

Cheers help amputee finish marathon amid severe pain

Plainfield native 'crutches' 26.2-mile course in 7 hours, 26 minutes

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During the last four miles of the New York City Marathon, Plainfield native Keith Mann envisioned the determined triathletes he'd seen on television crawling toward the finish line after their bodies gave out.

Mann, 19, a below-the-knee-amputee who was "crutching" the entire 26.2-mile race, worried he might have to resort to the same tactic.

At mile 8, he was already winded. Mann's training partner, Steve Kay, a veteran of 14 marathons, was surprised Mann was struggling so early in the run.

To lighten the mood, Kay jokingly asked Mann if he was up for the Philadelphia Marathon later in the month. Mann replied a terse, "No."

Mann, who lost his leg in an accident during his junior year at Wardlaw-Hartridge School in Edison, had trained for the marathon in Allentown, Pa., where he is a freshman at Muhlenberg College. But his three-and-a-half hour training runs were not enough.

By the time they reached the 14-mile mark, the outlook had grown worse. They faced a mile-plus ascent over the Queensboro Bridge. Mann's wrists were already numb from carpal tunnel pain. The wind was in their face and the road seemed to go "straight uphill," Mann said.

"It was the first time I thought there was a possibility we might not make it, because it was just too dif-

ficult," Kay said.

Mann popped a few Tylenols for his hands, which were still throbbing.

"It was hard not to just burst out and cry," Mann said.

Thoughts that he should quit, that he wasn't going to make it, fluttered through his head. But cheering crowds kept him going.

At mile 18, his parents, sister, and friends gave him another boost.

As dusk set and police cleared away road barriers, letting cars back onto the course, Mann and Kay were still running.

They exited the southeast corner of Central Park, turning right past the Plaza Hotel onto 57th Street. Less than a mile to go.

By this point, they were practically walking, Mann said. The teen's family and friends joined the race behind him. Police cars, with lights flashing, escorted him down the busy street.

"At 26 miles, you could actually see the finish line," Kay said. "He didn't groan in pain at any time until then."

Mann and Kay finished together, with an official time of 7 hours, 26 minutes and 14 seconds.

"It was a lot tougher than I thought it was going to [See **MARATHON**, Page 25]



JOHN MUNSON/THE STAR-LEDGER

Keith Mann of Plainfield makes the turn up First Avenue at 59th Street at about mile 16 of the New York City Marathon.