



NEWS WORLD PHOTOS BY CHRIS GIERLICH

# Runners disabled in body, but not in spirit

By EDDIE COYLE

## RUNNING

John Paul Cruz and I were coming to the end of a training run in Central Park the other evening. "We're getting near 90th Street, I'm going to pick it up a bit," he said between strides. He did — and I was surprised I had to step up my pace a bit to stay with him. What's so unusual about that? I have two legs; Cruz has one.

Cruz, who is 21, was a thalidomide baby, born with just one leg. But that hasn't stopped him from running. In fact, he even enters races. He is one of the disabled persons in the handicapped running class recently started by the New York Road Runners Club on Wednesday nights. It is under the direction of Dick Traum, himself an amputee, who, nevertheless, has finished four NYC Marathons.

John Paul Cruz doesn't have an artificial limb. He propels himself with crutches as does another mem-

ber of the class, Linda Down, a 28-year-old who was born with cerebral palsy but, nevertheless, completed the recent NYC Marathon on crutches.

These three are just an example of how men and women can overcome disabilities and participate in running. Down originally wanted to lose weight and began doing situps a little over a year ago. As she gained strength and flexibility (she increased her situps from nine to 100) she added stretching and conditioning exercises, then decided to try running. She'd walk a little, jog a little and eventually entered the L'eggs Mini Marathon. She finished the 10-kilometer race and then started training seriously for the marathon.

Both Down and Cruz say they derive a sense of strength and self-reliance through running. And both find training with other handicapped people a

big help. There's even talk of them starting a running team. (Disabled runners will be given a headstart in NYRRC races so they can finish with the pack, rather than end up alone trailing the field, said club president Fred Lebow.)

Speaking of her marathon, Down said: "It brought me in touch with my own resources." Both she and Cruz agree that running helps them "feel better."

Cruz has been running since the fall. An employee of Traum's, who is president of his own computer firm, Personnelmetrics, saw Cruz in the park and told him about the classes Traum was starting. The group meets at 6:30 at the NYRRC, 9 East 89th Street. For information call Traum at 212-398-0348. The classes are free.

Cruz joined the classes and with very little training completed the 5-mile Turkey Trot in Prospect Park Thanksgiving Day. He is hoping to run the 6-miler in Central Park on Jan. 9.