

PROFILE Cory Nolan '08



## MAYORS OF THE MARATHON

Guiding athletes with disabilities requires versatility, stamina and the ability to make quick decisions.

William Reilly, who is over 60 and has cerebral palsy, is laboring up a steep hill in New York City's Central Park. Seated in his wheelchair, propelling himself backward with his feet, "Backwards Bill," as he is known, is preparing for his 33rd New York City Marathon.

On this brilliant October morning, Cory Nolan '08 rides on a bicycle alongside Reilly and three other guides. All are decked in the bright chartreuse jerseys of Achilles International, a nonprofit that helps people with disabilities compete in athletic events.

Nolan, who has an architecture degree from Lehigh, has guided Achilles athletes through the Boston and New York marathons and through half a dozen half-marathons.

"It's never your race," says Nolan, who will skip this year's marathon because of a knee injury. "You do it for the athlete, and that keeps you going."

Just past the crest of the hill, Reilly lifts his feet as his chair begins accelerating backward down the paved path. The other guides sprint to keep up with him, holding the sides of his chair to keep it on course and yelling "Wheelchair!" to warn runners.

Nolan guided his first marathon in New York in 2011, when he ran with South African Celimpilo Khumato, who has spina bifida and competes in a hand-cranked wheelchair.

"We started an hour before the elite runners," he says. "We got to mile 5 or 6 and Meb [Keflezighi, the sixth-place finisher and top American man] blazed by. It was such an experience for Celimpilo to be on the same race course with a runner like that." When they neared the finish, Nolan grabbed a South African flag from a spectator and attached it to Khumato's chair.

Sports and philanthropy have always been part of Nolan's life. His father still

travels regularly to Africa on philanthropic trips. As a boy, Nolan stuffed suitcases with cleats and jerseys for the kids his father would see.

At Lehigh, Nolan played soccer, was president of Phi Gamma Delta fraternity, led fundraising initiatives for charities and tutored middle school students. He got a job with Deutsche Bank in New York and discovered Achilles through a friend. Last year, he secured a \$5,000 grant for Achilles from his employer to pay for travel and equipment, including expenses for the Achilles Freedom Team of Wounded Veterans, who compete each year in New York.

"Guiding can require very different kinds of activities," he says. "One athlete I guided flung his leg out to the side when he ran. I've had to keep other runners who weren't paying attention from getting accidentally kicked. And when I ran with Celimpilo in New York, at about mile 7 the police came up and told us, 'You're about to get hit by a wave of sprinters.' We had to get to the side pretty quick."

On marathon day, 275 Achilles athletes and 308 guides complete the course. Nolan helps them get started and then works the finish line.

"The crowning moment of the day was when Bill came in. The race announcer recognized him about 100 yards out and shouted: 'Here comes Achilles athlete Bill Reilly!' Everyone got super excited and they were giving him high fives."

At that moment, said Kathleen Bateman, director of Achilles' New York City chapter, "Bill was like the mayor of Central Park."

— *Chris Quirk*