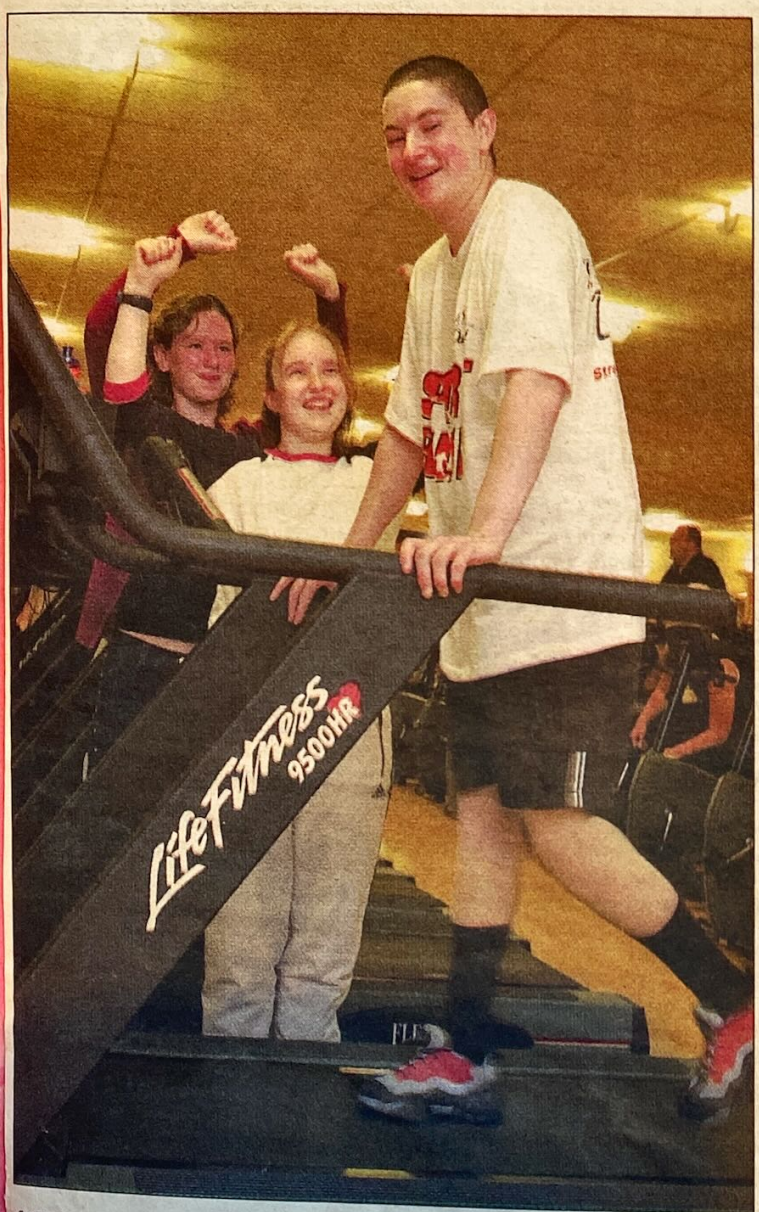
A REAL SPORT: TEENAGER DEFIES DISABILITY FOR FUND-RAISER

Walk is an inspiration



ACTION: Tony is cheered by sister Angela, left, and girlfriend Gemma

PICTURE: ANDY BAKER / 122665-3

Two hours on a treadmill is a daunting prospect for the fittest of athletes.

BY LINDA STEELYARD

For Tony Deacon, walking non-stop for 180 minutes is an outstanding achievement. He was born without legs.

Despite his disability, 18-year-old Tony, from Newbold Verdon, walked more than six kilometres yesterday to raise at least £300 for needy youngsters.

The accomplished swimmer was raising funds for Sport Relief, a new initiative from Comic Relief and BBC Sport which encourages people to take part in sponsored sporting activities.

Tony, a trainee chef at Leicester College, said: "I did the walk because I wanted to help people with disabilities who aren't as fortunate as me."

"When people see me swimming or training they sometimes come over and say, 'I think you're amazing', or, 'I admire you'. It makes me feel happy."

Tony Deacon

The teenager was born with one leg missing below the knee, and the other missing from below the thigh. From the age of five, he started using prosthetic legs.

He said: "People did ask me about it a lot at school and some people gave me a bit of a hard time, but I just got on with it."

Tony never let his disability hold him back. At the age of 11 he decided he wanted to excel in sport.

He has become one of the county's most successful young swimmers, twice being named runner-up in the Leicester Mercury's Young Disabled Sportsman of the Year awards. He won three gold and two silver medals at last year's BT National Disabled Junior Championships in Darlington, and hopes to represent Britain in the Paralympics in 2004.

Tony said he had been able to reach his goals thanks to the encouragement of his mum Pauline, 39, dad Ivan, 50, sisters Angela, 16, and Kerry, 20, brother Ashley, 14, and grandparents Rita and Ian Lomas, of Leicester Forest East.

To prepare himself for the challenge of walking for two hours, Tony started walking on the treadmill for 10 minutes at a time. Within a week he had built up to 30 minutes.

AMAZING

He said: "When people see me swimming or training they sometimes come over and say, 'I think you're amazing', or, 'I admire you'.

"It makes me feel happy because I'm proving disabled people can be as good as able-bodied people."

Cheering him on at David Lloyd fitness centre yesterday were his girlfriend Gemma Lamdell and his sister Angela, who hailed Tony an inspiration.

Gemma, 19, from Birstall, said: "I'm really proud of him. I would love to see him get to the Paralympics, not just because I'd get a holiday! He's got the ability."

Angela said: "I'm so proud of him because he's done so well despite his disability. It hasn't stopped him doing what he wants to do."