



MARATHON MAN — Dr. Richard Traum, trains for his sixth New York City Marathon next Sunday. Traum, who lost his leg in a motorcycle accident, was the inspiration for Terry Fox's "Marathon of Hope."

Achilles Track Club runners don't believe in weaknesses

By **KEN RAPPOPORT**
AP sports writer

NEW YORK — Pat Criskus climbs mountains, sky dives and runs in marathon races in a "go-for-it" lifestyle.

That would not be so noteworthy — except that Criskus has an artificial leg.

"I guess I serve as an inspiration to some people, although that's not really what I'm trying to do. I'm more interested in personal goals," said Criskus, who competes for the Achilles Track Club, an organization of handicapped runners.

Criskus, the world's fastest amputee runner, will be among several members of the Achilles Club competing in the New York City Marathon next Sunday.

Sponsored by the New York Road Runners Club, the Achilles Track Club is the only running club in the world where you have to be disabled to join. Its 60-odd members, ranging in age from 14 to 60, include polio victims, blind runners, amputees, stroke victims and paraplegics.

The club was founded in 1982 by Bob Glover, a renowned author on running, and Dick Traum, an amputee with a long history of

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marathon competition. It was Traum who served as an inspiration for Terry Fox's "Marathon of Hope" across Canada that raised \$30 million for cancer research. Fox had seen a photograph of Traum running in the New York City Marathon in 1976.

Achilles became a perfect symbol for a club of this kind, Traum said.

"Achilles was the Greek god who was perfect except for his heel," he said. "As the legend goes, they dipped him in a solution that would keep him from harm and had to hold him by his heel; therefore, the heel was not protected. The Achilles Club is representative of that — the members are usually perfect except for one thing."

Club members compete in races ranging from two-mile runs to the triathlon.

"There are people here with real abilities," said Traum, a 35-year-old behavioral scientist. "Our slowest runner in the mile has been timed in 40 minutes. Our top wheelchair person can do a mile in five minutes, a marathon in less than two hours."

Criskus has a marathon best of 3 hours, 44 minutes, 30 seconds.

"I work really hard," said Criskus, who lost one of his legs in a motorcycle accident in the Marine Corps in 1967. "I think I'm a great athlete, anyway. There's almost nothing I can't do well."

Criskus was asked to join the Achilles Club after running a marathon in 1983 in Middletown, N.Y. Since then, the 37-year-old investment advisor has been a workhorse, with seven marathons among his accomplishments.

"When I'm running, I don't just

run against the handicapped, but the able-bodied, too, and I try to do as good as I can against them," Criskus said. "If there are 8,000 runners, I'll finish in the top half. There are some great runners in the marathon, and some who are just ordinary. And I try to do the best I can against all of them."

Another of the club members is Linda Down, who has cerebral palsy and runs with crutches but has already completed three marathons. The first she entered took her 11 hours and 54 seconds; after a year of training with Achilles, she brought her time down to 8 hours and 45 minutes. According to Traum, the 27-year-old Down was transformed "from a survivor to an athlete."

"When they put the Achilles Club together, I thought it was terrific," said Down, one of the original five members. "With the club, there was a support system, teammates to run with."

"Before, I didn't feel as if I was an athlete. Running had never been a part of my lifestyle. Running with the club, it gave me a chance to develop as an athlete. I was able to hone my skills."

"We're constantly breaking new boundaries," Traum said.