

# Running for freedom- a blind runner's trip to Luxembourg

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**Running a marathon is hard enough at the best of times but running without the ability to see where you are going, is another matter.**

This does not faze blind runner Jeffrey Norris, however. The athlete, who lost his sight at the age of 26, was invited to take part as a special guest at this year's ING night run on June 11. And he cannot wait to cross the start line.

"It's a real privilege to be invited to such an event as this. I don't consider myself to be a good runner or top athlete, I just have fun doing it. I've never been to Luxembourg before and that's one of the reasons I'm looking forward to it."

Mr Norris, who has dual nationality with the US and Germany, will run with a guide, who he is attached either by touch or by a cord. A second guide will help by collecting water and clearing the way. "One thing I do not want is to be a problem for other runners", he said.

He is aiming to finish in a time of for hours and 15 minutes and, with Luxembourg female marathon champion Pascale Schmoetten guiding him for part of the route, he will have an excellent pace-setter.

Mr Norris, who currently lives in Nuernberg, is not a life-long fan of running. He took up the hobby several years after losing his sight in an accident.

He explained: "I was very troubled in my youth. I was on drugs. That got me in trouble. I was beaten up and, as a result of the injuries I suffered, I lost my sight. After becoming blind, I began to adapt physically to the problem. I had a white stick. I got used to doing things. For me that wasn't too hard. Mentally it was

not so easy. You have good days and bad days. But that is true for everyone. I then learned a new occupation: physiotherapy. I was working in a resort when I first became interested in running. I wanted to go out walking with a group of people. But they didn't want to take me with them, they thought that it was too risky taking a blind person through a forest."

While at the resort, Mr Norris met an athlete who offered to guide him on a run. From that moment onwards he was hooked. Four weeks later he took part in his first 10k run, aged 33.

"In my youth I played football and swam but I never did anything that required this kind of endurance before. That first experience was great."

A few months later, the athlete entered his first marathon. Despite giving up at the 28 Km mark, he vowed to train and continue running. But, in order to train he needed guides.



Jeffrey Norris at the finish of the 24-hour race in Brugge.

"Back then it was still hard finding training partners without the internet. Since the internet it has become so much easier."

From 1993 to 1995 Mr Norris completed four marathons before taking a break for personal reasons. But, the running enthusiast could not be parted from his passion, and in 2001 he resumed competitive races, eventually guiding him towards triathlons, multi-events, races which run over several days, 24-hour races and Iron Man events. In Gothenburg he set the

world record for the furthest distance run by a blind person in a 24-hour race, a record which he then bettered in Switzerland where he completed 155 Km in 24 hours.

Mr Norris said: "It's so liberating being able to go running. Normally I go along with my white stick. Running is freedom for me. Right now I'm about to go out on a bike ride on the tandem. When I get out to do things like that, I don't feel like I'm blind anymore."



With Prince Albert of Monaco at a 24-hour race in 2010.