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Josh Sams in NYC race

Amputee Marine finishes five-mile event

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Someone who had lost both legs might never even consider competing in a race. Wilmington USMC Cpl. Josh Sams, however, finished a five-mile marathon in a bit over 20 minutes last weekend on a piece of equipment he had never even tried before.

Sams and his wife, 2004 Hillsboro High School graduate Lindsey Sams, competed along with thousands in The Hope and Possibility Race in New York City's Central Park. The race is an annual event organized by Achilles International and unites people both with and without disabilities to support the inclusion of people with disabilities in mainstream athletic events.

Sams was one of 40 members hand-picked for the Achilles Freedom Team of Wounded Veterans, which is comprised of patients at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Md. The team was launched in 2004 and adapted for specific needs of wounded members of the U.S. military.

Achilles International is a non-profit organization that helps

athletes with disabilities train and competes in mainstream races throughout the country.

Sams was on routine patrol Jan. 11 when he stepped on an improvised explosive device (IED) and was rendered a double amputee. Since, he has been a patient at Walter Reed.

But on Sunday morning, less than six months after the injury, he was riding a hand-crank wheelchair, which is a three-wheeled cycle powered by hand pedals. Unlike pushrim wheelchairs, which require users to lean forward when racing, this adaptive device is best for people with injuries that have resulted in amputation or paralysis.

"I got fitted for one a couple of weeks ago, but I just sat in it to see how it felt until I raced in it," Sams said during a telephone interview Wednesday. "I learned in the parking lot. It's like a rowing, pedaling motion with your hands, but other than that like a regular bike."

Sams expected to take longer than 20 minutes to finish the marathon, he said.

