

Hicksville amputee marathoner goes the extra mile

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One look at Amy [Palmiero-Winters](#) and you get the sense that regular human boundaries - the ones that say, "I couldn't possibly run 130 miles" - don't get a whole lot of play in her reasoning process.

Her toned, lithe runner's body certainly is an indication of that, as is her right leg: muscled, slightly bruised around the thigh and sporting a surgical scar near the knee.

But oh, that left leg - that's the one that tells the story, not only of a determined athlete but of a person who has little concept of "I can't."

It's been 13 years since Palmiero-Winters lost her foot in a motorcycle accident. Below the knee, her left leg is a carbon-graphite prosthetic - a certifiable ode to technological and medical advances engineered by the folks at [A Step Ahead](#) Prosthetics in Hicksville.

She was a marathon runner before the accident - the usual 26.2 miles. Now the 37-year-old Hicksville mother of two has ascended to ultramarathons - sometimes 24-hour feats of endurance - and transcended most of those pesky boundaries.

It doesn't seem to matter that she's a woman in a sport that, at the top, is dominated by males. After all, ultramarathoning evens the playing field, she said. ("Women tolerate pain better - something about childbirth," she said.) And it certainly doesn't matter that she was told before her first ultramarathon that she'd never be able to finish (she did, with 30 seconds to spare). And, before all that, when the pain was too much, she did something about it.

Two years ago, Palmiero-Winters was afflicted with neuromas - painful masses of nerve fibers that formed near her amputation - and called in the Hospital for Special Surgery.

"That cycle of pain is hard to break," said Dr. Scott Wolfe, who, along with Dr. Daniel Richman, helped bury the nerve fibers. "Sometimes the pain persists even if the nerve clusters are removed. We tried everything possible to take care of it once and for all, and, in

her case, that intense concentration that she had helped."

That procedure ended up kick-starting Palmiero-Winters' ultramarathoning kick. It paid some dividends earlier this month when she won the ESPY award for best female disabled athlete.

She rolls her eyes slightly when the "disabled" part comes up. Not because of her prosthesis, but because, after winning the 130-mile, 24-hour [Arizona](#) Road Racers competition in January against able-bodied runners, the extra qualifier on her award is unnecessary.

"She's winning these races," said Erik Schaffer, her prosthetician and colleague at A Step Ahead (Palmiero-Winters now is director of sports at the practice). "She's not a disabled athlete, she is an elite, world-class athlete, and it's five times harder for her."

To prove the point, Palmiero-Winters became the first amputee to qualify for the U.S. national track and field team and, in May, she completed the 24-hour world championship ultramarathon in Brive, France. She also was the first amputee to finish the 100-mile Western States Endurance Run over the [Sierra Nevada](#)'s rough terrain. Next on the docket is the 24-hour NorthCoast Endurance Run in September.

"It's such a mental game," said Schaffer, who attended the Brive ultramarathon. "People come in with their feet going through their shoes. Their nails are coming off, they're bloody, their bodies are shutting down and they're starving."

It's easy to say that this sort of thing is crazy, but Palmiero-Winters says her reasons are thoroughly sane.

"I run to help people," she said. "Everyone faces obstacles and mine are somewhat more obvious. You see something like this and maybe it makes your own adversities, I don't know, more overcomeable?"

She translates this to her work with A Step Ahead, where she deals with mostly children. One of her charges, an 8-year-old named Cate, is amputated below the knee and already is running 10Ks. Her mother, Hemsley Hughes, accompanied Palmiero-Winters to the ESPYs.

"It was a neat thing," Palmiero-Winters said. "She could see the possibilities."

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