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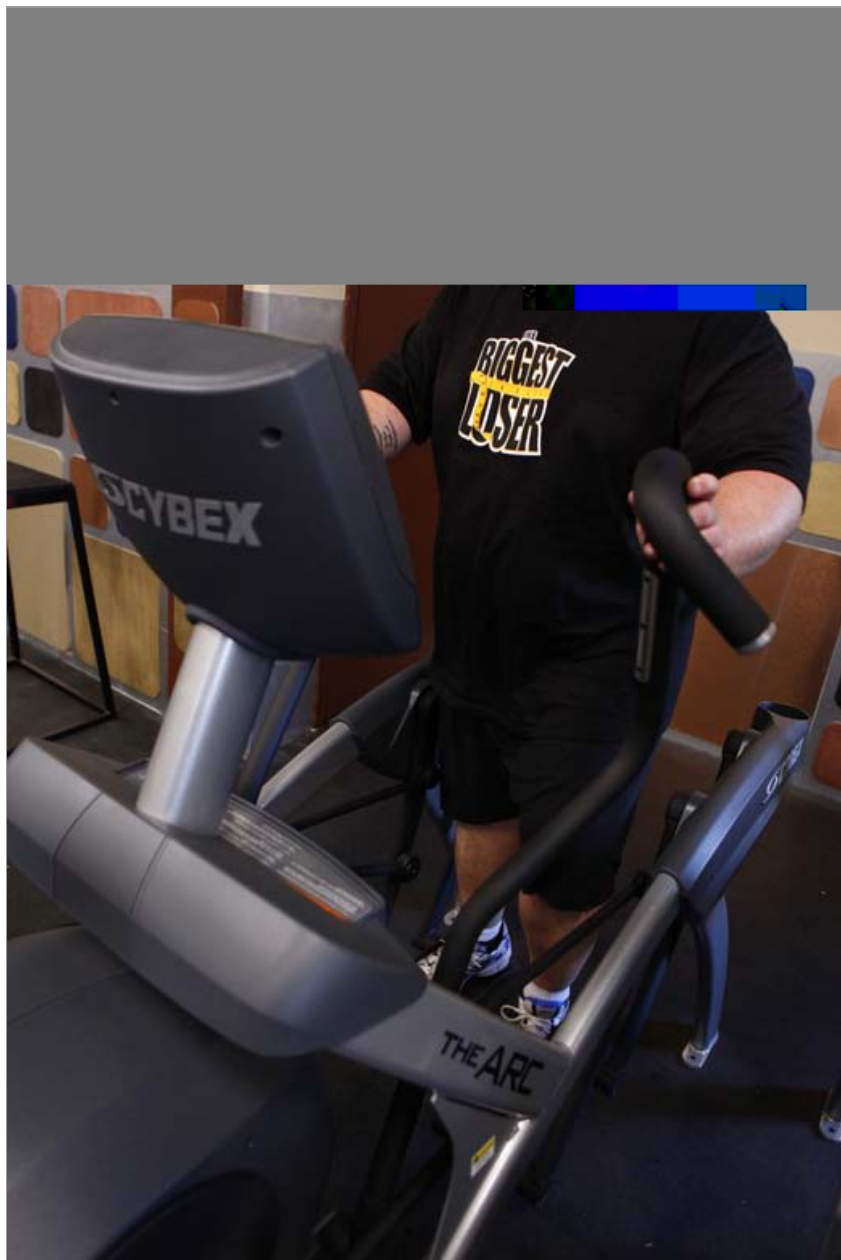
DORCHESTER, WEST ROXBURY

West Roxbury native loses weight, regains confidence on TV show

Posted by Matt Rocheleau November 19, 2010 08:30 AM

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(Courtesy: NBC)

Brendan Donovan in a photo shot in early June when the show began taping. He weighed 362 pounds when the show began and lost 90 pounds in the first nine weeks. (See a more recent photo below)

By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

Growing up, Brendan Donovan was always a “big guy.”

“But I was the big guy that was athletic. I was the guy who was 260 pounds and could outrun a guy who weighed 200 pounds,” he said.

However, in recent years, as Donovan became more absorbed in his work as a teacher and football coach in the city’s public school system and his exercising dropped off, his eating habits didn’t. The 33-year-old West Roxbury native, who throughout high school and college had been constantly motivated by sports and girls to stay in shape, was instead struggling to find motivation in something much more serious – his livelihood.

“I was 360 pounds and about to die,” he said before listing off weight-related health complications, including chest pains, high blood pressure and cholesterol, orthopedic issues, anxiety, depression and severe sleep apnea. “I had fallen so far down that I didn’t think there was a way out.”

Pushed by his students at the Jeremiah E. Burke High School in Dorchester, Donovan sent an audition tape to NBC and was chosen to become a **contestant** on the 10th season of the network’s Tuesday primetime reality weight-loss show, “**The Biggest Loser**.”

Regardless of whether Donovan, one of seven remaining contestants on the taped season that is currently airing, claims the show’s \$250,000 grand prize, he said he’s already a winner.

“It’s not about the money for me anymore. At first, it was a big factor. But now, it’s about me getting my life back,” he said. “I look good and I feel good.”

Donovan said he was a popular high school athlete and a competitive weightlifter in college at Florida State University where he majored in criminology. He returned to Boston from the Sunshine State and became a city school police officer. Interacting with students on a daily basis inspired him to earn a master’s degree in special education at UMass Boston and start teaching, he said.

But after entering his newfound profession in 2005, the man who had ran the 26-mile Boston Marathon for each of the previous three years found little time and energy to exercise, and Donovan said bad eating habits led him to rapidly gain weight.

“It was no one else’s fault but my own,” said Donovan, adding that that is the biggest lesson he learned on the show.

He remembers trying to run on a treadmill set at a “fast-walk” speed. Four-tenths of a mile later, he was out of breath, his heart racing and had a headache.

“I thought, ‘wow, I have a long way to go,’” said Donovan Thursday in a phone interview, admitting he had nearly accepted being dangerously overweight and needing to take pills daily to manage the health effects of his obesity. “First

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and foremost, I wanted to [get healthy again] for myself.”

His weight issues made him “miserable,” he said. A lack of self confidence caused Donovan to push away and eventually end his relationship with his fiancée, who he said has since moved on.

“I was raised not to regret anything. But that’s the one mistake I regret,” said Donovan. “I feel terrible about pushing away the one girl that loved me unconditionally no matter how fat I was or what I looked like.”

Donovan is not allowed to disclose his current weight since the show will not finish airing and unveil a winner for several more episodes, but through nine weeks he has lost 90 pounds, most-recently checking in at 272.

One somewhat unexpected side-effect from his TV stint has been receiving at times harsh, personal criticism from strangers who watch the show.

“I used to watch the show and always saw it as an inspirational show, so it’s hard for me to see people writing things bad about me who don’t even know me,” he said. “I don’t blame anyone for thinking how they do, but it just feels like I’m really being judged by people who don’t really know who I am.”

But, the toughest challenge since leaving the show and returning to West Roxbury is maintaining the discipline necessary to go to the gym regularly. So far, Donovan, who is eager to return to teaching in January, said he’s doing well – focusing less on weight loss and more on building muscle.

An added motivational factor to stay in shape: on Patriot’s Day, to help benefit [Children’s Hospital Boston](#), Donovan said he will make the 26-mile trek from Hopkinton to Copley Square for a fourth time.

“Everyone was extremely happy for me when I got back,” from the show’s recording on a ranch outside of Los Angeles, he said. “They see that glow back in my smile.”

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(Courtesy: NBC)

Brendan Donovan at 272 pounds, 90 less than when the show began, in a photo taken in early August after nine weeks on the show. (See an earlier photo above the story)



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