deal with.

I would also encourage people to [get their hands on athletes' bodies](#) and get involved in your local community because we're such a network. You meet people at one event and meet someone else and then that leads to something else down the road.

**FB:** Is there another event that you'd like to work?

**MW:** I would love to go back to London, where I ran the marathon in 1998, to do massage therapy there on the other side.

**FB:** What do you enjoy most about sports massage?

**MW:** I love helping an athlete train for an event with preventive medicine. People embarking on a marathon-training plan need to have prevention in that plan to arrive successfully on race day and achieve their goal. That is what I do in my practice.

It's challenging when athletes push too hard, don't listen to their coach or massage therapist and then have to miss the event or run it injured and don't perform as they might have—but it's exhilarating to see them succeed.

Visit the [Massage Therapy Foundation's site](#) to donate to its Running for Research team. Visit this [Boston Athletic Association page](#) for information on volunteering on the medical team, of which massage is a component.



Mary White while running the virtual fundraiser the Massage Therapy Foundation had in 2020 for runners who could not run in Boston.

## About the Author

Felicia Brown, LMBT, LMT is a Business, Marketing and Life Coach for Massage, Spa & Wellness Professionals and loves helping others succeed through her books, classes and coaching. In her free time, she loves living an active lifestyle, taking photos of wildflowers and racing rubber ducks. Connect with Felicia at [FeliciaBrown.com](#).

