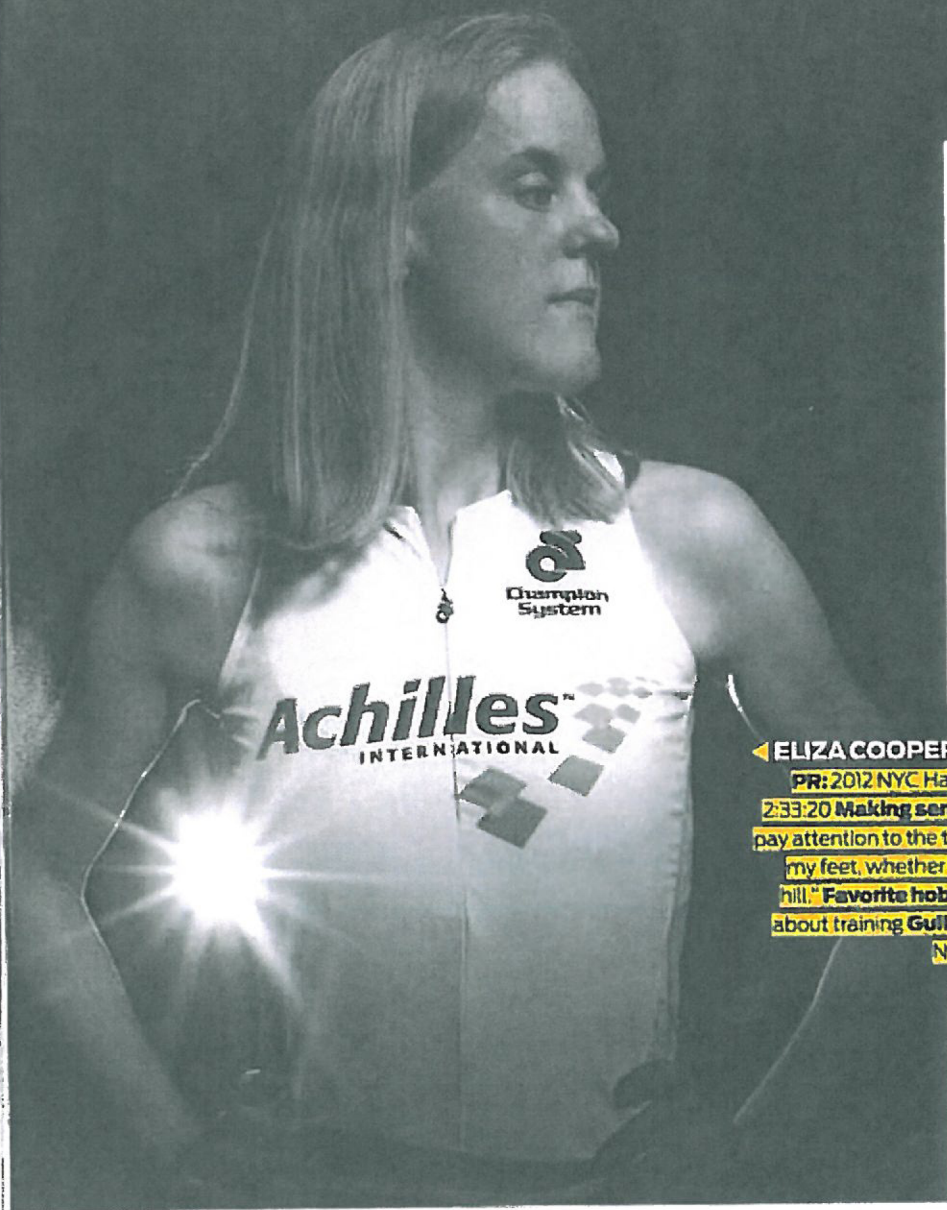


## THE FIRST-TIMER



manding part of training isn't the grueling runs or swimming straight in crowded lanes. For her, it's the simple logistics: finding a place where she can train and temporarily leave her guide dog.

To that end, Cooper trains a few hours a week with a local chapter of the Achilles Track Club, which helps prepare disabled athletes for mainstream events.

Cooper says that being around other visually impaired athletes and sighted volunteers keeps her motivated. Partners push her harder on both the runs and rides. Plus, Cooper says, they make the time go faster with casual conversation.

"When people expect you to be there for training and encourage you, it's much better," she says. "Even if I could see, I would still train with a group. It's much more fun that way."

Cooper has some light perception, meaning she can tell when it's sunny out or which room in her apartment is brightest.

For the past four years, the social media manager has relied on a guide dog to navigate New York. Though her dog is fast and likes to run off-leash, she won't use him for long runs because he gets confused.

"When he's on the leash, he knows that he's supposed to be guiding me," Cooper says. "He gets nervous. His job is to help me walk around the city, so I don't try to push him to run."

Even with an assistance dog, though, some big city perils are simply unavoidable. During a routine walk to work this spring, Cooper suffered a mild concussion after hitting her head on an object protruding from a building. That put a halt to training. "I walk really fast, and because the structure was elevated, my dog just didn't see it," she says.

Still, Cooper remains unfazed. "If you had told me a year ago I was going to be training for a triathlon," she says, "I would have said you were crazy." **E**

#### ◀ ELIZA COOPER'S STATS

**PR:** 2012 NYC Half-Marathon, 2:33:20 **Making sense:** "I always pay attention to the texture under my feet, whether it's a ramp or hill." **Favorite hobby:** Blogging about training **Guilty pleasure:** NPR podcasts

**WHEN ELIZA COOPER CROSSED THE FINISH** line of the New York City Half-Marathon in March, she had every reason to celebrate. Blind since the age of 3, Cooper had never run more than 8 miles.

"I was shocked and thrilled that I managed to finish the whole thing at a steady pace just under 12 minutes a mile," she says. Ever competitive, she shows no signs of slowing down.

Cooper, 25, trained for months and completed the New York City Triathlon, an Olympic-distance race, in July. But the Brooklyn, N.Y., resident says the most de-