

# Team Kucowski: Inspiration, Perspiration & Spunk!

By David Block

Ted Kucowski made it possible for his nine-year-old son Brandon to take part in marathons and triathlons. This is noteworthy in itself, but in Brandon's case it is quite inspiring because he was born with Schizencephaly, a disorder in which the corpus colosum was undeveloped in his brain. This caused Brandon to be a spastic quadriplegic, unable to talk. His father had a difficult time finding a doable activity that Brandon could enjoy. Ted Kucowski remembered: "As a parent of a child who was unable to do anything for himself, it was hard finding a suitable activity. He couldn't go out and play football or catch or ride a bike. I had to figure out something that he could enjoy. In the meantime, I was trying to stay on the healthy side, so I started jogging a mile with him in a baby jogger. I found that that soothed him. He enjoyed it. When we ran our first race together he was all smiles the rest of the day. He enjoyed being around the crowd." This was back in May 2004 when the father and son duo did their first 5k (3.1 miles) together.

Last year Ted and Brandon began doing triathlons together after they learned about Team Hoyt.

Rick Hoyt was born with a similar condition to that of Brandon's, yet he and his father Dick took part in numerous marathons and triathlons.

Ted realized that he and Brandon could do the same.

In the water, Ted Kucowski swims with Brandon by towing him in an inflatable boat. When he bikes, he pulls Brandon in a bike trailer and when he runs, he pushes Brandon in a racing wheelchair.

"Whether we just do a marathon, a 5k or a triathlon, Brandon gets excited," said Ted Kucowski. "His face lights up and he becomes so alert."

Kucowski added: "Brandon's physical therapist swears that he improved developmentally and physically because of the stimulation of the triathlons. His cognition also improved."

This past spring, Ted and Brandon met Team Hoyt at Boston College. "It was a wonderful experience," said Kucowski. "I told Dick that he and Rick inspired us. Dick was so touched."

One advantage that Team Kucowski has had over Team Hoyt was dealing exclusively with encouraging race organizers and fellow participants. Team Hoyt

was less fortunate when they began competing in the '70s. Dick Hoyt remembered that when they initially took part in races, race directors, participants and wheelchair entrants did not want them there, but that never discouraged them from entering. "They all snubbed us," said Dick

Hoyt, "but that didn't matter. Every time we raced, Rick had a huge smile on his face; his arms were up in the air, he was so happy. He called himself free-bird, because he never felt so free before."

Eventually, the officials and all the race entrants warmed up to the Hoyt Team.

"They could see that Rick had quite a personality and a great sense of humor."

The only people who objected were able-bodied people who had relatives with disabilities. "They used to call me and send me letters asking, 'what are you doing dragging your disabled son through all these races? You're looking for glory for yourself!' They didn't realize that Rick was dragging his father through all these races. I did these races because Rick wanted to. Otherwise, I wouldn't have been out there."

Team Hoyt paved the way for duos such as Team Kucowski.

To date, Team Kucowski competed in over 30 races, including one marathon (26.2 miles) two half marathons (13.1 miles) and numerous triathlons.

Ted Kucowski concluded by thanking the following: Jackson PBA 168 (Police Benevolent Association), Dr. Victoria Roeder of Growing Smiles Pediatric Dentistry and Drinkables who helped purchase Brandon's racing wheelchair.

