



PICTURE: PETER DUFFY

ESTIENNE Arndt might have an artificial foot, but it's not going to stop him running the Comrades. Pupils of the Ethembeni Special School for the physically disabled and the visually impaired, will be out on the side of the road at Hillcrest to cheer on their hero. Some pupils got an early introduction yesterday. They are (from left): Michael Mbesa, Monica Nyilongo, Pearl Thusi and Alter Mathenjwa.

Disabled man determined to do his 10th Comrades

BARBARA COLE

WHEN Estienne Arndt lost his right foot in a motor cycle accident, he was left with just a heel - and a dream of competing in the Comrades Marathon for the 10th time.

Seven years later, complete with an expensive American-made double spring artificial "foot", he was back in the big race.

"But I missed the cut off time by 15 minutes, and when you do that, you might as well not have bothered," said Mr Arndt.

Since then, he has finished the Comrades twice in just over 10 hours and gone on to compete in last year's San Diego Triathlon Challenge and the New York City Marathon.

He is a firm believer that disabled people can do what many people believe is impossible, even though running for him is

clearing no walkover.

"Of course it's far more difficult, especially as you get the speed out of your toes, which I don't have. I find downhill is okay, but going uphill is like running on one leg," said the Durban-based Mr Arndt.

Inspired by the level of awareness and encouragement that disabled athletes receive in America, Mr Arndt is now an active supporter of the South African branch of the international Achilles Track Club.

The organisation, to help disabled people get more involved in sport, had a stand at the Comrades Marathon Experience at the Durban Exhibition Centre in Durban yesterday to create awareness and to get volunteers around the country to start working with disabled people.

Several high profile personalities also spent time at the stand, including Geoffrey Hilton-Barber,

the South Africa-to-Australia solo blind yachtsman, and Dick Traum, the American founder of the Achilles Club worldwide.

"It's going to take time to get the message across, but I reckon in three years, the Achilles Track Club will be a household name," said Mr Arndt.

"We just want to get a lot more disabled people involved. If they turn up and ask to join clubs, we will find someone to work with them."

Mr Arndt will be donning his running shoes - and his famous red kilt - again for tomorrow's Comrades and will be running with three other disabled athletes.

They will be cheered on by 300 pupils of the Ethembeni Special School for the physically disabled and visually impaired at Hillcrest, who will be out in force on the side of the road to support the runners.