

Linda may be Down but she's not out!

SHE'S fighting fit at 5-foot-5 and 120 pounds. She's all set to run her fourth marathon on Sunday here. She suffers from cerebral palsy.

Linda Down, with her glossy brown mane and sparkling eyes, is an inspiration to all disabled people.

What New Yorker could forget the gallant young woman who forced her aching body on crutches along more than 26 miles in the 1982 New York marathon, finishing in the darkness long after every other runner had crossed the finish line?

After joining the Achilles Track Club, Linda pared her time down from nearly 11 hours in 1982 to 8 hours and 45 minutes last year.

This year she hopes to cut an hour off that time.

"Running on crutches is fairly new, and there isn't a lot of coaching you can get," says Linda, 27.

"That's why it's so good for me to be training with a group that gives advice on the particular problems of the disabled athlete."

Every Wednesday night, the 70 members of the Achilles Track Club — who suffer from cerebral palsy, polio, blindness and other physical afflictions — train in Central Park for the big race.

Dick Traum, a 35-year-old behavioral scientist with an artificial leg, puts the group through their paces.

"We do our warm-ups, then divide into two major groups," Traum explains. One group runs all over the park to develop endurance, and to train on



Feisty Linda Down is ready for Sunday's big marathon.

hills. Those who are trying to develop speed — or whose disabilities necessitate a fairly level surface — run the loop at the Delacorte Theater at Central Park West and 82 St.

Twelve Achilles members will be running in Sunday's race — for seven of them, the marathon will be their first.

"We're more interested in people enjoying themselves than in getting overly involved in time or speed," says Traum, whose organization is funded by the Road Runner's Club.

"That's why Linda is wonderful. She's very up, and she inspires a lot of the people starting out."

Don't miss The Post tomorrow for an armchair guide to the greatest race in the world