



# Amputee Runner Pushes the Limits

## Woman Competes in Grueling Ironman Competition With Artificial Leg

**Dec. 5, 2004** — - Sarah Reinertsen remembers growing up feeling different than other kids.

She was born with a rare tissue disorder that made one of her legs much shorter than the other. When she was seven, her left leg was amputated.

"I always remember that it was tough for me to keep up, especially when it came to sports," said Reinertsen. "So I never really thought I could be an athlete or that I could be on a team. I just didn't feel like I was any good."

But that all changed when she was 11 and met an amputee marathon runner named Paddy Rossbach.

"It was like, wow, you mean I can dream of being an athlete? You mean that's possible for me?" said Reinertsen.

And Reinertsen didn't just dream of becoming an athlete. She did it.

### Setting Records

Running with a special prosthetic "leg," Reinertsen, 30, has set five world records for above-the-knee amputee athletes in competitions from sprints to marathons. This month, she became the first disabled female featured on the cover of *Runner's World* magazine.

And just as Rossbach mentored her, Reinertsen now does the same for 16-year-old Scout Bassett.

"It provides me with so much encouragement and inspiration," said Bassett.

Reinertsen continues to push the limits. In October, she became the first disabled female to enter the grueling Hawaii Ironman contest, which consists of a 2 ½-mile swim, a 112-mile bike ride and then a 26-mile marathon.

"Ironman was one of the scariest goals for me to set, because no woman on an artificial leg had done the Hawaii Ironman," she said. "I really was blazing a trail where it hadn't been done before."

### Falling Short, But Not Giving Up

But during the bike ride, Reinertsen was slowed by 40 mph winds and dehydration. She just missed the 5 hour, 30 minute cut-off for the race, finishing with a time of 5:44.

Reinertsen was devastated by falling short.

"You know, I'm not used to failing, and I had worked so hard and come so far to not do it," she said. "I mean, it still upsets me because it wasn't supposed to happen that way."

But Reinertsen, whose motto is "always try," says she'll be back in Hawaii next year.

"I have unfinished business in Kona; I have to go back," she said.

For her, running is about more than competing or even winning. It's a way to prove herself -- to herself. When she runs, she says, she soars.

"Running, it is the one moment in my life where I really feel alive," she said. "You know when your arms are pumping and your legs are moving and your heart is beating. That's when I feel alive."

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