

The History of RaceRunning

By Mansoor Siddiqi, the world's first RaceRunning athlete, coach for the National Danish RaceRunning team, member of the International CPISRA RaceRunning Committee.

The First RaceRunning Bike

In the years 1982-1990 I was participating in backward wheel chair racing. I did not do very well and I was not satisfied with my performances, because I never felt that I was able to perform one hundred percent. I felt that I had power and energy in me that I could not use because of my spasticity and the way my wheel chair was designed. Therefore, in 1991 I contacted the famous Danish wheel chair athlete Connie Hansen - who is also an occupational therapist - and asked her to help me build a new kind of wheel chair racer.

One day Connie asked me why I insisted on going backward. Would it not be a better idea moving forward instead? I thought so too and Connie started making drafts for a new kind of three-wheeled bike without pedals. We built it from bicycle spare parts, the backrest of an office chair and some tubes from an old vacuum cleaner. Connie's father, a retired blacksmith, forged and combined all the parts into a new piece of equipment that I could use for running. We soon realized that this was way better than going backward. My old 100m record was 38 seconds and the very first time I tried to beat it with my new running equipment I broke it with ten seconds.

We were convinced that this new running equipment would be of interest to other than me but we needed to show it to the rest of the world. In 1991 I decided to participate - out of competition - in Robin Hoods Games. I competed against the CP2L athletes, the ones going backward, and this really was an eye opener to the CPISRA.¹ One of the classifiers made the following comment the first time he saw me on the new piece of running equipment: "This is definitely the most natural way to run: When you are going backward you are trying to escape something, but when running forward you are attacking it!"

After Robin Hood Games in 1991 the new running equipment was called *The Walking Machine*. In 1992, when we were still testing it, the Paralympics in Barcelona was taking place. The official games mascot was a girl named Petra. She did not have any arms but she had strong legs and she was good at any kind of sport. We found that

¹ Cerebral Palsy International Sports & Recreation Association, www.cpisra.org

Petra symbolized the whole potential of our new sport: that it is possible to compensate for every kind of handicap and that you should always look for unused and unfulfilled potential in every single human being. We therefor decided to change the name from *The Walking Machine* to *Petra*. But later, as we started to introduce the sport throughout the world, we recognized that the running equipment needed a more comprehensible name and we decided to call it a *RaceRunner*.

The Development in Denmark

The Danish RaceRunning Clubs

The two years 1990 and 1991 we spent developing prototypes of the RaceRunner that could be used by other than me. In 1992 RaceRunning started to spread all over Denmark. Connie Hansen started up a team in Hvidovre Athletics Club for young people with spasticity and soon RaceRunning became a popular sport among spastics, a group of people who were not used to having a sport that could really make them sweat and raise their pulse.

In 1993 Frederiksberg Handicap Sport (FHI) in Copenhagen started up with RaceRunning as their main discipline. RaceRunners started to appear in other sport clubs in the Copenhagen area and a common training session once a month was arranged so that the RaceRunning athletes could meet one another.

During the nineties Connie Hansen and I tried to introduce RaceRunning in the rest of Denmark. In the beginning a lot of the physiotherapists and occupational therapist were concerned if this new way of running would actually increase the spasticity. But very soon they observed the opposite, i.e. the exact same progress in health and movement that the athletes experienced themselves. And in places like the Geelsgaard School RaceRunning soon became a part of the physiotherapist's treatment and the pupils started practicing RaceRunning in their spare time.

In 1998 RaceRunning was for the first time introduced outside the Copenhagen area, i.e. in Aalborg, as a collaboration between the local athletics club, the local sport organization for disabled and a local school for children with special needs. The main target was to establish a regular training programme with weekly training sessions in which the children could participate in their spare time. This initiative finally succeeded in 2007 and today Aalborg is one of the major RaceRunning Clubs in Denmark.

After finishing primary school a lot of the young athletes doing RaceRunning in Copenhagen went to attend the Egmont Højskole in the Aarhus area. In 2005 the Egmont School established a regular RaceRunning programme for the students and young disabled people from the whole Aarhus area started coming to the Egmont for these training sessions.

From here on RaceRunning was spreading rapidly throughout Denmark. In 2005 RaceRunning was established in Sønderborg, in 2007 in Odense and also in Randers, one of the major RaceRunning clubs today. In 2010 even more RaceRunning clubs were established in Skive, Aabenraa, Næstved and in 2012 RaceRunning came to the island of Bornholm.

Concurrently with this national Danish development some common training weekends for all the Danish RaceRunning clubs were introduced. Every year in Denmark there are now two common training weekends for all Danish RaceRunning athletes and since 2011 a RaceRunning Camp for Children under 14 has been held every single year.

RaceRunners Camp & Cup

Ever since 1997 an annual RaceRunning summer Camp has been held under the name RaceRunners Camp & Cup. During the first five years it was exclusively for Danish athletes but ever since 2002 the Camp has been open to international participants. Year after year the event has been improved and extended, the event now consisting of an eight days camp, a children's camp for three days and in the end a big Cup that lasts for two whole days.

In 2009 RaceRunning athletes from six countries were participating in the Camp. Denmark, Brazil, Portugal, The Faeroe Islands, Sweden and Spain were represented at the Camp and for the first time CPISRA made the decision to place the World Championships in RaceRunning together with the Camp. CPISRA also sent a delegate and two classifiers to the Camp and the task of implementing the new RR Classification System - exclusively developed for RaceRunning - took a huge step forward.

In 2010 the two classifiers once again participated in the summer Camp and this was also the first European Championships in RaceRunning. In the days leading up to the Championships all RaceRunning athletes were classified according to the new system. The classifiers were most pleased with the classifying process and decided to apply the new system at the European Championships. Later on the RR Classification System was officially approved at the CPISRA General Assembly. By 2013 it was

already evident that the new system worked very well and we witnessed an increased number of exciting races with less than one second separating the bronze, silver and gold medals.

At the 17th RaceRunners Camp & Cup 48 athletes from 10 different countries were participating in the biggest RaceRunning Camp so far. One of the main reasons for the growth was that both CPISRA and IWAS were now offering RaceRunning. Denmark, Brazil, The Faeroe Islands, Holland, Norway, Russia, Scotland, Sweden, Spain and Tunisia were all represented at the 17th RaceRunners Camp & Cup.

This was the first time for Russia and the Russian RaceRunning athlete Nikita Kuznetsov was a very good example of how fast an athlete can develop if he or she receives the right coaching. When Nikita arrived he could not run more than five meters without getting spasms. After just one week of training he participated in the 40m, 60m and 100m races at the final Cup. Nikita's results clearly show what RaceRunning can do for the severely disabled and it was an eye opener to the Russian Team Manager: "We had absolutely no idea that so many athletes with so different types of handicap could benefit from RaceRunning. Also we were surprised to learn how much the right training and coaching can do for an athlete."

The impressive number of participants at the 17th RaceRunners Camp & Cup was exceeded already in 2014 at the 18th RaceRunners Camp & Cup. This year 67 athletes from 11 different countries participated: Brazil, The Faeroe Islands, Denmark, Holland, Norway, Portugal, Russia, Scotland, Sweden, Hungary and the USA.

Promotion and Organization: New Initiatives

In order to promote RaceRunning and to recruit new athletes the first so-called Visionsseminar ('Seminar of Visions') was held in 2007. Public relations materials was produced and Randers Real and Frederiksberg Handicap-Idræt were chosen as the main responsible clubs for recruiting new athletes. In 2007 RaceRunning also came online with www.racerunning.dk, and RaceRunning Denmark began doing promotions at various fairs and exhibitions.

In 2007 nine Danish and one Norwegian RaceRunner participated in the Tour de Bornholm bicycle race for the first time. Ever since RaceRunning has been represented at this major event and in 2010 RaceRunning also started participating in Horsens Run, another major event. In 2008 RaceRunning Denmark for the first time hired a mental coach for the athletes, many of them having problem with nervousness when participating in competitions. In 2010 a new RaceRunning bike model appeared: the RaceRunner GTX and a lot of Danish athletes began using it.

In order to promote RaceRunning in Denmark as well as internationally a number of new committees were established in 2011. Among these was a scientific committee trying to provide a science-based evidence of the positive effects of RaceRunning and also a committee working on the optimization of the RaceRunning bike.

The Danish National Team and the Elite Concept

In 2000 the Danish Sport Organization for Disabled (DHIF) wanted to structure the sport of RaceRunning in Denmark. DHIF appointed me, Mansoor Siddiqi, as the head coach of the Danish National RaceRunning Team – succeeding the unofficial national team that had existed since 1995.

At the Seminar of Visions in November 2011 a new RaceRunning Elite Concept 2012-2016 was established in order to structure the training of the elite athletes and measure their progress in a more professional way. The RaceRunning Elite Concept 2012-2016 has 4 primary affiliated coaches and the purpose is also to re-educate the coaches in the local clubs. The main targets of the concept are that: (i) all athletes in the Danish National RaceRunning Team must achieve results within 5-7% of their personal records at all competitions in 2016; (ii) all athletes representing the Danish National RaceRunning Team must finish top three in their classes; and (iii) all club coaches will be able to conduct training sessions of high quality in the local RaceRunning clubs.

International Development

A Question of Priorities

CPISRA took interest in RaceRunning already in 1993 but up until 2001 the organization did not really provide any actual support. Therefore, it was obvious that the international spreading of RaceRunning should be initiated by Denmark – with DHIF being supportive from the very beginning.

The first time RaceRunning was displayed internationally was back in 1994 at the Athletics World Championships for Disabled in Berlin. I did not get the opportunity to show RaceRunning at the main stadium only at the warming up stadium, but a whole lot of athletes and coaches became interested and wanted to learn more about RaceRunning.

In 1995 the CPISRA European Games in Nottingham, England, took place, and RaceRunning was represented as a show discipline. As the sport was still very young only Danish athletes (six) participated in the 100m, 200, 400m and 800m races. A lot of countries showed interest in RaceRunning and the CPISRA was now most positive regarding the acceptance of RaceRunning within the organization.

In 1997 RaceRunning was for the first time represented as an official event at the CPISRA World Games in Nottingham and for the first time other countries than Denmark were represented, i.e. England and Japan. The British Organization for Spastics had bought two RaceRunning bikes from Denmark in 1996 and the Japanese Organization for Spastics had succeeded in constructing their own bikes. The two new countries was represented by one athlete each, Denmark by eight athletes. Even though the Danish athletes generally performed a lot better we still witnessed some examples of real international competition. At these World Games in Nottingham in 1997 a whole lot of new countries realized how even the most disabled spastics are able to compete in sport at a high level.

After the World Games in Nottingham the Danish delegation had a meeting with the executive committee of CPISRA. On one hand they denied us economical support in the task of spreading RaceRunning internationally. On the other hand they wanted us to participate in the following CPISRA general assembly in Prague, Czech Republic, where we did a work shop for the local sport clubs and the countries participating in the assembly. We got a lot of positive feedback. The representatives found that RaceRunning was an excellent sport for the most severely disabled spastics. But like the CPISRA they objected that the RaceRunning bike was too expensive (10.000 Danish Kroner). Our delegation replied to this that a wheel chair racer costs around 30.000 Danish Kroner. So in this perspective it is really just a question of priorities – and the willingness to try something new. This situation meant that Denmark had to continue with this task of spreading RaceRunning internationally.

On Our Own: The First Three Countries

After the CPISRA general assembly in Prague it became clear to us that we could not count on the support of CPISRA for the present. In DHIF we therefor agreed that we had to take care of the international development of RaceRunning ourselves. Portugal, Ireland and Belgium had shown interest in participating in a development project and we chose to start up a project in one new country each year. Each participating country paid 7.000 Danish Kroner and in return they had three RaceRunning bikes and one or two workshops. Also the countries had to participate in the international competitions for the next two years to come. The first year we had our expenses covered by the Egmont Foundation.

Portugal, April 1998:

In Portugal we collaborated with the Portuguese Organization for Spastics. The primary task of this organization was their treatment system and they therefore hired a consultant to take care of the implementation of a new sport. We did two all-day seminars for physiotherapists and occupational therapist, coaches and teachers. The workshops consisted of a theoretical part about RaceRunning and its possibilities and a practical part where the participants had the opportunity to try out a RaceRunner at the stadium.

Just like the physiotherapists and occupational therapist in Denmark the Portuguese physiotherapists and occupational therapist were rather sceptic towards the new style of running that the RaceRunning bike caused. It caused too many spasms they found. On the other hand the athletes looked very happy on the bikes. The RaceRunner gave them the opportunity to really feel and use their own body and already at the end of the seminar they had experienced a tremendous progress in their running abilities. At the second workshop the physiotherapists and occupational therapist were already way more positive towards RaceRunning.

Following the two workshops the Portuguese sports consultant decided that he would work on spreading RaceRunning to the rest of Portugal and the Portuguese Organization for Spastics wanted to send two athletes to the CPISRA WC (where another show race was set) and to the CPISRA EC in 1999. Since then RaceRunning has gradually been spreading throughout the country and Portugal has collaborated with DHIF on a project supporting this development.

Ireland, January 1999:

In 1999 we did a single workshop in Ireland for physiotherapists and occupational therapist as well as children and young adults who had the opportunity to try out a RaceRunning bike. Once again we saw a lot of enthusiasm from the new athletes. After the workshop Ireland participated in the 1999 CPISRA European Championships with one RaceRunning athlete.

Belgium, January 1999:

In Belgium they have institutions with around 700 spastics and these institutions are working closely together with the sport clubs. We did a workshop for 25 physiotherapists and 30-40 children and young adults from an institution and once again it was lovely to experience the positive reactions from the athletes when they

tried the RaceRunning bike for the first time. It was later arranged that Belgium would send a group of athletes to the 1999 CPISRA European Championships. Since then several Belgian sport clubs have started up RaceRunning and RaceRunning has been represented at the Belgium Open Championships, and the National Danish RaceRunning Team has participated in this event more than once.

International Coordination

We saw a very clear indication of the effect of these development projects in 1998 when RaceRunning was invited to the Athletics WC in Birmingham as a show event. At the Birmingham WC the CPISRA president also asked RaceRunning to do some workshops at the CPISRA general assembly in Argentina the same year. With economic support from DHIF we went to Argentina and on the first days we had a meeting with the CPISRA where the organization stated that they really wanted to see the growth of RaceRunning continuing, but also that they did not have the money to support this development financially. In spite of this the trip to Argentina was not a waste at all.

At the Argentinian general assembly we experienced a whole lot more interest and enthusiasm in RaceRunning than we had experienced in Prague. RaceRunning was one the most thoroughly debated subjects at the assembly and we had a lot of positive responses from the athletes participating in our workshops. At the first day of the workshop there was one of the Argentinian athletes who could barely move her leg when she was placed on the RaceRunner. On the second day she could already run. The delegates from Taiwan bought the two RaceRunning bikes that we had brought along. They wanted to initiate a production of bikes in their home country. Delegates from Australia announced that they had already begun producing bikes and that RaceRunning would be an official event at the big Southern Cross Athletics event in Australia.

The next year it became obvious that RaceRunning was really spreading across the world. RaceRunning athletes from four different countries, Japan, Portugal, Ireland and Denmark travelled to Nottingham to participate in the CPISRA European Championships. In 2001 at CPISRA World Championships, also in Nottingham, RaceRunning had become even more popular and athletes from England, Belgium and Czech Republic were now also participating

After the competitions at the 2001 CPISRA World Championships Denmark invited all the countries to a meeting and delegates from eight countries showed up to a debate on how RaceRunning could become even more widespread internationally. The conclusion was that CPISRA had to appoint a coordinator for RaceRunning who

should collaborate with the CPISRA in order to develop a new strategy for recruiting new RaceRunning athletes and countries.

In the same year I was appointed International RaceRunning Coordinator by the CPISRA. My first task was to investigate how RaceRunning was doing in all the CPISRA member countries. As expected only as few as five countries had RaceRunning on their programme. But we were surprised to learn that as much as 20 of the CPISRA member countries were interested in including RaceRunning in their sport programmes. This investigation meant that more countries became seriously interested in RaceRunning and among these countries where Canada, which in 2004 implemented RaceRunning in their sport programme for spastics.

In 2011 the DHIF President Karl Vilhelm Nielsen, also the Vice President of IWAS, met with CPISRA President Koos Engelbrecht during the RaceRunners Camp & Cup. They agreed that the two organizations would be collaborating to promote RaceRunning internationally. The first common initiative was to send four Danish RaceRunning athletes to Sharjah in the UAE in order to participate in the IWAS World Games, this resulting in an increasing international focus on RaceRunning. The Danish team was also invited to the IWAS general assembly where the athletes had the opportunity to tell all the delegates about RaceRunning.

In 2011 a RaceRunning committee was set up in collaboration with the CPISRA. The object of the committee was to promote RaceRunning internationally. In 2011 Sweden also started focusing on RaceRunning and Connie and I were invited to Västerås to do a RaceRunning workshop. In 2014 the RaceRunning clubs in Sweden initiated a project lasting for three years. The aims of the project was to recruit at least 100 new RaceRunning athletes; to establish local, regional and national championships in Sweden; to establish functional RaceRunning clubs in at least 10 Swedish cities; to have more Swedish RaceRunning athletes competing at the international events on elite level; and to provide more courses for coaches and physiotherapists in Sweden.

In 2012 a CPISRA Championships was for the first time held outside of Denmark, i.e. in Portugal. On addition to this an international youth competition, set up by the European Paralympic Committee, took place in Czech Republic. In 2012 I went to Budapest in Hungary together with another representative for RaceRunning Denmark to do a workshop at the Petö Institute. The interest in RaceRunning in Hungary was massive. Hungarian national television interviewed us and we were also invited to demonstrate RaceRunning at a big institution for physically disabled young adults.

The Future of RaceRunning

After 25 years with development and promotion of RaceRunning it is most evident that RaceRunning has its *raison d'être* and that RaceRunning is a sport that can make a huge difference in order to include the most severely disabled in the international sport elite. We have achieved a whole lot since the first prototype was built in 1991 and we have spread the knowledge of RaceRunning among disabled around the world. But we still face some challenges and obstacles that we have to overcome before our sport will be recognized at the highest international level.

One of our primary targets is that RaceRunning will become an IPC event in the IPC Athletics² programme. In 2013 the first RaceRunning World Championships took place in Holland under the leadership of IPC Athletics and this was a huge step towards the official recognition from the IPC Athletics. But before RaceRunning can become an official IPC Athletics event the following criteria must be met:

- There must be at least ten athletes coming from four different countries and two different continents in each of the classes.
- In all these countries there must be regular competitions on a local as well as on a national level.

The international RaceRunning rankings from 2014 show that the classes of RR1 male, RR2 male and RR2 women all meet the criteria listed above on the distances of 100m, 200m and 400m. CPISRA is therefore negotiating with the IPC Athletics in order to have RaceRunning on the event programme for the national and international competitions from 2017 onward. Since RaceRunning cannot become a part of the Paralympics before the sport has become an IPC discipline, it is very important that even more countries throughout the world are taking up RaceRunning. We need to see the most severely disabled on the biggest international sport arenas.

In 2015 the International RaceRunning Committee had a meeting with Edinburgh University and the IPC Chief Classifier Dr. Peter Van de Vliet. It was a great meeting and Dr. Peter Van de Vliet was not worried about the physical/motional aspect anymore, which used to be an issue. His focus was now on the classification. Scientific research in classification takes time though and because of this factor it is probably not possible for RaceRunning to become a Paralympic event already in 2020.

² International Paralympic Committee, www.paralympic.org

Craig Carscadden, Chairman of the RaceRunning-committee, concluded after this meeting that there were now strong arguments for RaceRunning to be introduced as an event at the IPC Athletics competitions. He thinks that 2017 is realistic time frame for this. In this way the development of a new classification will be pushed forward. Edinburgh University is continuing their research in RaceRunning and in Denmark a similar collaboration with the University of Southern Denmark has begun.

All together the future of RaceRunning looks bright!



Mansoor Siddiqi and the very first RaceRunner bike ever built. Tarup Pårup Athletics Stadium, 1991 (today: SDU Athletics Stadium).