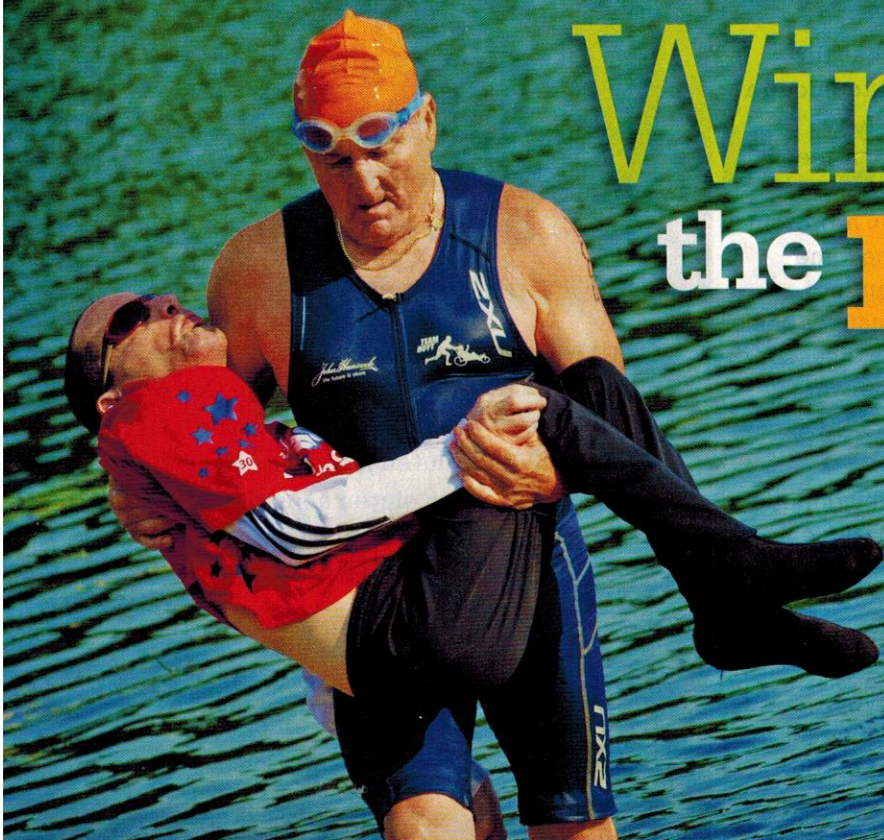


Winning the race



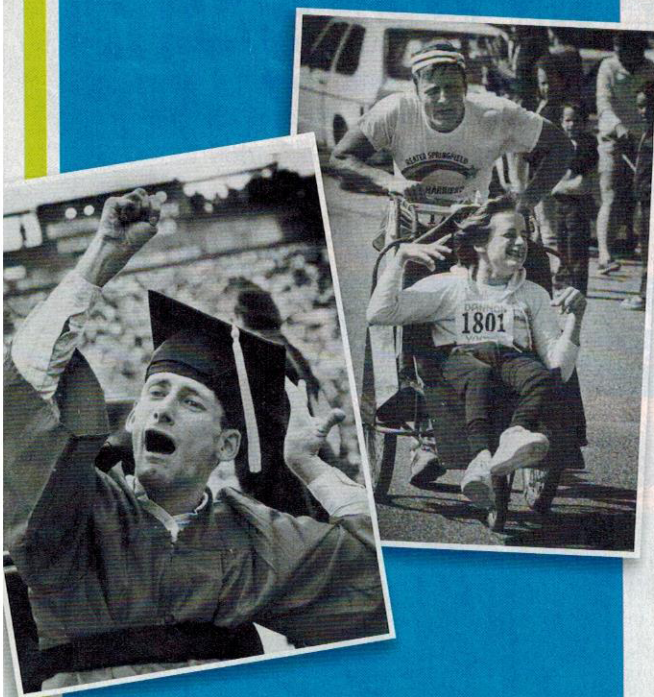
A life full of obstacles for Dick and Rick Hoyt has transformed into a message of devotion and perseverance built upon a father's love for his son.

Long before the inspiring image of his father, Dick, pushing him through a road race in his wheelchair became known to millions around the world, Rick Hoyt's life began with a struggle.

On that January day in 1962, Rick's umbilical cord wrapped around his neck at birth, depriving his brain of oxygen. Doctors diagnosed him as a quadriplegic with cerebral palsy who would find it impossible to ever live a "normal" life. "The tests came back and they were very negative," Dick says. "They said forget Rick, put him away in an institution—he's going to be nothing but a vegetable for the rest of his life." Now 51 years later, Dick can only chuckle at that prognosis—life had much more in store for Rick.

While acceptance of the disabled was much less common during that time, the Hoyts agreed that every effort would be made to raise Rick like any other child in their North Reading, Mass., neighborhood. Although he couldn't speak or walk, Rick's eyes sparkled as they followed his parents everywhere. Everyday activities like sledding, swimming, learning numbers and the alphabet were made a part of his routine, but getting him into school proved to be a serious challenge. "That was very tough because everyone said no, he doesn't understand, he won't be able to learn," Dick says. "We could tell by looking in his eyes that he understood everything we were saying."

With no means for Rick to communicate, a meeting in 1972 with a skeptical group of engineers at Tufts



University outside Boston brought proof of his intellect after a random joke made him crack up laughing. They agreed to build him a communication device for \$5,000—an interactive computer that allowed Rick to select highlighted letters with a tap of his head. His first words upon returning home were “Go Bruins!” in support of the Boston hockey team that was making a run at the Stanley Cup. A love of sports and competition would soon become an indelible part of the Hoyts’ lives.

Finally accepted into public school in 1975 at the age of 13, Rick announced to his father two years later that he wanted to participate in a five-mile run to benefit a lacrosse player who had been paralyzed in an accident. Then a captain in the Air National Guard, Dick had no running background beyond military boot camp. What he did have was an innate willingness to do things the hard way, learned while chopping wood with his nine siblings as a child to help heat a family house that at one point had no running water or indoor bathroom. Overcoming his own doubts and a lack of understanding from the racing community, Dick pushed Rick’s clumsy wheelchair through the entire race, finishing next to last. His aches and pains melted away when Rick typed out the message, “Dad, when I’m running, it feels like I’m not handicapped.” Father and son were hooked—Team Hoyt had become a reality.

Next came their first official road race, a 10K in which they also debuted a custom-made wheelchair crafted with lightweight tubes, a molded seat and modified tires. Team Hoyt finished ahead of half the 300 entrants that day, and from then on, the sense of sacrifice created by the intense bond between the two increased with each weekend of racing. Skeptics were also able to see Rick’s true personality emerge. “He just loved to be in the middle of the runners—always had a big smile on his face with his hands up in the air,” Dick says.

Despite their growing success and notoriety, Dick’s motives were still doubted by many, but the inner motivation that he felt from Rick never wavered.

“When we first started, I used to get a lot of letters and phone calls from other families with disabled people, and they were upset at me,” he recalls. “They said, ‘What are you doing dragging your disabled son through all these races? You’re just looking for glory for yourself.’ What they didn’t realize was that Rick was the one dragging me to these races.”

Team Hoyt’s focus settled on the Boston Marathon in 1981, but after being forced to race unofficially

for two years, an amazing qualifying time of 2:45.23 at the Marine Corps Marathon in Washington, D.C., got them admitted to the 1983 race. They have since become the face of the Boston Marathon—a life-size bronze statue of Team Hoyt was unveiled before this year’s race, just yards from the starting line. Since those early struggles for acceptance, Team Hoyt has completed more than 1,000 distance races and triathlons that include six Ironman competitions. They also biked and ran across America in 1992, covering 3,735 miles from Los Angeles to Boston in 45 consecutive days.

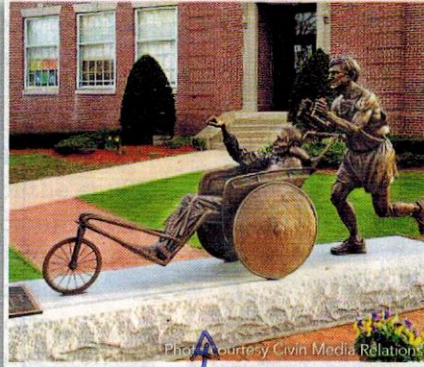
During that time, Rick achieved another incredible milestone, graduating from Boston University in 1993 after persevering for nine years to earn his degree in special education.

Dick served his country for 37 years before retiring in 1995 as a Lt. Colonel from the Air National Guard. His five-day-a-week workout schedule did more than prepare him for each weekend’s grueling races: Following a 2003 heart attack caused by significant artery blockage, Dick’s doctor informed him that he would have died

15 years ago without the regimen that has kept him in race-worthy condition. Remarkably, Dick and Rick have been able to give each other new life.

Today, Dick speaks proudly of Team Hoyt’s stories of motivation over the years, from the young lady who called searching for hope before running turned her life around, to the tales of substance abuse from people who were influenced to clean up their lives by the Hoyts’ inspiring feats. The Hoyt Foundation was also formed in 1989 with the mission of helping America’s disabled youth integrate into society and even take up endurance events, just as Rick was able to with the help of his family; it now has 20 chapters around the world.

So what’s next? Even as the Hoyts age, they have no set plans to retire from racing, aside from planning their final Boston Marathon in 2014 as a tribute to this year’s bomb victims. And with millions still being inspired by their feats, why would they? Team Hoyt still has people left to touch. “When we first started, no one really wanted anything to do with us,” Dick says. “Our message became ‘Yes You Can!’ That has always been our motto with Rick. There isn’t anything you can’t do as long as you make up your mind to do it.”



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