

Robert Dowling



To call **Dr. Robert Dowling** a "late bloomer" when it comes to sports would be an understatement. He just kept getting better with age.

In fact, "Doc" Dowling has enjoyed an outstanding sports career three different times in his life. The first time came while playing hockey and running track, two sports the Rowayton native participated in while at Norwalk High School.

Dowling played only one season of hockey for the Green & White as a senior in 1939 when he skated on the wing. That same year, as a member of the NHS track team, he won the Fairfield County championship in the half-mile.

But Dowling's athletic career was just beginning to scratch the surface and really took off after his graduation from Norwalk High. He continued to run the half-mile at the University of Connecticut in 1941, and added the sport of football to his resume as a halfback for UConn. He later transferred and played at New Mexico State during the 1943 season.

Then while in the Army in 1944, the versatile Dowling took up the sport of boxing and represented Camp Ellis, IL, in a Golden Gloves tournament held in Peoria, IL. All he did was win the welterweight title.

When he got back home, Dowling resumed his ice hockey career as a member of the Rowayton Fire Department team. And in 1961 and '62, at the ages of 40 and 41, he played with the vaunted Home Oil hockey team, a perennial power semi-pro team out of the Crystal Rink.

With his hockey days finally behind him, Dowling was about to enter the second phase of his three-part athletic career. From 1962 to 1973, he played with the Rowayton Bears in the Inter-City Touch Football League, and despite his advanced age he was one of the top safetys in the league as he matched strides with former New England sprint champions half his age. He was a major reason why the Bears won the ICTFL title six of the first seven years the league was in existence.

It wasn't until he had reached the age of 56 that Dowling finally retired after a stellar 15-year career in the league. But Dowling wasn't done competing in athletics yet. Some 20 years later, he embarked on a third career almost by accident.

While playing hockey, Dowling hurt his back and was told by a doctor to swim as a means of therapy. Dowling took his advice, swimming every day at the Darien YMCA, and became so good at it that he began swimming in Senior Olympic events.

He even qualified for the sixth annual U.S. National Senior Olympics in Tucson, AZ in 1997 at the age of 76 and won a silver medal with a second-place finish in the 50-meter swim for men between the ages of 75 and 80. The National Senior Olympics that year attracted 10,000 competitors from the United States and Canada.

What's more, Dowling is the reigning gold medalist in both the 100-meter run and 50-meter swim at the Connecticut Senior Olympics.

A graduate of Loyola College of Dental Surgery, the 79-year-old Dowling still practices dentistry in Darien after years in Norwalk.