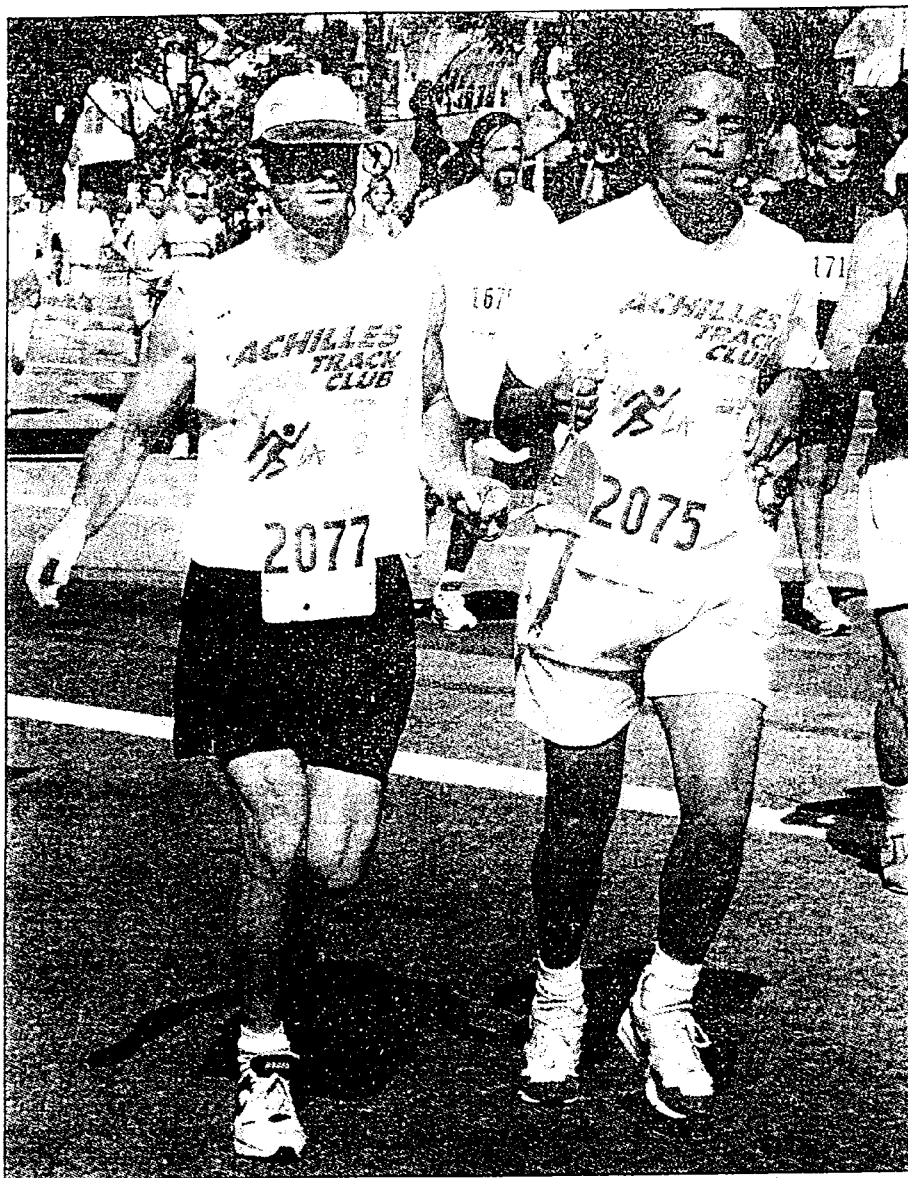


GOOD SPORTS

For 10 Angelenos, Athletics a Means to Champion a Cause

LOS ANGELES TIMES



John Ross, left, helps physically challenged runners compete in marathons.

By BILL PLASCHKE
TIMES STAFF WRITER

The sun rising over the perfect day in Los Angeles sports first strikes the middle-aged owner of a small office-supply store.

He is a casual jogger, climbing sorely out of his Agoura Hills bed, training for a marathon only because he thinks it will save a boy's life.

Down in the inner city, a golf pro reports to work. He could hone his game and maybe make some money with it, if only he would stop giving free lessons to the kids who climb his fence and steal his range balls.

The sun rising over the perfect day in Los Angeles sports casts shadows over

So why is Ross bragging about the time he ran an 8½-hour marathon?

Or the time he finished a race just ahead of a truck picking up the orange cones?

Because Ross no longer runs for himself, but with others who need him.

He directs a group of volunteers who assist members of the nation's only track club for physically challenged runners.

In the last eight years, the only races Ross has run have been with blind runners, wheelchair participants who are not in the competitive group, and any others who need help. He also acts as one of the club's trainers during weekly workouts.

You can see him at the next Los Angeles Marathon. He'll be the one running next to a blind racer, attached by a tether.

"People are always asking if we are escapees or something," he said.

He still doesn't know why he got started. The founder of the New York-based club, a friend, persuaded Ross to start another chapter when Ross moved to Los Angeles in 1986.

Ross agreed, and although he has since won no medals he also has no regrets.

"All I can say is, I get some deep-seated satisfaction that I can't verbalize," Ross said. "You have to finish a marathon with a blind runner to feel that runner's jubilation mixed with your own, to understand."