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Tom O'Connor: "A positive attitude."

His marathon to be against blindness

By **ROBERT FLEMING**

Four years ago, 19-year-old Tom O'Connor suffered from a mysterious ailment that caused a fluid buildup in his head and robbed him of his sight.

Today, the spunky Bensonhurst youth has overcome the initial obstacles of blindness with courage and determination. And now his challenge will be to sweat out the 26 miles of the New York Marathon on Oct. 28 and finish with a respectable time.

"I'm excited because this is my first marathon and I can make it," said O'Connor, who lives with his mother, Rose. "Running in this race will give me more self-esteem and show that I am not a quitter."

No one could tell his mother he is not a fighter. "Tom has taken the loss of his sight better than I have," Mrs. O'Connor said. "He's a go-getter and he's not afraid of anything. If it was up to me, I'd have him with me all

the time, but he's independent."

O'CONNOR had joined a karate club shortly after losing his sight, but he had some problems with his endurance so one member recommended jogging. He said he had searched the city for someone to run with until word got to him about the Achilles Track Club, a group for disabled runners.

Dick Trum, is head of the club, which is part of the Road Runners Club in Manhattan. He said he was immediately impressed with O'Connor. The young man from Brooklyn fitted right in with the 45 other disabled runners on the team, Trum noted.

"Tom commutes 1½ hours each way to get here and he's

a good athlete," added Trum, who said he expected O'Connor to run the marathon under three hours in a few years.

O'CONNOR'S "guide" in the race will be Susan Keegan, a program coordinator for the Parks and Recreation Department. This will be her first marathon, too.

"Tom is friendly, easy to know, and has a real positive attitude," Keegan said. "I cue him on whether to turn right or left, where the people and bumps in the pavement are, and he rarely needs to hold on. We're going to do fine."

O'Connor, who is currently looking for a job, said it was his faith in God and the fact that blindness came on gradually that prevented him from giving up. "God keeps me going," he said.