

THERE'S A LOT of groaning at the Saturday morning workouts of the Achilles Track Club in New York's Central Park, but it's not from physical exertion. No, the runners are rolling their eyes at Dick Traum's silly one-liners. When one athlete mentions she's heading to the salon after the workout, Traum, an above-the-knee amputee, deadpans, "Think they'd give me half price on a pedicure?" Another says he needs a new wheelchair. Traum doesn't miss a beat. "It does look like it's on its last leg." And all the amputees have heard Traum suggest they refuel at

the pancake establishment whose name mirrors their running motion: IHOP.

For all his jokes, Traum, 68, who founded Achilles 26 years ago and is its president, couldn't be more serious about his work. He gets people with any kind of challenge—missing limbs, multiple sclerosis, visual impairments—and coaches them to finish races. Traum formed the club in 1983 with less than \$1,000, mostly from his own pocket. That year, six disabled athletes finished

the New York City Marathon. Today, there are about 150 Achilles chapters in more than 60 countries operating on a \$1.7 million budget. More than 500 Achilles participants will finish marathons this year, and thousands will race shorter distances, like the Hope & Possibility Five-Milers in Central Park, Atlanta, and Madison, Wisconsin.

The purpose of Achilles has always been to integrate disabled athletes into mainstream events. "When an able-bodied runner gets passed by someone who is blind or on one leg, it changes their perception of what the disabled can do," Traum says.

THE MENTOR **Dick Traum**

Text by SARAH LORGE BUTLER
Photograph by DAVID YELLEN

WELL-ARMED

Traum's fastest marathon on foot is 6:44. His hand crank PR is 1:51.

Traum has a tried-and-true method for motivating Achilles newcomers. He gets them focused on a race. On an August morning, after a young man tries a handcrank wheelchair for the first time, Traum tells him to "mark November 7, 2010, on your calendar—that's when you'll be doing the New York City Marathon." The athlete sits silent, momentarily stunned by the idea, but Traum, the first amputee to run a marathon (New York City in 1976), has made similar pronouncements thousands of times. "We're trying to set up something for them to think about, a goal for them to meditate on," he says.

Traum has traveled to global hot spots like Chechnya and South Africa to set up chapters. A group has even formed in Kabul, Afghanistan. And he's always looking for new challenges. Can running help Alzheimer's patients? Kids with autism? Cancer patients undergoing chemotherapy? Traum has recruited members with all those afflictions—and gotten them racing.

When he was 24, Traum was crushed between two cars at a gas station; his right leg later had to be amputated. He completed 11 marathons on his prosthetic, but when he needed his left knee replaced 10 years ago, doctors advised him to use it sparingly. So the handcrank became his racing vehicle (in it, he's done 25 marathons). He lifts his sleeve to show off his biceps, which look like they belong in the dugout of Yankee Stadium.

But Traum is a coach first. He counts among his athletes people like Donald Arthur, who first walked the New York City Marathon in 1997, 15 months after a heart transplant. Arthur has since completed marathons in 30 states. "Our first conversation, I'm thinking this guy is crazy," Arthur says. "I just had a heart transplant and he's talking about a marathon." As Arthur, and thousands of others have learned, doing a marathon can transform a life. And even Traum would admit that's nothing to joke about.

