

# SPORTS SCENE

## Achilles Athletes Summit Kilimanjaro

**S**even Achilles Track Club athletes with disabilities and eighteen Achilles volunteers guides along with two guides climbed Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania, Africa. The team spent four days acclimatizing at 7,500 feet before beginning their hike on Aug. 28. The five blind athletes, one cancer survivor/arm amputee, and one deaf asthmatic was the largest group of physically disabled athletes ever to climb Kilimanjaro.

Aged 19 through 56 years, the athletes have various athletic abilities, and come from all types of ethnic and social backgrounds and trained together at the New York Sports Club in preparation for the trip.

Before their climb began the team visited a school for children who are blind in Tanzania. They set up an Achilles Kid's chapter there and delivered school supplies and Braille books.

The six-day trek found climbers singing while sometimes navigating through steep and rocky terrain and lava fields. Altitude sickness, that took the form of headaches and shortness of breath, was a factor each time they reached a new height, but it was not a deterrent. Aspirin, exercise and rest helped as they acclimatized at each new level.

When not climbing, the athletes and guides played cards, visited and dreaming of the



Achilles team reaches summit!

foods they missed the most. Of the 27, 25 summited at Gillman's Point (elevation, 18,650 feet). Of the 25, ten went on to summit Uhuru peak, the highest point on Kilimanjaro (elevation, 19,340 feet) on

Sept. 2.

"The trip was life changing for the athletes and guides alike," said Adrienne Cooney, director of the project and the Achilles coach. "Additionally," she said, "the local Park East

Tours staff had their eyes opened by our team. They had never dealt with disabled climbers before and found that our athletes profoundly educated them about the abilities of athletes with disabilities."

## 'SO Get Into It' It is a New Special Olympics Program

"SO Get Into It" is a new K-12 curriculum launched by Special Olympics which brings together people with and without mental retardation, teaching young people to "be the difference," by learning the values of inclusion, tolerance, respect and welcome.

"SO Get Into It," available at no cost to schools, is designed with four lesson plans that teach awareness and under-

standing, as well as inspire students and encourage them to take action through service-learning. The curriculum begins by introducing mental retardation and Special Olympics to students and has students' discuss stereotypes.

"SO Get Into It" continues with examples of Special Olympics athletes and their compelling and inspirational stories about how they set goals,

achieved those goals, and lets students then set their own goals.

Finally, the curriculum encourages students to take action with Special Olympics and become involved with their local Special Olympics Program. Students can get to know individuals with mental retardation and understand that the daily challenges they face are not only because of

their disability, but also because of the stigmas and misconceptions that surround them.

In addition to increasing the participation of children and youth in Special Olympics, the "SO Get Into It" curriculum addresses current trends in school reform such as the standards movement, character education, positive youth development and service-learning.