



The New York Times/Michael Tweed
Brian Froggett running in Computer Run in Central Park.

Marathon Challenges Disabled Runners

Brian Froggett of Dagwood, New Zealand, arrived in New York early for Sunday's marathon. He wanted to compete in yesterday's tune-up race, the five-mile New York City Marathon Computer Run, and to meet his coach for the first time.

Froggett, a brawny 27-year-old bachelor who was born without a left leg, competed as a member of the Achilles Track Club, an organization for disabled runners. When he began running two and a half years ago, he removed his prosthesis and hopped on one leg for up to two miles. Yesterday, using the prosthesis, he completed the circuit of Central Park in just over 48 minutes.

Then he waited for Dick Traum, the founder of the three-year-old club, who has coached Froggett by mail for the past nine months. Traum is well aware of the concerns of the disabled runner, having lost his right leg after being hit by a car 20 years ago.

Traum, 44 years old, was the first disabled competitor in the New York Marathon, in 1976. He began running as part of a West Side Y.M.C.A. fitness program. Several years ago, he proposed a similar program for disabled runners to Fred Lebow, the president of the New York Road Runners Club, who went along with the idea.

Achilles members are automatically affiliated with the Road Runners, and their entry fees for Road Runners events are waived. This year, funding from a corporate sponsor, the international specialty petroleum services and chemical firm NL Industries, allowed Achilles to pay part of Froggett's fare.

"He was doing very, very well," said Traum, who received the letter saying that Froggett was coming just three hours before the runner arrived. "He is a true talent."

"I compete against myself more than anything — I like to improve my own times," said Froggett, adding that he sometimes runs with friends but not with family members. "They think I'm crazy," he said of his relatives. "But they give me lots of encouragement once they can't talk me out of it."

Wide Range of Abilities

Froggett learned about Achilles from a television program but the club is publicized mostly by word of mouth. "They come out and they find out that the people in it are not super human," Traum says of new members.

The club has about 100 members up from about 75 just six months ago. The membership includes amputees, paraplegics, cancer, cerebral palsy and heart disease victims. Their levels of expertise range from those who can hardly run a block to those as conditioned as Froggett, who has never run a marathon but has done 25-mile training runs.

"It's exciting to see people do something that they always thought was closed to them," said Patty Lee Parmalee, the club's head coach and a national-class distance runner. "You say to them, 'You're an athlete. Take yourself seriously and just train the way normal people do. Don't look for excuses.'"

One club member who has always trained like "normal people" is Paddy Rossbach, who lost part of her left leg in a truck accident when she was five. "I was very lucky — my parents let me do everything," said the 47-year-old Mrs. Rossbach. She ran yesterday on a brand-new "flex-foot," a prosthesis of resilient carbon fibers. "The more I bounce, the better it moves," she explained.

A research nurse at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, Mrs. Rossbach said she runs for her own satisfaction. She also hopes to attract attention and funding to a fitness program she is hoping to start, for children and adolescents who have lost legs to cancer.

Then she turned back to a group of Achilles members clustered around Traum, who had just finished the race. One was Froggett, clad only in running shorts and singlet despite the chilly air.

Traum offered his muscular protégé a shirt and was declined. "You know, you look sort of frail," Traum said with a smile. Froggett and the rest of the group laughed heartily.