

Racewalking champion Charlie Boyle of Annapolis remembered for his humor and speed



Charles "Charlie" Boyle, 92, was known for his big, sunny smile, his love of exercise, his compendium of pun-filled "Boyle's Laws." Surrounded by his family and friends in a hospital bed placed in the dining room, he passed away the next evening on Nov. 17. Boyle was a week shy of his 93rd birthday.



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Charlie Boyle and teammates broke multiple USATF records in their age group. See his photos.

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Charles "Charlie" Boyle, 92, was known for his big, sunny smile, his love of exercise, his compendium of pun-filled "Boyle's Laws."

Two of his 763 "Boyle's Laws" were: "Exercise will keep you from becoming a well-rounded person", and "Exercise adds years to life, but only at the end."

Boyle was right on both counts.

He also knew how to throw a birthday party that was fun – and healthy.

At the start of the early morning outdoor birthday party, held in the Lindamoore community on the Severn, community members and guests of all ages walked or ran on a mile-long route through the neighborhood before lining up for a Bloody Mary (for adults) or a lemonade served up on his front lawn.

Participants also received commemorative racing bibs to wear while trotting the local streets. "Walk for the Health of It," was printed above each bib's race number.

Boyle, who had a form of Myelodysplasia, a bone marrow disorder, suffered a massive stroke shortly after his regular Pilates class a month earlier. He never recovered. After several weeks in a hospital and an assisted living facility, his wish to return home was honored.

"It was his choice to let go," said Holly Perdue Boyle, his daughter-in-law. "He never wanted to be dependent or a burden to his family."

Surrounded by his family and friends in a hospital bed placed in the dining room, he passed away the next evening on Nov. 17. Boyle was a week shy of his 93rd birthday.

After his retirement 21 years ago, he took up the Olympic sport of racewalking. He'd been a competitive runner, but did not enjoy the stress on his bones and muscles caused by the constant pounding stride of running.

In his 80s and 90s, Boyle and the teams in which he participated set national records in USA Track & Field Indoor 3K and 5K racewalk competitions and was a gold medalist in the Senior Olympics. In 2014, at age 90, he was a member of the first men's relay team aged 90 and older to participate in the USA Track and Field Masters Outdoor Championships at [Wake Forest University's](#) Kentner Stadium. The 5-member team raced in the 4x100 meter relay, the 4x400 and the 4x800 relay, setting three world records as the oldest team to ever cross the finish line in those events.

The group, recruited by Charles Ross, then 91, of Decatur, Arkansas (now 93), included Champion Goldy, Sr., 97, of Haddonfield, New Jersey (died Nov. 11, 2016 at age 98); Orville Rogers, 96, of Dallas (now 98); and Roy Englert, 92, of Springfield, Virginia (now 94).

Charlie was the "baby" of the team. The men had never met before.

"Our only requirement was to cross the finish line alive," Boyle said.

In July 2015, despite having a broken foot, Boyle returned and teamed up with three other men – Ross, Rogers and Englert - to break the world record for running in the 4x200 meter relay. They ran it in 5 minutes, 40.82 seconds, a record for that age group – and they were the only contenders.

He also brought home a silver medal for competing in the 200 meter and a gold medal in the 3K racewalking competitions.

The past 13 years, in the USA Track & Field racewalking competitions for men aged 80 to 84, and, later, in the 85 to 89 category, Boyle set national records in Indoor 3K and 5K racewalk competitions.

He was a champion racewalker the past two decades. After a foot injury and surgery to repair it in his early 70s, he took tap dancing lessons – the only male in the class – until the foot was rehabilitated. In his mid-70s, he broke the American record for the 3,000 meter racewalk at the USATF Nationals. More records were broken in 2009, before the headline-making races of 2014 and 2015.

Boyle was raised in Bayonne, N.J. At 17, he briefly enlisted in the Army. Boyle convinced his mother to sign his enlistment paperwork, by leading her to believe it was for a summer camp. Realizing the ruse, his father drove to Fort Dix and pulled him out of boot camp.

He later joined the U.S. Merchant Marine and, from there, received a scholarship to Naval Officer Candidate School. World War II ended shortly after he was inducted.

Never in battle, Boyle left the Navy in 1947 as a Lieutenant Junior Grade.

Several of the friends he made during his Naval Officer training at [Tulane University](#) and [Georgia Tech](#) remained friends for life.

"We met November 1, 1943," said Art Jenssen, 93, of Pottersville, New Jersey. He is planning to eulogize Boyle at his Memorial Service at the Annapolis Yacht Club in January.

"We'd meet every few years for a reunion, along with our wives. The reunions would take place in various towns, depending upon who sponsored the reunion. We had great times together."

The men and their wives vacationed all over Europe from the northern reaches of Norway, near the border it shares with Russia, to Sweden, Denmark, Turkey, Greece, Cyprus, Israel, England and Ireland.

"He was like a brother," said Jenssen. "His family treated me like a son. His brother was my brother."

The next 15 years, Boyle worked for Standard Oil. Newly married in 1952, he and his wife Joan, began raising their four sons, Robert, Chris, Brian and Neil.

The sons, ranging in age from 52 to 62, have given Boyle nine grandchildren. After 60 years of marriage, Joan Boyle passed away in 2012.

He joined [NASA](#) in 1962. One of his responsibilities at the Goddard Space Center in Greenbelt involved operating the agency's special programs, explaining NASA's mission and projects to a wide variety of audiences. He retired in 1995.

He wrote several books while standing upright at a special computer station he built himself. Two were based on his NASA experiences: "Space Among Us: Some Effects of Space Research on Society" and "Shuttle Rising: Rendezvous With A Rumor."

A short piece he wrote was published in the 2010 edition of "Chicken Soup for the Soul: Runners." In it, Boyle advocates the benefits of racewalking.

He also published two illustrated children's books. One, "Tailey Whaley: A Tale of a Whale, A Whale of A Tale," discouraged bullying. The second, "Sandpiper's Game" encourages performance and a concept of doing your personal best.

His racewalking wasn't confined to the competitive racetrack. He believed the practice was more important than the performance. Daily, passersby could spot him racewalking along the Naval Academy sea wall or on the 400 meter outdoor track. In foul or cold weather, he took advantage of the indoor track in the Wesley Brown Field House.

He often lamented being the only person in his age group on the track or trail.

His advice for people of all ages was "Walk! Walk! Walk! For your health, get out there!"

The Memorial and Life Celebration for Charles "Charlie" Boyle will be held at 4 p.m. Friday, Jan. 6, 2017, at the Annapolis Yacht Club, 12 Dock Street in Annapolis, near the Sailing Hall of Fame.

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