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Mrs. Rutan

English IV

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Eat. Sleep. Breathe. Run.

Our sweat glistened skin would shimmer in the sunshine, blisters would pop up on our feet, hair was plastered to our faces. It could be 80° and sunny, or pouring down rain, and we would still run. I never knew how to run fast and I had very little motivation. Because of this, I always thought all I’d ever get was last place, but this year my view changed. My cross country season would no longer start in August, it started in June. Waking up at 7 AM and running, everyone called us crazy, and we knew it. Cross country had given me passion for running. Cross country wasn’t easy, it hurt, and I was always sore and tired; but it helped me build character, stamina and motivation and gave me a great group of friends.

I realized that all my hard work had paid off after my first race of the season. I was a whole minute faster than last season. I was amazed. The feeling of accomplishment overwhelmed me. Tears sprang to my eyes as I crossed the finish line, 25th place. In this moment I realized that the statement “hard work pays off” is true. When you’re passionate about something and you strive to reach your goal it can really be met.

The last race before regionals dawned upon me in all its glory and I was so nervous. I kept asking myself “Did I work hard enough to race at regionals?” That race would always be ingrained in my brain.

We were all squeezed into our little box, toes lined up along the white spray-painted line. I had tuned everyone else out and only heard the starter’s instructions, “I’m going to stay here, you will run around me, I’ll give you a two signal start. Are you all ready?” I nodded my head yes. “Runners ready,” BANG! And we were off.

I pressed the start on my watch and took off across the grass. The wind whooshed past me and whipped my hair away from my face. I went as hard as I could to get a good starting position, and I broke out of the pack, chasing after ponytails.

As I rounded the corner I could see my coach as he drew near, leaning over pointing his fingers, his face turning red, his blue Nike baseball cap tight on his head, he was screaming, “Push, push, push… pick up your knees, stay with her Maria, stay with her, pass her and work toward the next one.” The first two miles had flown by and I could start to feel the pain. It began in my feet, slowly creeping into my calves, racing through my thighs, begging me to stop and surrender. I pushed on, with only 400 meters left I looked up and saw the finish line. I pulled my legs up the last hill, picking my knees up past my belly button like we had done in practice. I rocked my arms back and forth pushing with all the energy I had left.

I crossed the finish line at 21:55.I had run the fastest race of my life. Five whole minutes faster than last year. I had done it.

A week later we raced at regional's. This was my make or break moment… the weather wasn’t very good; it was cold and raining all morning. Throughout the race I just pushed through, wanting to be done and across the finish line. I kicked across the line and walked slowly through the finishing shoot. Looking up two of my teammates finished with me; one ahead and one behind me. We wiggled with anticipation wondering what place we finished in and seeing if any of our girls had made it to state. We filed out as they took our tags and ran over to all the other girls. I saw Reagan, she had tear glazed eyes, and a smile the size of Texas slapped on her face, and I knew she had made it to state. Tears sprang to my eyes as I gave her a hug. We had made a special bond during the season and I knew I’d be there to cheer her on at state.

November 2nd, the day of states, came upon us, with overcast skies and a forecast of rain all day. Just the perfect weather to be running in for a big race. Reagan and seven of our teammates all squeezed into the excursion, our coach gave her a pep talk and we sang along to music as we drove to the meet. 1 PM rolled around and we all strolled out to our cheering posts. Making sure we had the perfect view and an easy breakaway to get to the finish.

I could see her heading toward us, we started cheering; screaming our lungs out. My face started to tingle and I yelled as loud as I could. We watched her pass then made a break for the finish. Getting a spot on the sidelines, we watched her peel across the muddy grass and across the finish line. Letting her catch her breath we waited, soon enough she came out and in that moment I was so proud of her. I gave her a huge hug and tears slipped out of the corners of our eyes.

At the end of our season, I realized cross country was my favorite mistake. I loved running and I loved it even more because I was running with Reagan and all my teammates. I had learned that hard work and dedication make you an amazing athlete. Only two years earlier, I would never have pictured myself running three miles all at once. If I had never started running I would never be the person I am today, and for that reason I am forever thankful.