

Disabilities inspire these marathoners

by Derek Kaufman
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9/20/2008 - **WRIGHT-PATTERSON AIR FORCE BASE, Ohio** -- A paralyzing injury from a motorcycle crash at age 20 took away Andy Houghton's ability to use his legs. Today he finished his first marathon.

Houghton, from Hollywood, Fla., completed the 26.2 mile 12th Annual U.S. Air Force Marathon on Sept. 20 piloting a sleek handcycle. The human powered vehicle is equipped with a derailleur and other components that any bicycling enthusiast would admire.

Always someone who loved sports, encouragement from people Houghton works with and for was his inspiration to enter the race. He currently serves in a position appointed by President George W. Bush as chairperson for the Committee for Purchase From People Who Are Blind or Severely Disabled, an independent federal agency.

More familiarly known as AbilityOne, the program provides employment opportunities for people who are blind or have other severe disabilities. Houghton says disabled people provide more than \$2 billion in products and services to the federal government. With 43,000 employees AbilityOne is the largest employer for the severely disabled in the U.S.

AbilityOne tries to match skills for people across the entire spectrum of disabilities. Veterans with traumatic brain injury, one of the signature injuries of the current war, are among those who find employment via the program, according to Houghton.

Now 42 years old, Houghton says he gets great personal satisfaction through sports and exercise and hopes his competing in the marathon will encourage others with disabilities to surprise themselves.

"If I can show some of the folks in our program that I can do a marathon, I hope it will inspire them to try something new and out of their comfort zone," he said. "Sports is one of the greatest motivators for people with disabilities."

As with many first-time marathoners, Houghton felt he ran into a brick wall in the latter part of the race, especially as the temperature rose under sunny skies.



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[Wheelchair racer Andrew Houghton and Army Capt. Ivan Castro exchange best wishes prior to the start of the U.S. Air Force Marathon at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio on Saturday, Sept. 20. Castro, who is blind as a result of combat injuries sustained in Iraq, ran tethered alongside Lt. Col. Fred Dummar. Both special forces officers are assigned to Fort Bragg, N.C. Houghton is chairperson for the Committee for Purchase From People Who Are Blind or Severely Disabled. \(U.S. Air Force photo/Al Bright\)](#)

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"At around mile 23 I was pretty tapped out. My right hand was completely numb," he said.

But encouragement from volunteers at hydration stations and fans along the course really motivated him to keep up the pace.

"It was great to take part in this event. It was also great to come on base, meet with Gen. Bruce Carlson [Air Force Materiel Command commander] and see how our program is making a difference...by giving disabled people an opportunity to both learn new skills and give back to the military," Houghton said.

Soldier doesn't let blindness get in his way

Army Capt. Ivan Castro with the 7th Special Forces Group at Fort Bragg, N.C. finished the U.S. Air Force Marathon today with an unofficial time of 4:16:52.

Running alongside him every step of the way was Fred Dummar, an Army Lt. Col. who commands the Special Operations Recruiting Unit also at Ft. Bragg.

Castro said this was his first U.S. Air Force Marathon, but it definitely will not be his last. The soldier has made running long-distance races a key part of his therapy after a mortar round exploded next to him in Iraq on Sept. 2, 2006, leaving him, among other serious injuries, totally blind.

Castro decided to travel to Wright-Patterson this week with his wife Evelyn Galvis and run in the Air Force Marathon in part because he does most of his training at Pope Air Force Base, N.C., adjacent to Ft. Bragg. He thought it would also provide a good baseline pace time for his next big race, the Marine Corps Marathon in Arlington, Va. Oct. 26.

"I know the Pope Gym like the back of my hand," Castro said. "The Airmen there are fantastic."

He acknowledged another reason he was honored to run in the Air Force Marathon was Airmen were always there with "top cover" close air support for coalition ground forces "whenever we needed them."

"This is a team fight, I wouldn't be here if it weren't for everyone who helped put me back together. I'm very grateful," he added.

"Sir, your folks put on a great show here today," Castro told Air Force Col. Bradley Spacy, 88th Air Base Wing commander at Wright-Patt. Spacy congratulated the Army officer on his marathon time, shortly after the wing commander himself had just finished running the half-marathon.

Captain Castro's wife Evelyn, a New York City native, said she hopes his running will inspire other servicemembers with debilitating combat injuries to find the inner strength to adapt and overcome them.

"I want them to know if Ivan can do it, so can they," she said.

His training partner, Lt Col. Dummar, agrees Castro's optimism and strength in the face of adversity are infectious.

"It's an honor to run with him," Dummar said. "I think I get a lot more out of this than he does."