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GETTING AND GIVING INSPIRATION: Wheelchair marathoner Dustin Tuller of Milton lost both legs in a shootout in Iraq nearly three years ago.

Amputee veterans accept challenge of 26.2 miles

By HAL HABIB
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WEST PALM BEACH — Mary Bryant isn't one of those people who if you give them an inch, they'll take a yard, because that's such a waste of time.

Bryant comes right out and says she expects people to go 26.2 miles — a marathon — even though many have never done it before.

Her recruiting grounds are Walter Reed Army Medical Center.

Her recruits have just come back from Iraq and Afghanistan with as many as three missing limbs.

"Of course, they were completely confused," Bryant says.

Not for long, because the next thing they know, these men and women have enlisted in the Freedom Team, joining a group of wounded veterans who travel the country competing in marathons by using wheelchairs or prosthetics. Their destination Sunday: the Marathon of the Palm Beaches.

"You won't miss us," Bryant says.

There's no mistaking people like wheelchair racer Dustin Tuller, a former staff sergeant in the National Guard who lost both legs in a shootout during a raid on a house in Iraq on Dec. 23, 2003.

Tuller, 31, of Milton, suffered multiple gunshot



ALEXEY TOLCHINSKY/Pensacola News-Journal

THE MOTIVATOR: The Freedom Team's Mary Bryant recruits wounded veterans for the Freedom Team, often telling recent amputees it is possible for them to finish a marathon.

Marathon of the Palm Beaches

6:30 a.m. Dec. 3, Meyer Amphitheatre, Flagler Drive, West Palm Beach

■ Race course and pre-race details, 12B

See MARATHON, 12B ►

'They're able to get into this wheelchair and have a mobility that you feel like an elite athlete.'