

# Near-blind marathon runner chases dream

By DAN MANGAN

A nearly blind Burmese runner — who calls himself Tarzan, has a daughter named after Nancy Reagan and this week slept in a bed for the first time — plans to blaze through the New York City Marathon on Sunday.

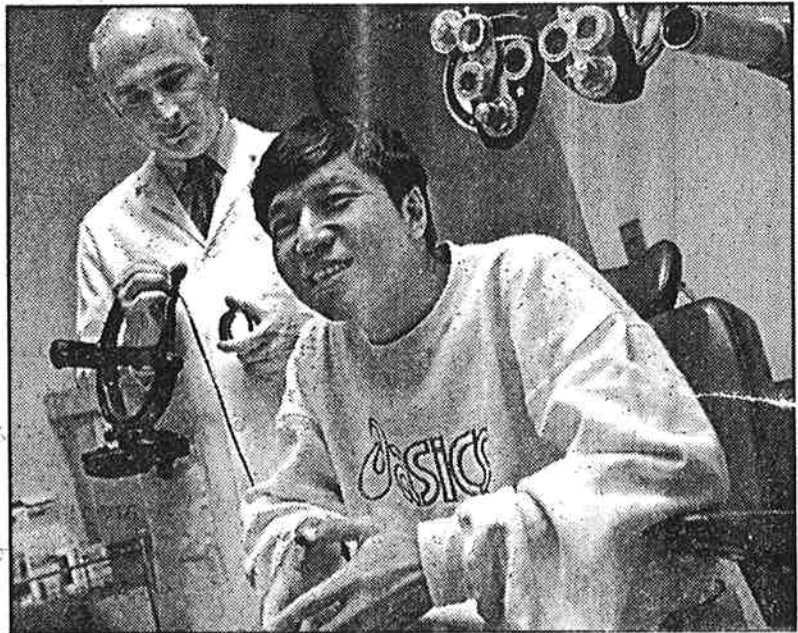
"I think it will be easy, because the weather is cool," said Paul Ngin Thian Mung, 35, who normally runs up to 10 miles daily on the steamy, rugged streets of Rangoon, Myanmar.

With the help of a \$5,000 grant from Runners World, Mung's longtime dream of traveling to New York to run the marathon is coming true, although another goal of the trip — having his eyesight restored — remained unfulfilled.

Dr. David Guyer, chairman of the ophthalmology department at New York University's School of Medicine, examined Mung yesterday for a potential cornea transplant, but determined it wouldn't work. Instead, Mung will receive free glasses, magnifiers, and other aides that will help him see, if only a bit.

Guyer — who will guide another blind runner Sunday — will exam about 50 other blind marathon runners from poor countries over the next week to see if they, too, might be able to have their sight restored.

"He's a horse — he's really, really good," said Rick Lipsey, the Sports Illustrated reporter who helped Mung travel from the poor Asian country formerly known as Burma, and who will be one of his sighted guides during the 26.2-mile race. "He thinks of himself as Tarzan. He's seen the movies" as a boy, Lipsey said.



**VISION QUEST:** Dr. David Guyer examines Burmese runner Paul Ngin Thian Mung, who will run the New York City Marathon on Sunday with the aid of guides.

N.Y. Post: Tamara Beckwith

A former jade miner who lost almost all his sight in the early '90s from malaria medication, Mung will be the first person ever to run the New York Marathon — blind or otherwise — from Myanmar, whose authoritarian regime rarely lets its athletes compete internationally.

But he'll be among several dozen other vision-impaired runners competing under the banner of the Achilles Track Club, a Manhattan-based disabled-athletes group that has chapters worldwide.

"He looks like a fine athlete," said Dick Traum, president of the Achilles Track Club, who met Mung Monday. "He had a

great big grin on his face and was just so happy that he is here."

In Myanmar, Mung had never taken a shower, eaten in a restaurant, or slept on a bed, instead sharing the floor of a small room with four kids at the Blind School for Children in Rangoon.

Mung, who is studying to be a Christian minister, started running at the school after losing his sight, and became the Achilles chapter's best runner, covering courses of up to 18 miles. His 11-year-old daughter, Nancy — named after former President Reagan's wife — lives with his mother. His wife died, while pregnant, of yellow fever in 1989.