



NYRR LOCAL RUNNING NEWSLETTER THIS RUNNING TOWN

FALL 2011



NEW YORK ROAD RUNNERS

NYRR is devoted to running as a competitive sport. We are committed to the local runners who come out and run our races week after week, and who participate and shine as individuals and members of our wonderful network of local teams.

This newsletter covers the local running scene. In this issue, we profile four athletes who compete at a high level with the help of some atypical equipment: a racing wheelchair, a prosthetic running leg, a handcycle, and a guide runner. We celebrate milestones with two local teams of longstanding excellence, and we talk to the coaches of an equally longstanding rivalry on the track. And we introduce you to the all-new Official NYRR ING New York City Marathon Training Program.

We thank you for your continued support of the sport, and of our organization and its mission. We'll see you on the roads.



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ATHLETES

When athletes are faced with unusual obstacles, they sometimes respond with near-miraculous achievements. We profile four NYRR members who belong in that group.

YANNICK BENJAMIN

Rolling With It

Yannick Benjamin is a full-blooded New Yorker, born and raised in Hell's Kitchen. Though there are a lot of runners on his mother's side of the family, he preferred basketball, hockey, and working out in the gym. He'd always been into weightlifting, and athleticism has always been a huge part of who he is.

It's no surprise, then, that when a 2003 car accident resulted in paralysis that would restrict him to a wheelchair, he vigorously embraced his physical therapy. He traded hoops and pucks for calisthenics and hand-crank machines; his regular workout now includes totals of 200 dips, 150-200 pushups, and 100 pull-ups, and he hits the road in his racing chair four to five times each week.

Benjamin, 33, usually trains alone, familiar with solitary workouts from his weightlifting days, but he's had help, too—he joined the Achilles Track Club in August 2008. "Achilles is great for helping people improve, and the community gave me advice on racing, equipment, and how to get to race starts [a major factor for wheelers]." He now handcycles every Saturday with Achilles.

Benjamin advises people interested in wheelchair racing to try both the handcycle and push-rim. "They should solidify their opinion before they commit to either—it depends on their



level of injury, how much time they have to train, and how seriously they want to take the marathon," he says.

Athletic involvements keep Benjamin fit for a very different kind of competition—as a sommelier (restaurant wine expert). "Multiple passions can

"Multiple passions can go hand in hand."

— YANNICK BENJAMIN

go hand in hand," he says. After working at such restaurants as Le Cirque and Felidia, he's been in three sommelier competitions this year, and in July he went for his Masters Sommelier training in Las Vegas. Candidates must blind-taste and review six wines and take an 80-question oral exam—and then comes "the Table from Hell," a worst-case restaurant scenario in which judges act as obnoxious customers.

The third time was a charm for Benjamin at the ING New York City Marathon. For his 2008 debut, he only trained for three months, used his regular wheelchair, and wasn't sure what to expect. The race began well, but he got a flat around mile 18. "I was wondering 'What do I do?'" he says. He

finished with the flat tire in over five hours and vowed never to do it again.

A year later he'd reconsidered the vow and gotten a special racing chair. He started the 2009 race feeling confident. This time, disaster struck at mile 8. "I was riding next to a bike marshal

when I heard air hissing from a tire. The biker and I glanced at each other, wondering whose tire it was," he recalls. Benjamin had another flat—but this time he had a spare, and two volunteers came running over to help. He finished in under 4:30.

In 2010, the marathon gods watched over him. With no flats tires, he finished in 3:11:14—a PR by over an hour!—and took 29th place. After first-place finishes in the 2010 Bronx Half-Marathon and this year's Achilles Hope & Possibility 5-Mile, Benjamin will compete in his fourth ING New York City Marathon in November. Far from swearing off racing, he now says, "As long as I race, I'm going to do New York every year."

Michael Grubb

Donna Joyce

Perry King

NYRR Sprint Triathlon

Aziza Aliyu





HELENE HINES Learning to Fly

Some people just won't take no for an answer. Sixty-three year old Helene Hines is one of them. In 1978, the lifelong athlete and physical education teacher was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. At 30 years old she was told she would never walk again; she'd have to accept reality. She refused.

Hines saw another neurologist, and a third, and finally an eleventh, who gave her the answer she was looking for: Keep moving. In a time when physical activity was thought to exacerbate the symptoms of MS, this was a revolutionary prescription.

Progress was slow. It began with labored walks down the street, steadied by her husband. "We'd go from house to house, light pole to light pole," she remembers. Each benchmark was a small triumph.

Soon she began jogging between those light poles, then running. Several years after her diagnosis, she lined up for a five-mile race in Long Beach, NY. "It seemed incredible for

"There's so much you can do that you think is impossible."

— HELENE HINES

someone who'd been told she couldn't walk, but it really did happen," she says.

The year 1988 marked a number of important benchmarks in her running career. Upon joining the Achilles Track Club and New York Road Runners, she also began an impressive streak of marathons: eight New York City Marathons, plus Boston, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, and Mexico—and even the 54-mile Comrades ultramarathon in South Africa.

In 1998 the pain worsened; she ran her last marathon in New York City. But Hines was only getting started as a marathoner. Once again, "no" was not an answer she would accept. In

2000, she entered the New York City Marathon again—as a handcyclist.

Accustomed to pounding out 9:00 miles on foot, Hines found 4:00 miles on the handcycle a very different experience. She'd been a middle-of-the-pack runner, but in the handcycle division, she was now among the leaders. And at the finish, she was alone in front.

Hines and her husband live in Garden City, NJ, and they have an apartment near Central Park so she can do most of her training there. Despite often being the oldest handcyclist, she has now won more than 20 marathons, six of them in New York City.

Hines still marvels at the speed and athleticism required by her new sport. "When you're flying down the Verrazano Bridge at 30 miles an hour in this tiny 10-pound thing, you're just thinking 'Please don't let it fall apart!' It's an incredible feeling."

The grandmother of two also teaches water aerobics to others diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, encouraging them to remain active. "There's so much you can do that you think is impossible," she maintains.

It is this attitude that has earned her three separate Keys to the City, two from Mayor Giuliani and one from Mayor Bloomberg. Each finish line crossed is a triumph over her illness. Driven by her eternal defiance of the word "can't," she embodies a wholehearted belief that she can, no matter what.

"I'm not just out there riding. I'm out there trying to win or get a place on the national team. It's pretty exciting," she says with a smile. "I'll never quit racing. Never, ever, ever."

Andrew Toutain



Fern Chan



Peter Francis



Central Park Conservancy Run for Central Park



BEN SIMMONS

One Leg Up

For the first three decades of Ben Simmons' life, the Weymouth, England, native didn't think he was physically capable of running. As he puts it, "I'm one down in the leg department."

Simmons, 37, has proximal femoral focal deficiency, a rare defect often characterized by missing bones in one or both legs. He was born without his left leg below the knee.

At age 11, Simmons had an amputation above the knee, which enabled him to wear a prosthetic leg with a knee joint. At 15, he became an avid cyclist, frequently going on 100-mile rides. But it wasn't until 2005, when Simmons was living in White Plains, NY, that he first thought about running—after being literally chased down the street by a man who told him that his prosthetic leg used archaic "World War II-era technology" and referred him to A Step Ahead Prosthetics in Long Island.

Simmons took the advice, and A Step Ahead outfitted him with a snazzy new walking leg and a carbon-fiber running leg. "I said, 'If you give me a running leg, I'm definitely going to run a marathon,' because I never thought I'd run," Simmons recalls. "For me, running was as likely as going to the moon."

True to his word, in 2008 Simmons joined the Achilles Track Club (a team for runners with disabilities), ran his first half-marathon that May, and debuted at 26.2 miles in the ING New York City Marathon 2008, running 4:52 (still his PR). He's since run four out of the five World Marathon



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— BEN SIMMONS

Majors—New York again, Boston, Chicago, and London—and is eyeing the last of the quintet, Berlin, for 2012. First, though, he'll tackle the Marine Corps Marathon in Washington, DC, this October (follow

his training at bensimmonsrunwithit.blogspot.com), with the goal of breaking 4:30.

To that end, Simmons plans on incorporating some speedwork into his usual training regimen, which consists of several six-milers each week (including Tuesday-night Achilles group runs) and long runs (18–20 miles) on Saturdays. He usually runs on Central Park's asphalt outer loop, so he takes Sunday off from pounding the pavement and goes for a bike ride instead.

The training has paid off. Simmons won Achilles' Athlete of the Year honor in 2009 and was recently named USA Triathlon's 2010 Paraduathlete of the Year. He says he owes much of his success to Achilles.

"I was self-conscious about running with a prosthetic. Joining Achilles helped me get past that," he says. "They were very welcoming, and I met inspiring people who've overcome all kinds of disabilities. There's one chap with cerebral palsy who does marathons by pushing himself backward in his wheelchair with one foot. It's a really good inclusive community."

Simmons says he loves running because "it's something I never thought I'd be able to do. It's like a bonus in my life." He also loves to inspire people. Still, he isn't sure he's a lifetime marathoner. "I definitely have a few more marathons in me, but I'm aware that I have to look after my one good leg—I don't want to beat the heck out of it," he laughs.

After Berlin and Marine Corps, he'd like to run the Tokyo Marathon and complete an Olympic-distance triathlon. After that? Perhaps he'll enjoy a leisurely stroll on the moon.

Ernest Morales

Pamela Benepe

Larry O'Rourke

NYRR New York Mini 10K



LAUREN OPLINGER

Blindsided

Two years ago, Lauren Oplinger thought she was coming down with the flu. A recent graduate in math and economics from Holy Cross University, where she played on the women's ice hockey team, Oplinger had been an equities sales trader at J.P.Morgan for nine months when she began to feel sick. By the time she got to her parents' place in Summit, NJ, her fever had spiked. Her parents rushed her to the ER.

Days later, Oplinger—an otherwise healthy, vivacious 23-year-old—lay in the ICU, an airborne infection attacking every major organ in her body. "It started in my lungs, traveled into my bloodstream, and spiraled out of control," she explains. "No one knows the cause." Oplinger went into cardiac arrest, and a resulting lack of oxygen to her optic nerves left her completely blind.

After a month in the ICU and more time at an NYU rehab center, Oplinger could discern light and some shapes. Determined to return to work and independent living, she started physical and visual therapy. (She was also on dialysis; her kidneys had failed.) When she was finally able to go home, she was severely debilitated. "I lost all my body mass—I was a toothpick. I could hardly walk up a hill," recalls Oplinger, now 25. But the perseverance that had propelled her on the hockey rink and the trading floor remained strong. She began to take daily walks with her mom.

Therapy and exercise helped, and soon Oplinger wanted to run. "I'd



"I'm in better shape now than I've ever been."

— LAUREN OPLINGER

been running four to six miles a day before I got sick," she says. "It was stress relief. I needed that outlet."

A friend mentioned that she'd seen visually impaired Achilles Track Club runners in Central Park with guides. Last fall, Oplinger met the group for a run. She told Kat Bateman, director of

Achilles International's New York City chapter, that she could "only" run three miles. As the weeks passed, Oplinger's runs lengthened. Six months later—two years after losing her vision—she completed the More Magazine | Fitness Magazine Women's Half-Marathon in 2:07:53.

"I couldn't have been happier that day. Six months earlier, I could hardly run a quarter of that distance," says Oplinger, who trains and races alongside volunteer guide Kerry Klein (at right in photo, with Oplinger). "I'm in better shape now than I've ever been."

Oplinger's doctors are amazed by her recovery—as are her friends and family. "Lauren is incredibly upbeat, despite going through this tremendous change," says Bateman. "She's adapted completely, and with a smile. She's an amazing person."

Today, Oplinger is back in her Manhattan apartment and back at J.P.Morgan, where she sits on the trading floor in front of three computer screens, listening to her e-mails through earbuds. While she has adjusted amazingly well, simple tasks like crossing the street or meeting a friend for dinner are still daunting. "I can't read street signs, so I can't tell what store I'm standing next to," she says, "I never take walking outside casually. I'm constantly on guard."

Which makes her relish her time with her Achilles teammates even more—when she can rely on Klein's guidance and just run.

"When I'm running, I have a sense of freedom that I don't have any other time I'm outside," she says. "I'm safe."

Christopher Wong

More Magazine | Fitness Magazine Women's Half-Marathon

Garland Days

Scotland Run

