



A Strong Debut

by Merle Myerson

Those who arrived a half hour before the start of the Jan. 9th Winter Series Six Miler were witness to the beginning of a new movement, as the event marked the racing debut of the Achilles Track Club, sponsored by the New York Road Runners Club. Founded by Dick Traum and coached by Robert Glover, the club is for those with limited ambulatory capabilities or physical handicaps.

The club grew out of the NYRR's Running Class for the Handicapped, also a brainchild of Traum's. He had seen races held on Terry Fox Day in Canada (Fox was the young Canadian athlete who lost a leg, and eventually his life, to cancer) and thought, "If handicapped athletes are competing in Canada, why not here?" So, from the NYRR mailing list Traum sent a notice announcing the class to 600 physicians and 700 others in related health fields.

Back in 1975 Traum, who has an artificial leg, got *his* start in running by attending Bob Glover's beginning classes. His first race was a five miler in Central Park and in 1976 he ran the NYC Marathon. He's run three more marathons since and is an active member of the NYRR, serving on the Board of Directors.

The class for runners with ambulatory problems meets in Central Park on Wednesday nights at 6:30 and Saturday mornings at 10:30. There is no fee for participants. Scott Sullivan, a physical therapist, and Jim Beckford

are assistant coaches. Marty Ball and Natalie Bacon serve as coach/athletes. Patty Lee Parmalee coordinates all activities.

In addition to running, the class offers instruction in general exercising and stretching. Athletes are loosely grouped into three categories: those with artificial limbs, those confined to wheelchairs, and those on crutches.

The classes and the Club boast a celebrity member, Linda Down. Down, 25, who was born with cerebral palsy and has been on crutches all her life, finished last year's NYC Marathon in just over 11 hours. Her heroics brought an invitation to the White House, where she was greeted by President Reagan along with Alberto Salazar and Grete Waitz.

The Achilles Track Club offers the handicapped athlete another dimension—competition. The emphasis, however, is not on racing with another but with one's self. Because each athlete is unique, time comparisons are often irrelevant. "The goal," said Coach Glover, "is to have races serve as a motivating factor. It's a personal competition and the idea is for each individual to improve on his or her own performance. The main objective is enjoyment, to have a good time."

Glover said the six miler, which had seven Achilles T.C. entrants, was a successful experiment. The early start enabled the athletes to feel a part of the larger race; a later start would have left them far behind and they would have missed such amenities as water, mile markers and the camaraderie and support of the other runners. In the future,

the team will run races as a group. Special arrangements are being made with NYRR officials.

Any athlete wishing to attend classes or join the Achilles Track Club can call Dick Traum at (212) 389-0348, or Bob Glover at (212) 580-2310.

While the Handicapped Running Classes and the Achilles Track Club are unique in some respects, the participants share with others basic pleasures of the sport. "The people involved are as delighted by running as any runner," said Traum. "The thrill that anyone gets is their thrill. You can't ask for any more than that."