

Amputee Runners Meet the Challenge



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Running can be a part of any amputee's lifestyle. Participation in sports by the disabled has enjoyed a rapid growth over the past 20 years, and running 5Ks, half marathons, marathons, and even triathlons are within reach of an amputee or wheelchair-user. Advances in prosthetic knees and feet, wheelchair equipment, and a general awareness of the benefits of physical fitness make running/racing a viable option for anyone who wants to train and make a commitment to the lifestyle. The thrill of victory and the agony of defeat are no longer limited to the able.

Dick Traum, founder of the Achilles Track Club for disabled athletes, was the first runner to complete a marathon with a prosthetic leg in the 1976 New York City Marathon. High-tech prosthetics weren't available; he ran with a strap-on leg. His finish that day was seven hours and 24 minutes.

Traum has competed in 10 marathons and one ultra-marathon (100K/more than 60 miles). He also has competed in the hand-crank wheelchair race in two marathons and in one ultra-marathon.

There are many disabled runners who have captured national media attention for their abilities, including Sarah Reinertsen (the first amputee runner to be on the cover of Runner's World magazine), Amy Dodson, and Aimee Mullins. Among the legendary pioneers are, Chris Moon, Paul Martin, Jim McLaren, and Mark Soldo.

Up and comers include Amy Palmiero-Winters, who broke the world record for female below-knee (BK) amputees by posting a finish time of 3:04:16 in the 2007 LaSalle Bank Chicago Marathon. She also was a standout in the 2006 Rite-Aid Cleveland Marathon and broke the BK world record by more than 25 minutes with a time of 3:26. Palmiero-Winters ran the 2007 Boston Marathon under adverse weather conditions and finished with a time of 3:44:18.

Wounded Warriors also continue to pursue a variety of athletic competitions. Runners include Sgt. 1st Class Michael McNaughton, who made headlines when he ran a mile with President George W. Bush in 2004. On Jan. 9, 2005, two years after he lost his leg, he ran the Walt Disney World Half Marathon. In March 2005, he participated in the Bataan Memorial Death March.

Army Spc. James Stuck was wounded by an IED in December 2005, resulting in an amputation. Less than a year later he ran the Army 10 Miler race as a member of the Walter Reed Army Medical Center team. Today, he is training for the Beijing Paralympics at the University of Central Oklahoma, an official Paralympic training site. In an interview with a local newspaper, Stuck said: "Everyone has good and bad days, but I have a tendency to look at the glass as half full. I will be running and my stump hurts, but at least I can say, 'I'm running, I'm still alive.'"