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Autistic Twins Ready For NYC Marathon

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Next month's New York City Marathon promises to be an especially emotional and memorable event for a very unique Great Neck family.

Alex and Jamie Schneider, Robyn and Allan Schneider's identical 23-year-old twin sons, are both severely autistic and they will run in the Nov. 3 event for the first time to raise funds and awareness for autism. This is by no means Alex and Jamie's first marathon, having competed in more than 120 races, including two Boston Marathons, two Hamptons Marathons and one Marine Corps Marathon.

Robyn Schneider, the boys' mother, is extremely proud of their accomplishments and says, "I'll be waiting at the finish line as I always am." Alex, the faster runner, figures to cross that line first and his brother is also expected to follow a little later, accompanied by his father, also a runner.

"Alex runs a 5:25 minute mile and is on pace to run a three hour 15 minute marathon in November,"



his mother added. "He consistently finishes in the top tier of his group. No one is quite sure how fast Alex can truly run. Jamie tends to run for the social benefits. He enjoys

running in a pack of young adults his own age."

Both boys, who are unable to speak, ran in Boston this past April and escaped harm. Alex finished with a personal best (3:23:22) before the explosions and Jamie and his dad were four miles from the finish when authorities stopped the race. The Boston incident has affected Jamie, even though neither he nor his brother can communicate verbally, except for a few simple words. Had Alex run as slowly as he did in Boston two years ago (4:09:10), he and his mother would have been at the finish line just 33 seconds before the first explosion.

"Jamie's training has been severely hampered by it," his mother said, about Boston. "He was able to sense the horrible tragedy and has somehow linked these bad feelings to running. It has been a struggle to get Jamie completely back into the groove of running, an activity he once enjoyed so much."

The boys, who live in Thomaston, have always had tremendous amounts of energy and their parents were aggressive in seeking ways for them to channel that energy. The Schneiders had them focus on sports such as basketball, horseback riding and swimming but achieved only moderate success.

"None of these activities captivated their interest the way running did," their mother

recalled. "At 15 years old, they fell in love with running and haven't stopped."

There were some difficulties, one of which led Robyn and Allan to take up running themselves. Initially, only experienced trainers ran with their sons. "Jamie had some behaviors (while he was running) and returned with bloody hands and knees, the result of an intentional fall," she explained. "We realized that we needed to make a decision. We were going to start running with the boys or the boys were going to stop. Coaching Alex and Jamie requires diligence and is a huge responsibility."

The family running experience helped the boys thrive despite their parents' health issues. Alex and Jamie's father, who retired from a real estate career, has multiple sclerosis, and his wife is a breast cancer survivor. Much of Robyn's spare time is taken up by her advocacy for better autism awareness and treatment and in maintaining her sons' website, www.autismrunners.com.

Robyn is philosophical about the difficulties the family has faced and concerns about the future for her sons. "Alex and Jamie are completely dependent and will always need 24 hour supervision," she says. "We're concentrating on working on plans for the future."

"But nothing can override the joy and pride that we'll feel watching the boys dig deep within themselves to excel and overcome their own challenges in next month's marathon," she emphasized. "We'll have trouble keeping our emotions in check watching them cross the finish line."

"We hope that Alex and Jamie's accomplishments will provide inspiration for others," she added. "We want them to prove to others that their triumphs can be far greater than their disabilities."

Achilles International, an organization that helps people with disabilities to take part in mainstream athletics, assisted the Schneiders in gaining entry into the New York City race. The boys will be running with Team ASAT, representing the National Association for Science in Autism Treatment.