

Handicapped public-school students compete in the New York marathon for the first time

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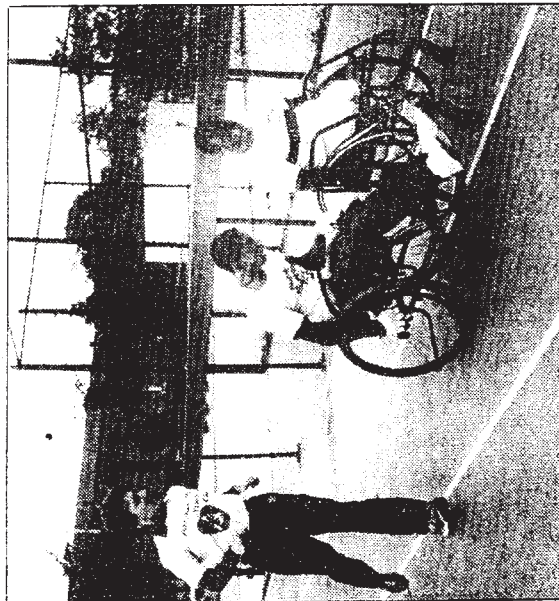
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SECTION

## At a Racers' Club, Speed Is Just One of the Lessons Learned

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The New York Times/William Parry

Bari Slatas coaching Keith Givens, center, and Andre Donegan for the New York City Marathon on Sunday.

Traum, who lost a leg in an accident, became the first amputee to run the New York City Marathon.

"Dick showed a film of him running the marathon," said Jv Bader, head of the division. "The kids had no idea it was even possible."

The first chapters in elementary and junior high schools were established last February. Initially, 120 students joined. The number has since grown to 300 at 12 schools in all five boroughs. The disabilities range from blindness to spina bifida, any handicapped student is eligible.

Teaching students to run bolsters their self-esteem, Mr. Traum said. "If they develop a positive outlook early on," he said, "they are better equipped to face challenges later."

At first, the students set modest goals, instructed by physical education teachers specially trained to work with handicapped people, the children run for 20 minutes. When that target is reached, they enter two-mile, then four-mile races in Central Park. For their accomplishments, they are given T-shirts, running shoes and sometimes medals.

The students work out several times a week at school and, on Saturday mornings, with adult Achilles members in Central Park.

"So much of their lives they hear about what they cannot do," Mr. Traum said. "Now they start seeing

what they can do."

The club provides transportation and takes care of other things, including racing fees and running shoes. "We didn't want anyone to have money as an excuse," Mr. Traum said.

The students also participate in races alongside able-bodied runners. "It's a wonderful vehicle for marbled kid who is trained to run can go a longer distance than an able-bodied youngster who is not trained. It's like a metaphor for life."

Andre and Keith are among the few exceptional racers who decided to enter the marathon. (Athletes must be at least 16 to enter.)

"It sounded like it would be a good chance to meet a lot of people," the boys began training in the spring, going about 2 miles. After four months, their mileage increased to 12. "At first, the hills were hard," Keith said. "But now I'm used to it."

Training presented other challenges. Padded gloves had to be designed to prevent the wheels of Andre's chair from burning the skin on the stumps of his arms, which he uses to turn the wheels. Keith did not own a sports chair, a lightweight but expensive version needed by wheelchair racers. That problem was solved by a donation from the Eastern Paralyzed

Veterans Association.

According to Mr. Traum, this is the first time that a quadriplegic amputee will compete in a marathon.

The boys' coach, Bari Slatas, called them "tremendous athletes," and added, "Andre can throw a basketball better than some people with arms."

Ms. Slatas, a physical education teacher, is one of 80 volunteers who will run alongside disabled people at the marathon, to insure their safety.

The boys are excited about the race. Andre admitted, however, that he cannot wait until it's over. "I'll probably be scared, nervous seeing all the people. I'm going to try and concentrate on the running and forget about everything else."

After the race is over, they said they will focus on their schoolwork again. They both want to go to college. Andre to study law, and Keith to become a computer operator.

Andre and Keith do not see themselves as heroes. But Ms. Slatas said that their participation in the marathon will open doors for many handicapped children. "I've been telling my kids at school about it," she said. "Some of them already can't wait until they're old enough."

"This has given them a whole new appreciation for life," she added. "It's given them a future."