

AUGUST 19, 2014

Cleveland Clinic
Florida

your health

Quick Read

With the cooler weather coming, it's time to run. Prevention.com has five good tips to keep you on track to train for a 5K. For the complete list, go to www.prevention.com



PROSTHETICS

Brian Douglas, a 10-year-old from Lauderhill, is inspiring other amputees with his running prowess

Blade RUNNER

MIKE STOCKER/SUN SENTINEL

BORN TO RUN: Brian Douglas runs on the track at Joseph C. Carter Park in Fort Lauderdale. He lost both legs due to birth defects, yet swims and runs competitively. The nonprofit organization Amputee Blade Runners has pledged to donate running and walking legs to him until he fully matures.

BY ROBERT NOLIN
Sun Sentinel

He may lack legs, but Brian Douglas is fleet of foot. And now he'll be sprinting at an even faster pace.

The 10-year-old Lauderhill boy proved his mettle earlier this year by running a 5K charity race on rubber braces he calls "stubbies." His inspiring feat drew the attention of a Tennessee-based nonprofit organization, which donated to Brian a spiffy new pair of blade-style running prosthetics.

There's a catch, though: Brian must run even more, at least three 5K races a year.

But for the aspiring athlete, that's a fine exchange.

"It's a pretty fair price," he said. "They make my legs, and I only have to run."

The goal: to inspire other amputees.

Birth defects, including missing tibia bones, forced amputation of both Brian's legs below the knee at 10 months. But that didn't stop him from dashing about on his stubbies — "A leg shorter than all of his friends," said mom Samantha Cools-Lartique — or swimming competitively against able-bodied opponents.

"He's a pretty confident boy," Cools-Lartique said.

That confidence was on full display in January, when Brian ran and rode a wheelchair in a 5K race sponsored by the St. Anthony Knights of Columbus. Proceeds went to the Children's Diagnostic and Treatment Center of Fort Lauderdale, which serves kids with special health needs like Brian.

"He really went out of his comfort zone to compete; he was running on his stubs," said Amanda Mitchell, the center's director of development. "When he crossed the finish line, everybody had tears in their eyes."

Brian's efforts, and a Sun Sentinel account of his run, caught the notice of two nonprofit organizations dedicated to assisting disabled athletes: Amputee Blade Runners of Nashville and the Challenged Athletes Foundation of San Diego.

The Challenged Athletes Foundation awarded \$1,500 to Brian for swimming expenses such as coaching and equipment at Fort Lauderdale's International Swimming Hall of Fame, where he trains.

In June, Amputee Blade Runners flew Brian and his family to Nashville, where he was fitted with custom-made, Olympic-style running blades. The organization then surprised him with a second pair of prosthetics: special-made walking legs with shoes, which he can don for daily use or other sports like basketball or football.

"I thought they were just giving us running blades; then we found out they were actually going to give us a new pair of legs along with the running blades," Cools-Lartique said. "I was extremely happy for Brian."

The balky old stubbies, Brian's main mode of locomotion, have been relegated to a closet.

"He didn't spend much time in them," his mother said. "Now he's always in his legs; he uses his legs a lot more."

Especially the running blades.

"They just make me feel like I'm the fastest person on the Earth," Brian said. "It's an exhilarating feeling. I would like to be in the Olympics one day, but I'm gunning for the paralympics."

And the best part: Amputee Blade Runners will replace Brian's current legs with new, larger ones as he grows, until he reaches maturity at 18 or 19. Such prosthetics, which for a growing boy need replacing roughly every

year, could run between \$8,000 and \$20,000 a leg.

"I don't think I could ever afford those kinds of prosthetics for Brian," Cools-Lartique said. Amputee Blade Runners, started three years ago, has a goal of providing athletic prosthetics to one deserving amputee in every state. It has fitted athletes in 28 states so far, and Brian is the first from Florida.

Trey Barclay, ABR's director, said his organization saw the newspaper story about Brian, then screened him as a prosthetic recipient.

"He seemed a great candidate," Barclay said of the A student. "He's very goal-oriented. We're looking for people like that."

A math lover, Brian was named to the Honors Society of the Broward County Urban League. He just started sixth grade at the North Broward Academy of Excellence in Tamarac. He helps Cools-Lartique, a single mom, with his sister Anayah, 8, who suffers from chromosomal abnormalities and requires daily care.

Barclay said Brian was more than ready for quality prosthetics. "The first time he put on his legs he jumped around," the director said. "He never had the ability to do that with his old legs."

Through donated labor and material, ABR was able to obtain Brian's legs — which can take up to 60 man-hours to craft — for under \$15,000, far below the average cost of \$50,000 to \$75,000, Barclay said.

The provision that Brian run at least three 5K races a year, the equivalent of about nine miles, is asked of all ABR prosthetic recipients. "We want someone to spread the word about us, and to spread the word about amputee awareness," Barclay said. "We hope he inspires more people to get out and move."