



Photo by Fou Solari

Courage Leads the Race

Although John Cruz, 22, didn't pass the finish line first, every other runner and spectator that was a part of the Manufacturers Hanover Trust Half-Marathon considered him a winner. Cruz is making his way along Coney Island Avenue in this 13.1 mile event which concluded in Prospect Park. Racing alongside him James Beckford, 35, another of the race's 3,000 competitors.

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familiar sight to Central Park competitors. After a race many runners report that seeing him and other Achilles runners on foot and in wheelchairs gave them a special lift during the race.

Not only is the Club doing something important for people less fortunate than most runners, but Achilles members also are doing something important for other runners. Whether



Achilles runner J. P. Cruz has completed nine races and is training for the New York City Marathon.

you zoom by them at the front of the pack or fall in at their speed and hear the onlookers cheering for them, seeing disabled runners in a race does something to make you feel really good about your sport. On the simplest level you think, "If they can run this race I can certainly put out a little more effort." On a deeper level you are moved, perhaps to tears, by the indomitability of the human spirit.

All enormous amount of work and courage has enabled Linda to become an effective model indeed. After finishing the 1982 New York City Marathon in 11 hours, she was invited to the White House to share the President's congratulations with Alberto Salazar and Grete Waitz. Later, when she participated in the United Cerebral Palsy Telethon, Howard Cosell called her the "athlete of the century." She has also been invited to give speeches to disabled and women's service groups around the country. But she still comes faithfully to Wednesday night Achilles Club workouts. When she does a marathon again she will do it in much better time, because now she has coaching and people to run with; the first time, her training and the race were done all alone.

For every disabled person who has found the courage and optimism to engage in sports and self-improvement, though, there are many more who remain depressed, feeling useless without a job or a skill, whose physical inactivity contributes to their unhappiness and depression. The Achilles Track Club hopes to reach many of these people as well, by publicizing its activities to hospitals, organizations for the disabled, doctors, and the public at large.

There is room not just for veteran competitors, but also for beginners and the severely out-of-shape; people work out at many different speeds. A dialysis patient recently joined who, although he needs exercise to oxygenate his blood, must also be careful not to overexert. Coaches prescribed alternating slow jogging and walking for him, with periodic heart-rate checks. Another new member is recovering from a stroke that left him weak and spastic on one side. Blind

gives a whole new lease on life.

Wheelchair racing has already achieved popularity at selected road races around the country, and the Achilles Club boasts two members who have been pioneers in the field, Natalie Bacon and Marty Ball. They help with coaching and advice on equipment. It is an exciting experience for someone who has always sat in a heavy, upright wheelchair to get into a lighter weight racing chair and run in a race—a little like trying a sports car if you're used to driving a farm truck. Of course racing chairs are expensive, and most Achilles members cannot afford to buy their own. Procuring equipment continues to be a financial problem for the Club and its members.

Trial and Success

Coordinating starting times and traffic control during races remains an unsettled issue. Wheelchair runners (who can be very fast or fairly slow, depending on their experience, disability, and equipment) prefer to run with the crowd. The NYRRC is in the process of devising guidelines for safety, especially on downhills. Crutch and artificial-leg runners, and those with other ambulatory disabilities, sometimes start out ahead of the pack so they will finish with other runners, rather than run alone the whole race and miss out on the camaraderie. Or they may start with a men's race if a women's race is starting separately later.

Everything about the Achilles Club is new and experimental, and these procedures are being developed through trial and error (or, more often, trial and success) to benefit regular and

Techniques and equipment for wheelchair racing improved during recent years.

"I have learned more from my students than they from me" with real meaning.

In working with Achilles Club members, I gradually have learned that any kind of disaster can be overcome, or, with the right attitude, turned to advantage. Hearing member after member tell me they were not depressed by their fate, how much they enjoy life, and how much the activities they are able to do mean to them has helped me realize that I too would probably have the energy and optimism to carry on, stay healthy, and deepen my sense of worth in spite of physical, financial, or personal disaster.

Something of that feeling rubs off on other runners who associate with the Achilles Track Club members, so the experiment must be deemed a success from everyone's point of view. NYRRC has provided a wonderful free service to disabled runners, but they in turn are giving something very valuable back.

As I write this I'm listening to John Lennon sing, "One thing you can't hide is when you're crippled inside." Smiles on the faces of Achilles runners as they become more and more healthy inside and out is infectious, and proof that another thing you can't hide is when you're whole inside.

Patty Lee Parmalee is a national class distance runner in the masters category, winner of the age 40 to 49 division of the 1982 L'eggs Mini Marathon, and coordinator and coach for the Achilles Track Club.