

Billy Quick

By Jimmy Tomlin

Very Special Athlete

BILLY QUICK KNOWS ALL ABOUT TRAILS—he's been blazing them for years. The 29-year-old High Point, N.C., man, who is developmentally disabled, spent much of his childhood surrounded by doubters who told him what he could not do, but he's spent the rest of his life proving them all wrong.

Today, the avid cyclist and runner is an international Special Olympics celebrity who has discovered he's not a developmentally disabled man who happens to be athletic, but a gifted athlete who happens to be developmentally disabled.

"I like showing people what I can do," Quick says, flashing a contagious smile. "Not many people can run as far as I can or bike as far as I can."

Indeed. Consider this abbreviated list of Quick's accomplishments:

His first distance running event was the 1990 U.S. Marine Corps Mini-Marathon, where he finished fourth overall. The following year, he won the event, setting a course record in the process. The year after that, he won again with another course record.

He has completed nearly a dozen marathons, including the New York City Marathon, the Boston Marathon and the Marabana Marathon in Havana, Cuba. His best time is three hours and 10 minutes (a pace of just over seven minutes per mile).

In 2000, he received the Special Olympics Male Athlete of the Year award from the U.S. Olympic Committee, one of countless distinctions he has earned through his 21 years of participation in Special Olympics competitions.

Quick got his first taste of distance cycling in 1995, when he participated in AXA World Ride '95, an event designed to highlight the abilities of athletes with disabilities. There he joined a large group of cyclists who rode from Los Angeles to Washington, D.C., a journey of more than 3,000 miles.

It wasn't until 2000, however, that Quick developed a genuine appreciation for rail-trails. That year, he and about 500 other participants—some with disabilities, some without—rode in Face of America, a unique, cross-country cycling event that spotlighted disabled athletes while helping promote the nation's growing network of rail-trails. Two teams of riders set off simultaneously from opposite coasts—one group left from Boston, the other from San Francisco—and met at the Gateway Arch in St. Louis, Mo.

Cosponsored by World T.E.A.M. Sports and Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (RTC), much of the Face of America 2000 ride took place on rail-trails. Quick, who has done much of his training on the often-busy streets of High Point, has fond memories of the three-week journey.

"The main thing that I loved was the scenery," he says. "We went through parks and through some wide-open mountains, and it was really nice. Just seeing the country like that was really cool."

Quick also remembers the slice of Americana he experienced as the ride wound through quaint little towns. "We went through one town that had about 850 people, and they all came out to support us and have a picnic for us," he recalls. "That was just too cool."

He took part in this fall's Face of America 2002, a three-day bike ride from New York City's "Ground Zero"—the site of the World Trade Center's tragic collapse on Sept. 11, 2001—to the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. The ride honors those individuals who lost their lives in the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.





Quick has participated in several events sponsored by Charlotte, N.C.-based World T.E.A.M. Sports (T.E.A.M. stands for “The Exceptional Athlete Matters”). He also serves on the organization’s Athletes Advisory Council. Officials with the nonprofit organization have been impressed by Quick’s devotion to the group’s goals.

“Our main focus is working with athletes who have disabilities, either physical or mental,” says Lance Pellow, World T.E.A.M. Sports assistant director for sports programs and a personal friend of Quick’s. “Billy has been with us since about 1993 or ’94. What I love is that he has continued to work our mission, bringing numerous Special Olympics athletes into our program. And on a personal level, I’ve found him to be a very friendly man who is amazingly caring about the people he’s participating with. It’s been an awesome experience getting to know him.”

In addition to preparing for Face of America 2002, Quick spent much of his summer cross-training for the October Washington, D.C., Marine Corps Marathon.

Because he’s both a runner and a cyclist, he looks forward to the completion of the Bicentennial Greenway, a 17-mile, multiple-use trail that will connect High Point’s City Lake Park and the Guilford Courthouse National Military Park in Greensboro, N.C. About seven miles of paved trail are open leading from City Lake Park, and about three miles of paved trail leading from the Greensboro park. The two segments are expected to be linked by 2006, according to local government officials.

At that point, Quick figures the greenway—where he currently trains from time to time—will become his favorite outdoor training facility. “When they’re finished building the greenway, I think I would use that more than riding in the streets, because you don’t have to worry about traffic or people blowing their horn at you,” says Quick.

Meanwhile, Quick keeps adding accomplishments to his resume. He remains active in Special Olympics, which has afforded him the opportunity to rub shoulders with the likes of Arnold Schwarzenegger, Kathy Ireland and Grant Hill, not to mention former President Bill Clinton. He plans to return to Havana for another Cuban marathon in November, and he continues to look for ways to promote athletes with disabilities.

What inspires Quick to keep on keeping on? He says it’s the host of teachers and coaches who have supported him through the years.

“They’ve always encouraged me to just go out there and do the best that I can, so that’s what I do,” he says. “I give my all each time that I go out.”

Greensboro, N.C.-based Jimmy Tomlin, a freelance writer and columnist for the High Point Enterprise, has been an admirer of Billy Quick for nearly a decade.