

# Athletes In Every Sense Of The Word



Photo: Jessica

The Achilles Track Club has left its athletic mark on the roadways of New York and the world with 40 chapters and over 2,000 members. Regardless of the disability, the Achilles Track Club has shown its members what it's like to be athletic. Unlike their namesake, the Achilles Track Club has no weaknesses—only strength.

BY THOMAS GREEN JR.



**T**he Achilles Track Club is no ordinary track club.

How many running clubs can boast having 40 chapters all over the world with over 2,000 members? Their largest chapter just happens to be in Moscow. The club places 100 of its international membership into the New York City Marathon each year, and would gladly put in more if allowed.

One more item, all of its members just happen to be disabled.

The organization's long-distance runners specialize in grueling marathons across the world, and the club is home to runners with such disabilities as blindness, amputation and cerebral palsy.

In 1983, Achilles founder Richard Traum had a simple idea. He wanted to set up a forum for disabled people in order to allow them to participate in and enjoy running.

"I wanted to encourage people to run for the fun of running," said Traum.

Traum himself is a disabled runner with quite a few marathons under his belt. He had lost his left leg in

1965 and began running 10 years later.

"I was 35 and a friend the same age had a heart attack. I was overweight, had a pressure job. A mutual friend of ours suggested I join the YMCA," he said.

Traum joined and, oddly enough, didn't like the running part of the agenda.

"To take the fitness program, which was sit-ups and push-ups, you had to stay for the bad stuff, which was running."

Soon running became enjoyable for Traum. He started building on his distances and in 1976 he became the first person to run a marathon with an artificial limb when he participated in the New York City Marathon.

A picture of him from that marathon inspired a young Canadian dying of cancer, Terry Fox, to begin his marathon of Hope. Fox ran a simulated 26-mile marathon daily to shed light on the cancer situation in the world. After Fox's death, Traum went to Canada to help with fund raising. The effort has raised over \$80 million.

"There were a lot of disabled people out there," Traum explained. "That's where I got the idea of encouraging people to run. That is where this track club came from."

Upon opening his club, Traum became the remedy for so many disabled athletes who needed such a vehicle. Its runners have competed in mainstream races only. They go up against able-bodied people with an emphasis on fun.