

ONENESS-ARRIVAL-SHORE

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SANDY DAVIDSON: ABOVE AND BEYOND

The New York City Marathon is just around the corner, and every one of the 20,000 runners probably has an interesting tale to tell about his or her sports career. Few, though, could match that of Alexander (Sandy) Davidson, a Principal Technical Adviser with UNDP. This determined Scotsman will be undertaking his sixth marathon next week - just three weeks after participating in an "ultramarathon" of 100 kilometers (62.5 miles) - as a member of the Achilles Track Club for disabled athletes.

Davidson was hit with a severe stroke in March of 1982 while stationed at the UNDP office in Tunis. "It was considered life-threatening during the first 24 or 48 hours," he notes matter-of-factly. "I was out of work for nine months, but from the beginning I was optimistic about making a good recovery" - and once again setting out on agricultural missions to developing countries all over the world.

Although he enjoyed sports - including daily jogging - before the stroke, Mr. Davidson never imagined trying a marathon until after the stroke. Soon after his reassignment to New York at the end of 1982, a colleague presented him with an article about the Achilles Track Club, and he immediately reached for the telephone to speak with Dick Traum, President of the Club. "I met Dick and got started, doing regular workouts with the Club in Central Park, and after a few weeks Dick said, 'I think we can put you in for this year's marathon!'"

Marathon road to recovery

Cheerfully indifferent to his limitations from the start (he must rely exclusively on his right arm and primarily on his right leg), Mr. Davidson was tremendously motivated by his new acquaintances from Achilles. "My first reaction was very much to the other people. I said to myself, 'Here are



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young people much worse off than I am in many cases - virtually all. Here I am with a silly little stroke which is going to clear up in a few years, so I had better follow their good example and do my best." And so he joined the blind, the ambulatory amputees, the wheelchair-bound, the cerebral-palsy victims and other "handicapped" determined to concentrate on increasing their strengths rather than regretting their weaknesses. In this endeavour they follow the example of Dick Traum, president of a personnel data systems firm, who lost a leg in a car accident some 20 years ago and rose above despair to run marathons with a full prosthesis and to establish Achilles chapters in New York and all around the world.

After several months of training and racing in Central Park at shorter distances, Mr. Davidson toed the line for his first marathon in November 1983. "Dick said to me, 'Don't worry about speed. Just concentrate on finishing *sometime*.' That first year it took me ten hours and 15 minutes. In 1984 I did two marathons, London and New York, both in around nine hours. In 1986 I did my best time so far: 7:43. Last year was a disaster! I was overconfident, pushed too hard in the first six miles and wilted. My time was 8:10. This year I've got to do better, especially since the marathon falls on my birthday! I'm going to hold myself in for the first 13 or 14 miles and then let rip and see what I can do." That sounds just like the strategy of the front runners!

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Although one medical authority on strokes, himself a runner, offered a discouraging and faulty prediction some years ago, Mr. Davidson has received abundant reinforcement. "People have been extremely supportive, particularly my wife, Wilma. She goes with me to virtually every marathon."

In mid-October, Mr. Davidson and some 15 other Achilles athletes from the US journeyed to Kalisz, Poland, for an adventure that makes the 26-mile marathon look like a morning trot: the 100-kilometer "Super-marathon Calisia". Thanks to the efforts of Dick Traum, who is of Polish descent and helped organise an Achilles chapter there, a special invitation to run was extended to "disabled sportsmen of locomotive organs," according to the charming English version of the information brochure for the race. The course consisted of two 50-kilometer loops around the countryside, with medical attention and refreshments provided at regular intervals. The handicapped got a head start of ten hours to give them a chance to cover the distance within the prescribed limit of 22 hours.

Mr. Davidson managed to complete 65 kilometers, or 40 miles, before a bad cramp, probably caused by jet-lag fatigue and cold, forced him to drop out. Many of the disabled did complete the race. "One was blind and had no hands," recalls Mr. Davidson. "He was looking very strong when he passed me at about 60 kilometers."

Mr. Davidson hopes to give it another try in Poland next year, better rested from the trans-Atlantic trip and more warmly dressed.

"The best thing about it was just to take part in a race of this distance - just to be in there and be part of it, to be accepted as a runner. Another very good thing was the reaction of the people in the countryside. People came to their farmgates or to the little village centres at 1:00, 2:00 and 3:00 in the morning to cheer us and give us cups of warm herbal tea, sandwiches, cookies and flowers. They also danced in local costumes and played music for us.

"The third greatest thing was that one of our people who - among other things - has difficulty in speaking, was able to make a speech of thanks on our final evening with our Polish hosts. I was as proud of him for that as I was for his accomplishment in the race.

The interpreter was moved to tears, poor girl!"

Inner journey

Has it ever been frustrating to cope with handicaps? "I don't think about it," says Mr. Davidson, who is known for his buoyant humour and quick wit. "It's not frustrating; it's fascinating to discover new ways of doing things with one hand and one leg. One of these days I'm going to be able to do everything again."

Elaborating on the notion of so-called impossibility, Mr. Davidson says, "To God all things are possible. I have been doing a lot of praying since the stroke, particularly for the persistence and stubbornness to do the things I need to do for my recovery. I feel that God guided me to Achilles and other forms of therapy."

When asked whether he considers himself a different person since the stroke, Mr. Davidson replies, "I hope so. I am a better-balanced person. I have learned how to deal with stress, which is the cause of so many catastrophic things like heart attack and stroke. In fact, some people think that stress is a major factor in all illness. My attendance at meditation sessions helps me to achieve a sort of spiritual equilibration. I think I am a happier person now."

There is no hesitation when Mr. Davidson is requested to offer advice on dealing with catastrophes in life: "I would say faith and prayer."

"Go, Sandy!"

If you are anywhere on the route of the New York Marathon on Sunday, 6 November, you may see this intrepid adventurer wearing an "Achilles" track suit and a cap marked "SANDY". If you call his name, you will no doubt be greeted with a wave, a broad smile and a powerful surge of inspiration to conquer the impossible.

OUR GOLDEN HERITAGE

"We bow before an ideal of life, and an example of profound faith, faith in the dignity but also in the good sense and fundamental decency of men. Without this ideal and this faith, who would seek to follow the course of patient negotiation, of ceaseless effort to conciliate, to mediate, to compose

differences, to appeal to men's reason in order to build agreement? This ideal of public service and this faith in the ultimate triumph of good will are a living reality. They are the foundation upon which the United Nations itself is built." - Dag Hammarskjöld, 24 July 1953

SPOTLIGHT ON HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

"Human Development: Goals and Strategies for the Year 2000" will be the subject of a presentation and panel discussion co-hosted by UNDP and the North South Roundtable on Monday, 7 November. Themes to be considered will be the growing emphasis on putting people first in the development process, the roles of the private sector and the state, the formulation of strategies for the next development decade, the need for national, regional and global approaches, and the mobilization of financial resources and support.

This conference, based on the conclusions of the Roundtable held two months ago in Amman, Jordan which was attended by 60 leading international personalities, will take place at 5.30 p.m. in the Economic and Social Council Chamber. Mr. William H. Draper III, Administrator of UNDP, will chair a distinguished panel of experts from the UN family and other

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