

A 1st for N.Y.C. Marathon

By **DAVE SALTONSTALL**

Daily News Staff Writer

When Don Supinski begins the New York City Marathon today, he will require all the things that most runners do — loads of stamina, a team of supportive friends and a burning desire to finish.

But Supinski also will need something else — batteries, and therein lies a small piece of New York City Marathon history in the making.

The 42-year-old Ohio native is the first quadriplegic to attempt the potholed, 26.2-mile course in an electric wheelchair, a piece of equipment

that aroused debate among overseers of the race.

As a motorized vehicle, the hulking chair would seem an unfair addition to a race in which results are contingent on strength, endurance and athletic achievement.

But Supinski and his family successfully lobbied the Achilles Track Club, the group that governs disabled competitors in today's race.

They pointed out that for the chair to move, Supinski has to use the only muscle he has any control over — his neck — to depress a headrest that activates the chair's motor.

If he doesn't push, the chair doesn't move.

"Don is using the only strength he has available," reasoned Mary Bryant, his sister, a New York-based model who will run with him in today's race. "And... he is doing the work. This is not just some chair that you turn on and it goes."

Even under the best of circumstances, it will be a torturous day for Supinski. His sister expects it will take at least



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BANNER DAY with pre-marathon International Friendship race at the UN yesterday. At top, quadriplegic Don Supinski and his sister Mary Bryant.

eight hours for them to finish the course. The chair's 12-volt batteries will have to be changed about midway, and Supinski probably will have to rest at intervals.

Supinski has been para-

lyzed since he was 16, when he fell while playing, snapping his spinal cord. He cannot feed, bathe or even scratch himself.

But none of this seems to have dampened Supinski's

spirits.

"Yeah, I'm excited," he said yesterday as he registered with race officials. "I just want to show crippled people that they can do something with their lives."

If nothing else, the Supinskis should make quite an impression today. His sister and another runner will wear T-shirts and hats — if not a poncho — printed with the words, "Who is Don?"

Don's shirt proclaims simply, "I AM DON!"

The message for those in the crowd is simple, said Bryant, who has spent more than \$12,000 of her own money to make this day happen.

"I just hope people will accept who they are and be grateful for what they do have," she said. "And through Don's spirit and attitude, I hope they are able to have the confidence to make the most of their lives."

Donations to help defray Supinski's costs may be made through the Achilles Track Club, 42 W. 38th St., New York, N.Y. 10018.