

(H R)



RUNNING FOR GOOD

FOOTING THE BILL

A former Paralympian outfits amputees with running prostheses.

Back when he played high school football, Ryan Fann always carried duct tape with him. When the foot portion of his prosthesis would break off, the linebacker would do a midgame repair.

Fann had been dealing with equipment malfunctions for most of his life. His lower left leg was amputated when he was 3 after he was hit by a truck. Fann was fitted with a prosthesis—one designed for walking, not the rigors of sports. Regardless, Fann took up football when he was 5. His senior year in high school, in 2002, Fann was named special teams MVP and was selected as one of 80 students in the state

to play in the Tennessee East-West Shrine Bowl. A pregame interview with ESPN caught the attention of Bryan Hoddle, who was a former coach of the U.S. Paralympic track-and-field team.

Hoddle tracked Fann down and encouraged him to train for the Paralympics. Hoddle knew that in order to compete, Fann would need a proper running leg. He connected Fann with a prosthesis maker who gave Fann a “running blade.” “The first day I wore it, I ran a mile in 5:45—45 seconds faster than my best time,” Fann says. “Being able to run faster and not feel as fatigued? That was

cool.” Fann went on to compete in the 2004 Paralympics, where he won bronze in the 400 meters and gold as a part of the 4 x 400-meter relay. “I wouldn’t have had the opportunity without that technology,” says Fann, who is now 32.

To pay it forward, in 2011 Fann became a certified prosthetist and cofounded Amputee Blade Runners (ABR) to provide free running prostheses to in-need amputees. Running legs, which aren’t covered by insurance, can cost \$8,000 to \$20,000.

Since mid-2011, ABR has outfitted 75 amputees across 33 states with running blades. ABR provides ongoing support and maintenance to its athletes, and it fits growing kids with custom sockets and new blades every year until they are 18.

One typical recipient is Rachel Vasquez of Kuna, Idaho. The 31-year-old mother of five was injured in a car accident when she was 15 and eventually needed to have her left leg amputated. But by then, her mobility



Fann runs with Khloe (above), fits an amputee with a blade (below), and adjusts a prosthesis at his Savannah, Georgia, clinic (left).

WOULD-BE BLADE RUNNERS

To receive a running blade, amputees need to complete an application (found at amputeebladerunners.com/grants). It includes writing an essay detailing the impact a blade would have on his or her life. Applicants also need to submit a video of themselves running in place to show their current ability. And adult candidates are expected to walk three 5Ks to show their commitment to the sport.

had decreased and her weight had ballooned. She wanted to get fit, but her prosthetic leg was heavy, and she couldn’t afford a running one.

Vasquez received a blade from ABR in 2015, and she’s now an active part of her local running community. She’s completed 25 5Ks and shed 80 pounds. “Before I’d watch my kids play sports and live through them,” Vasquez says. “Since ABR, I’ve made a lifestyle change. At races, people tell me, ‘Thank you for being here. You inspire me.’”

—CHRISTINE YU

