

MONDAY 01.24.05

TROPICAL LIFE

PEOPLE

ALSO INSIDE

READ2ME
Chapter 2:
Hoofbeats
in the fog

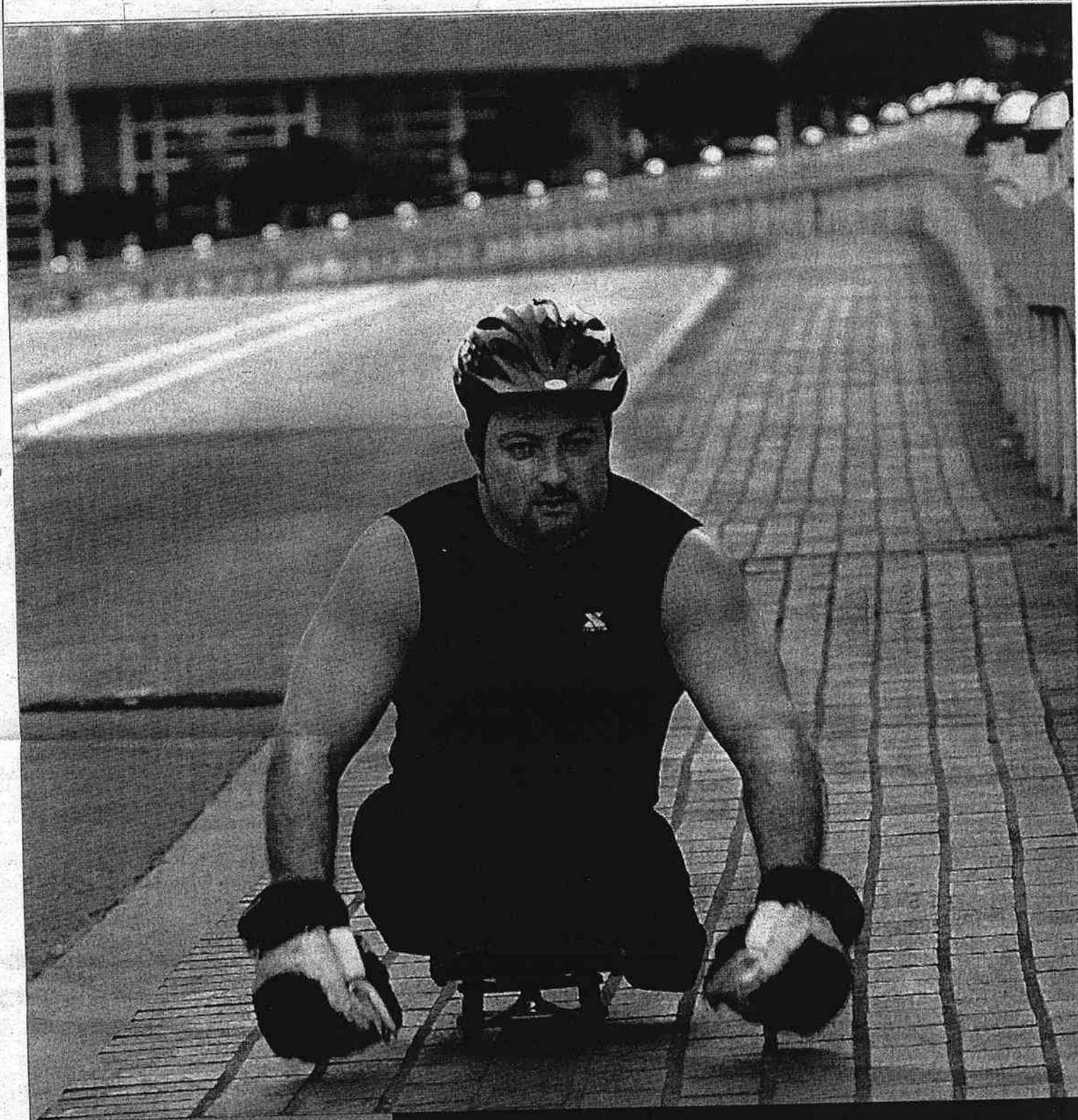
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A RATHONER WITH A MISSION

Lance Benson has no legs, but that won't stop him from competing and inspiring others to go the distance, 8

INSIDE: CLASSIFIED SECTION
AND BUSINESS MONDAY



NURI VALLBONA/HERALD STAFF

HIGH GEAR: A skateboard is more adventurous than a wheelchair 'and I enjoy that,' says Lance Benson. 'I enjoy it going fast.' Here, on the bridge to Brickell Key, he shows how he trains for marathons.

CHAIR

...ENJOY IT GOING FAST

Marathoner Lance Benson shrugged off his lack of legs early on. Now he's trying to help disabled people join mainstream athletics.

BOARD

THE OFF THE M

BY DESONTA HOLDER
dholder@herald.com

When Lance Benson competed in New York for a five-mile run/walk in August for disabled people, he had no idea how deeply it would affect him.

"I saw guys and girls, like 18-, 19-, 20-, 21-year-olds. Arms blown off, legs blown off... partial or both, even shrapnel that cut parts of their body," says Benson, 31. "And you go, 'Holy [crap], this war is real.' It really never hit me so hard until I saw these people. And you're like, *These are kids!*... It's an incredible experience."

Benson, a Miami commercial real estate broker, is using Sunday's Toyota Prius Miami Tropical Marathon to make his point — that is, those with disabilities can compete in a marathon. He's raising money to start a Miami chapter of the Achilles Track Club, a non-profit with a presence in 40 countries. The club encourages those with disabilities to participate in mainstream athletics.

Benson knows firsthand how athletics can benefit people who are disabled or injured. Last year, he completed the Miami half-marathon. It was the first time he mastered such a feat — sitting atop a skateboard, using his hockey-gloved hands to propel himself forward.

Benson, after all, was born with no legs. Doctors had no explanation.

"You learn to make do with things and everyday life," says Benson, who works for Cushman & Wakefield, a real estate services firm. This only child "made do" pretty well, thanks

to his parents in Davie, who encouraged him to be independent. "We raised him like a normal kid," says Jerry Benson, his dad. "He grew up around grown people, so we never treated him like a tiny baby. He always wanted to try new things... I'm behind him 100 percent."

When he's not training on his skateboard, Benson walks with prostheses and crutches or drives.

At 18, he left home to attend North Carolina State. In 2003, he earned an MBA at Florida International University. At Cushman & Wakefield, he represents office tenants such as CBS-Viacom and Iberia Airlines. He has an apartment in the Brickell neighborhood, and when dressed for work, he looks as if he stepped out of GQ.

Athletically, he raced three- and four-wheelers as a 10-year-old (making mom Beverly a little nervous), wrestled in high school and did competitive

weight lifting in college.

Now, he's a marathoner. New York in November (finish time: 3 hours, 21 minutes) was his first full marathon; Miami will be his second try at the 26.2-mile distance.

(He hasn't ruled out triathlons.)

Though his body is buff, running on crutches would be too painstaking. The skateboard is different, more adventurous than a wheelchair.

"I enjoy it going fast," Benson says.

The crowd enjoys it, too. Crowds go crazy when Achilles Track Club members zip by at road races in their signature T-shirts, some on crutches, others in wheelchairs.

Gabrielle Greeves, director of corporate and foundation relations for the club in New York, hopes to see a Miami chapter rejuvenated. There was a chapter here in 1991, but those involved had little time to dedicate to the club and it fell apart, she says.

"We would like to bring in people from as far north as the West Palm Beach area," Greeves says. "We have the ability to work with people at the University of Miami to raise our awareness. We know there are community programs for people with varying disabilities that would be willing to partner with us... to get people up and running."

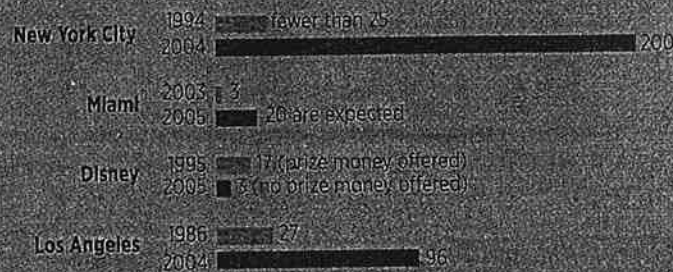
At the New York run that launched Benson, many of the people "came up to me and said, 'You really inspired me. My legs got blown off and I'm kind of down on myself and I don't know what my next [direction] is in life.'"

"To me, that was real touching because these are kids. It was tough."

MOVING RIGHT ALONG

More wheelchair athletes — hand cycle and push rim — are going the distance at some of the most popular marathons. The Miami Tropical Marathon's goal within the next few years is to have the largest division of physically challenged athletes.

WHEELCHAIR ATHLETES IN MARATHONS



SOURCE: Marathon organizers

P. CHEUNG/HERALD STAFF

HOW TO HELP

The faces

BY DESONTA HOLDER

During the Causeway

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Lance Benson