

# ATHLETES

## BEN SIMMONS

### One Leg Up

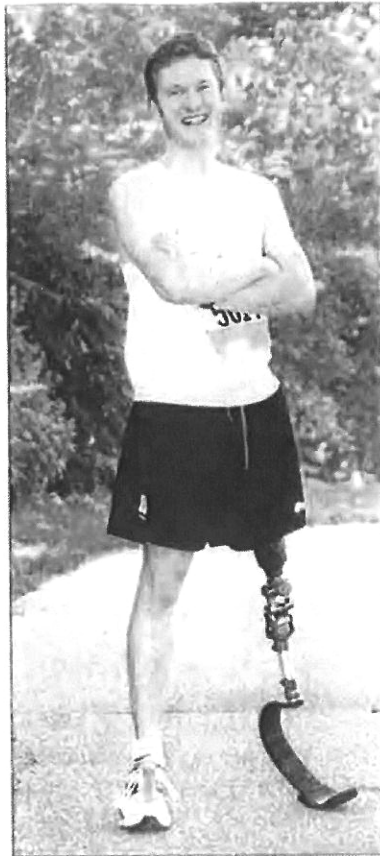
For the first three decades of Ben Simmons' life, the Weymouth, England, native didn't think he was physically capable of running. As he puts it, "I'm one down in the leg department."

Simmons, 37, has proximal femoral focal deficiency, a rare defect often characterized by missing bones in one or both legs. He was born without his left leg below the knee.

At age 11, Simmons had an amputation above the knee, which enabled him to wear a prosthetic leg with a knee joint. At 15, he became an avid cyclist, frequently going on 100-mile rides. But it wasn't until 2005, when Simmons was living in White Plains, NY, that he first thought about running—after being literally chased down the street by a man who told him that his prosthetic leg used archaic "World War II-era technology" and referred him to A Step Ahead Prosthetics in Long Island.

Simmons took the advice, and A Step Ahead outfitted him with a snazzy new walking leg and a carbon-fiber running leg. "I said, 'If you give me a running leg, I'm definitely going to run a marathon,' because I never thought I'd run," Simmons recalls. "For me, running was as likely as going to the moon."

True to his word, in 2008 Simmons joined the Achilles Track Club (a team for runners with disabilities), ran his first half-marathon that May, and debuted at 26.2 miles in the ING New York City Marathon 2008, running 4:52 (still his PR). He's since run four out of the five World Marathon



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Majors—New York again, Boston, Chicago, and London—and is eyeing the last of the quintet, Berlin, for 2012. First, though, he'll tackle the Marine Corps Marathon in Washington, DC, this October (follow

his training at [bensimmonsrunwithit.blogspot.com](http://bensimmonsrunwithit.blogspot.com)), with the goal of breaking 4:30.

To that end, Simmons plans on incorporating some speedwork into his usual training regimen, which consists of several six-milers each week (including Tuesday-night Achilles group runs) and long runs (18–20 miles) on Saturdays. He usually runs on Central Park's asphalt outer loop, so he takes Sunday off from pounding the pavement and goes for a bike ride instead.

The training has paid off. Simmons won Achilles' Athlete of the Year honor in 2009 and was recently named USA Triathlon's 2010 Paratriathlete of the Year. He says he owes much of his success to Achilles.

"I was self-conscious about running with a prosthetic. Joining Achilles helped me get past that," he says. "They were very welcoming, and I met inspiring people who've overcome all kinds of disabilities. There's one chap with cerebral palsy who does marathons by pushing himself backward in his wheelchair with one foot. It's a really good inclusive community."

Simmons says he loves running because "it's something I never thought I'd be able to do. It's like a bonus in my life." He also loves to inspire people. Still, he isn't sure he's a lifetime marathoner. "I definitely have a few more marathons in me, but I'm aware that I have to look after my one good leg—I don't want to beat the heck out of it," he laughs.

After Berlin and Marine Corps, he'd like to run the Tokyo Marathon and complete an Olympic-distance triathlon. After that? Perhaps he'll enjoy a leisurely stroll on the moon.

Ernest Morales

Pamela Benepe

Larry O'Rourke

NYRR New York Mini 10K

