



Eddie Coyle
Running Along

Disabled join in the benefits

Dick Traum, who has run four NYC Marathons despite having an artificial leg, tells a funny story about one of his early races.

It was a half-marathon on a hot day, and Bob Glover was running with him.

During the course of the race, Glover kept pouring water on Traum's head to help cool him off. As they went along, Traum was showing the effects of the grind. Glover asked him how he was feeling. "OK," he said.

Leg got heavy

Glover asked how the leg felt. "Getting a little heavy," was the answer. Traum had been told he could expect tightness and heaviness in his normal leg during a longer race.

But the problem wasn't the good leg, but the artificial one: it was filling with water from the dousings. Finally Traum stopped, leaned against a tree, unscrewed the artificial limb, and shook the water out. A kid went by on a bicycle, saw what was going on, and was so astonished he nearly crashed into a tree, Traum recalls with a smile.

Now Traum is starting to share the joy of running with other handicapped — or disabled, as some of them prefer to be called — persons.

Under the auspices of the New York Road Runners Club, he holds training classes for disabled runners every Wednesday evening. Glover assists as fitness consultant.

The group meets at the Road Runners International Running Center on East 89th Street, and after a skull session and stretching, it heads into the park. For info: 212-398-0348.

We ran with a couple of the class members the other night — John Paul Cruz and Linda Down. Both run with the help of crutches. You get a lift from seeing the progress they are making. You also come away appreciating something you always took for granted — the fact that you can run on two legs.

John Paul, 21, was a thalidomide baby born with one leg. Linda, 26, was born with cerebral palsy. Both say they get a lot out of running.

Linda got into running to lose weight. A little more than a year ago, she began doing situps,

stretching and conditioning exercises.

Then she felt she was ready for some running. She'd walk a few blocks, run a few blocks, just like any other person getting into a running program.

Finished NYC Marathon

Linda gradually built up her mileage, then ran in last spring's L'eggs mini 10-k. She was thrilled to finish it and decided to take a longshot — train for the NYC Marathon. She did, and completed it. That effort, she says, "brought me in touch with my own resources."

John Paul has been running for a shorter period. He was "recruited" for the class by one of Traum's employees, Joe Cody (Traum is president of his own computer firm). Cody saw John Paul walking in the park and told him about the classes his boss was starting. John Paul joined them (they're free) and became an enthusiastic runner.

He finished the recent Turkey Trot 5-miler in Prospect Park and is aiming at the 6-miler in Central Park on Jan. 9.

Increasing his mileage

"I'm building up my mileage and know that if I decide to enter the race, I'll finish it," he said. He's also thinking of a weight-training program to build up his upper body but "doesn't want to rush things right now."

Both Linda and John say they've developed a sense of strength and self-reliance through running. They find that training with other runners on crutches is a big help. There's even talk of forming a racing team, although racing is not a necessary part of the class curriculum.

Fred Lebow, NYRRC president, plans to let the disabled runners start ahead of the rest of the field in the races. People like John Paul and Linda then will finish in the pack instead of trailing the field and running most of the race alone. The encouragement from the other runners should provide a big boost for them.

John Paul is capable of a nice finishing spurt. On the night I ran with him, 90th Street was looming ahead when he said: "I'm going to pick it up a bit." I had to stretch *both* my legs a bit when he stepped up his pace.

Linda, who has experienced a healthy change in metabolism "but I still need to take off a bit more weight," says she derives a "high" from some of her runs. She reports feeling a "greater sense of self-esteem." Both she and John Paul agree that running makes them "feel a lot better."

Traum, who is in his 40s, feels disabled persons can enjoy all the cardiovascular, psychological and emotional benefits from running that other do.

Spirit remains strong

Traum lost his leg in an auto accident in 1965. He was standing behind his car at a gas station when another car hit him and crushed his leg.

The leg had to be amputated. But they didn't cut off his spirit.