

Friday, 03 July 2009 | 09:25 AM

Beating the odds

18th December 2007, 7:45 WST

If ever there was a television program screening an against-all-odds story, this is it. If ever there was a story of indelible mateship, here it is.

Two WA men with goals greater than themselves, two men from different worlds, have come together to transform lives, give meaning to their own and have a roaring good time along the way.

Frank Surgener met Daryl Howe nine years ago. An agent for Brooks sporting goods, Surgener was organising a fun run when he spotted Howe with local man Tommy Greenwood, ex-boxer and noted sporting mentor.

Howe stood out because he has cerebral palsy, which affects all his limbs. By rights, Howe shouldn't be walking, never mind running — never mind running marathons, of which so far he has run 10.

This personal triumph and history-making first includes the New York Marathon, an endeavour captured on a new SBS documentary, Frank and Daz Take on the World.

Surgener sits in his East Fremantle living room trying to recall his early impressions of Howe. "The first thing I ever heard about Daryl was from Tommy and he said something I've never forgotten, which was, 'This kid has got the biggest heart of anybody I have ever trained'. And that



stuck in my mind because I had seen a lot of the other people Tommy had trained and I thought that was a big call.”

In the documentary by filmmakers Judy Rymer and Bevan Childs, Howe says he likes to think that Surgener is inspired by him as much as he is inspired by what Surgener does.

What Surgener does and has been doing for the past three years is throwing his energy behind his charity Ride Aid aimed at helping the street kids of Cambodia and their families who still are suffering from the horrific legacy of Pol Pot’s murderous regime.

Just to kick things off, Surgener rode his BMW bike 20,000km from Fremantle to Cambodia. By Christmas, he hopes to have opened his sixth school, a massive achievement in Ride Aid’s short three-year existence.

A long-time cross-country biking enthusiast, Surgener has ridden through 65 nations across the globe. When it came to Cambodia, the need was obvious — especially of the children.

“There were people with very little resources and they were trying to help,” he says. “I met volunteers who were doing a lot with a tiny bit. I said, ‘I’m going to help you do this better’, and I’m still doing it.

“M’Lop Tapang is our centre, which started with 18 kids. Now we’re dealing with 1500.”

One of the film’s most tender moments is when Surgener takes his mate Daz to Cambodia to see what their fundraising efforts are achieving and to show him something of Cambodia’s history.

The Killing Fields were not familiar to Howe, but his reaction in a museum dedicated to those who were butchered there speaks of the heart and decency of this remarkable young man. It’s also a moment where the two men’s bond



deepens — as is the New York Marathon.



Howe's aim was to beat his personal best time. As a disabled person, he was allowed a two-hour start, but the excitement and a pulled muscle conspired to threaten his dream of even finishing.

“We didn't hit the time right,” Surgener says. “Daryl was coming through at the same time as the elite runners, but the crowds and officials were extraordinarily supportive. It was mind numbing. You get to First Avenue and there are literally a million people around you. I think it's the best supported sporting event in the world. People line the streets 10 deep and they yell and cheer for six bloody hours. It's just fantastic.”

Running beside his friend carrying a banner saying “Go Daryl Go”, Surgener gees up the crowd to get Howe across Manhattan Bridge. It's an inspiring Chariots of Fire moment.

Next year, Howe will run in the South African Two Oceans Ultra Marathon, a 56km run as opposed to the standard 42km marathon course. Surgener will be there to cheer him on. Meanwhile, Surgener, a Scot who has called WA home for the past 15 years, will continue his mission to help the children of Cambodia.

“It takes a lot of work to keep the Ride Aid machine going and in terms of revenue, we're competing with 3000 professional charities with hundreds of full-time staff on board,” he says. “We're totally voluntary.”

“After Guy Leech donated \$100,000 (the Ironman from Celebrity Survivor) to Ride Aid, he told me he was visiting our centre and the first thing he said was, ‘My wife and I are paying our own airfares and hotel’. Because everyone pays their own way, no one takes anything out to support it and that's a culture we're trying to create. I'm determined to make every dollar count.”

- To donate, go to info@rideaid.net. Frank and Daz Take on the World, tonight, 7.30, SBS.

HELEN CROMPTON

Have your say
