



Gina Gayle for The New York Times

Trisha Meili, known as the Central Park Jogger, listening to Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg yesterday at a race in the park.

## How Far Does Hope Go? Five Miles Is a Good Start

By CAMPBELL ROBERTSON

There are hundreds of reasons that people showed up at the northeast corner of Central Park yesterday morning for a five-mile race. For Pfc. Josh Frey, it was a gunshot to the shoulder as he was making his way through a house in Falluja. For Cpl. Jamel Daniels, it was a roadside bomb outside Iskandariyah that left him without most of his left leg. For Andre Matthews, it was a drug habit that he conquered seven years ago.

The race, the Hope and Possi-

to participate in athletics, particularly long-distance running. She became actively involved in the club in the early 90's, ran the New York City marathon in 1995 and was elected chairwoman of the club in 2000.

The club had organized marathons in Prospect Park for two years, but Ms. Meili and Dick Traum, founder of Achilles, said they wanted to hold the race in Manhattan. The choice of Central Park was not a symbolic one, they said, but simply the best place in the city for the event.

bilities Five-Mile Run/Walk, was intended for people with disabilities. About 2,200 people participated on foot, prosthesis, wheelchair or hand-cranked bicycle, some of them blind, some of them amputees, some of them recovering drug addicts. Many were people without disabilities and just eager for a run in the park.

All of them had a different story, but one runner, an organizer of the event, was exceptional in that much of the world knew of her injuries in exhaustive detail years before they even knew her name.

Trisha Meili, better known as the Central Park Jogger, was raped, beaten and left for dead in the park in April 1989. The label still follows her — it even appeared on the T-shirts that many of the runners wore — but that does not bother Ms. Meili, now 45. It is, she said, part of what the race is about.

"My hope is when people hear that, they think of being a survivor, not somebody who is a victim," said Ms. Meili, who said she still feels the effects of the traumatic brain injury she had after the attack.

In the summer of 1989, about two and a half weeks after she was able to walk on her own again, Ms. Meili said she went on a short jog with a local chapter of the Achilles Track Club, an organization founded in 1983 that encourages people with disabilities

The race, named after the subtitle of Ms. Meili's book, "I Am the Central Park Jogger: A Story of Hope and Possibility," was in its third year. It was the second year that wounded veterans had been invited from Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington and from the Navy Medical Center San Diego.

Many of the veterans were from Iraq, like Sgt. Jimmy King, 26, whose left leg had been shattered by a bomb in Ramadi. It was the second time he raced here, using a hand-cranked bicycle. But next year, he said, he expects to run on his prosthesis.

Sgt. Michael McNaughton, 33, lost most of his right leg to a land mine in Afghanistan in January 2003.

"I love doing this because I get to see soldiers just like me," Sergeant McNaughton said. Before his injury, he said, 10 miles was about as far as he had ever run. Since then, with a prosthesis designed for running, he said he had already participated in a marathon and was considering running in the New York marathon in November.

It was not an unusual attitude among the disabled participants yesterday — a mix of optimism with a frank acknowledgment of the frustrations they often face.

"We share an unfortunate bond," Ms. Meili said. But "we're pushing forward and saying, 'Look what we can do.'"