

A WEEKLY GUIDE TO THE



# 2007 SUN RUN



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**Teri Thorson competes in the 2006 Sun Run. The B.C. resident used mental strategies to overcome her physical setback.**

# POWER OF THE MIND

Disabled former dancer Teri Thorson proves having a positive attitude can work wonders



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**A**s a professional dancer who lost all use of her legs and hands in a car accident 10 years ago, Teri Thorson had to give herself a pep talk almost every day to keep moving forward.

"At first, like most disabled people, I thought my life was over," she says. "I thought I'd never go back to work, never drive a car, have kids, get married. I thought I'd just sit at home all day not doing anything."

But Thorson didn't wallow for long. Within three years of finishing rehab, she was working, driving and jetting off to Athens to compete in the Paralympic Games 2004 as a wheelchair racer. In three short years she'd gone from a complete novice to a Paralympian. Who knew?

Overcoming her physical

handicap was tough, but just like a Sun Run virgin who feels like the training is so difficult, so painful, so hopeless, Thorson struggled much more to combat the mental barriers.

#### USING MENTAL STRATEGIES

Getting from "I can't do this" to "I can and I did," takes mental strategies. Luckily, there are lots of them.

Thorson uses self-talk to overcome her negative feelings. She reminds herself that she's not racing to win. She took up wheelchair racing to fill the gap



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left by dancing and to connect with a new circle of friends.

She didn't expect it would increase her strength so much that she would no longer require home support.

She didn't expect to be travelling all over the world to compete.

Those were the bonuses that have kept her at it — just like the success of finishing that

first Sun Run keeps many returning.

At first, Thorson finished last in every race. Even knowing she should expect that, she suffered letdowns.

She had to talk herself out of caring where she placed, reminding herself of her reasons for taking part. She gave herself the same talk in Athens as she crouched at the start line with far stronger and more mobile competitors.

"There was the hopelessness that I would never get a medal, but I reminded myself that did-

*Racing isn't who I am. It's a part of what I like to do. I don't need to win.*

TERI THORSON



n't matter," she says. "Racing isn't who I am. It's a part of what I like to do. I don't need to win."

#### HOW TO BEAT YOUR DOUBTS

Sports psychology consultant Laura Farres, who works with elite athletes, has lots of mental tricks Sun Runners can use to beat back their doubts. Distract yourself, she suggests. It's a

hugely effective tool for beginning runners, taking their minds off the pain or fatigue they feel. Or try focusing on a single word or mantra like push, or stride.

Some people use a meditative focus like rhythm, she says. "They count: one, two, three, four. One, two, three, four."

"It engages the self in a rhythm and distracts the chatty side of the brain."

Visually minded people employ images to get through the rough spots. They might imagine themselves crossing the finish line in a great flourish. One runner she knows sees himself as the Energizer bunny who keeps going and going and going. Another imagines her tight shoulders as ice and then visualizes them melting.

A third imagines a commentator following his every step, noting when he flags and commenting on what he needs to do to pick it up.

"There are many crazy ways that people push past the mental barriers. But it doesn't matter how crazy it is if it works," says Farres.

Like Thorson, once you find it, there is no limit to what you can do. You may find yourself running the marathon at the London Olympics.

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