

MARATHON 2004

Annual Race is Moving Toward More Inclusion



PHOTO BY DEANNA SCHWARTZ

Walter Reed Team gets ready to roll.

By Brian Cruise

The human condition is one of the most amazing paradoxes of all things earthly. What can be taken for granted for years without thought, can in an instance become more important than a most prized possession. Especially, when that instance changes a life forever and causes us to re-examine and appreciate the simple gift of life.

For the 30 men and women

from the Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C., who participated in the New York City Marathon. There was a sense of "never give up." The Achilles Track Club, an international non-profit organization, started a chapter at Walter Reed for soldiers who have come home from Iraq after losing limbs in the war. Achilles sponsored the group, who were enlisted by Mary Bryant, a cancer

survivor, former model and special projects director.

One year from the day Capt. David Rozelle started learning to run on a prosthetic leg, he came to run the marathon on a prosthesis decorated with the American flag. He thought that running the marathon was a good way to mark his anniversary.

Navy medic Jose Ramos, who
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lost part of his left arm to a rocket-propelled grenade while patrolling with Marines near Fallujah a couple of months ago, also ran the marathon as part of the Walter Reed contingent. He finished in 6:23. "I am very glad to be here, and very grateful to be alive," said Ramos.

Bill Reilly, who has cerebral palsy, competes in a wheelchair, riding backward and pushing with his feet in small increments, which is the only way he can do it. Reilly, 52, of Brooklyn, completed his 15th New York City Marathon at 6:49 p.m., a 26.2-mile journey he started at 8 a.m. at the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge. Asked why he did it, he said, "Because I'm nuts. It's a challenge."

For the elite wheelchair racers it was quite a challenge as well, as three seconds determined the outcome. Saul

Mendoza, a Mexican who lives in Texas, won the men's race in 1 hour, 33 minutes and 16 seconds. Krige Schabort, a South African living in Georgia, who finished first in 2002 and 2003, missed winning his third consecutive N.Y.C. Marathon, finishing second in 1:33:19. Kelly Smith, a Canadian, was third with 1:33:24.

"It was a strong field, and it was very difficult to break away. So the last 10 meters, when I saw the finish line, I realized I had it," said Mendoza.

Edith Hunkeler of Switzerland, won the women's pushrim competition in 1:53:27, competing in her first New York City Marathon. Hunkeler broke the course record of 1:59.30, set last year by Cheri Blauwet. Sandra Graf, 35, also of Switzerland, finished 10 seconds behind Hunkeler. "I never expected to catch her," Hunkeler said of

Graf, who held the lead throughout most of the race. "I hate uphill, but it was to my advantage today that I could catch her and win."

New York is beginning to equal Boston and Los Angeles in drawing the elite wheelchair racers. Bob Laufer, the wheelchair race director of the marathon said, "Our goal is to be companions with Boston and L.A."

"New York is on the right path because of the treatment they give the athletes," said Mendoza.

The purse is also escalating along with the races notoriety in this, the fourth year as an official division of the marathon.

Todd Philpott, 47, of Australia, won the men's handcycle division in 1:17:12. Angelique Simons, 37, of the Netherlands, won the women's race in 1:50:02. For the first time, this year's handcycle di-

vision was classified as a competitive race; it was previously considered an exhibition. Although no prize money was awarded, the top three winners received silver Tiffany trophies.

Winners of the wheelchair division on both the men's and women's side each received \$3,500. The prize for second place was \$2,500, with \$1,500 for third, \$1,000 for fourth and \$750 for fifth. Jose Ramos and Jennifer Woods won the Avis inaugural "we try harder" award.

The award celebrates people who endeavor to overcome considerable obstacles through courage and extraordinary effort. Ramos is undergoing rehabilitation at Walter Reed, and Woods, who was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis 11 years ago, is an advocate for individuals who suffer from the disease and lives in Indiana.