

When I joined the track team my freshman year I thought I knew a lot about running; how many miles to run, how many laps to do, and even how fast to pace each lap. But, there was one thing I had yet to learn about, it was a small word called team. As a freshman I was timid and nervous and I didn't want to disappoint the team. I held the middle school mile record, so the girls assured me that I would do great. However, I was not so sure. I had run plenty of races, but the girls I would run against were all older and more experienced than I was.

We got to the first meet and butterflies flew rapidly in my stomach. I warmed up and suddenly I hear, "first call for the mile", that was my race. I jogged over to the starting line and the official lined us up. Questions rushed through my head, who were these girls? were they any good?, could I beat them? I was on the line shaking, anticipating the gun, and then the official yelled out, "on your mark!" Everyone put her bright new racing flats on the line. Then, suddenly, I heard a few of the girls on the team, "come on you got this, it's your race, your ready, we know you can win!" They were cheering for me! I could not help but smile and then the nerves began to diminish. Now only the sheer determination to prove my new teammates right remained. "Bang!" the gun sounded and we were off, there was a lot of pushing and shoving. One girl even punched me square in the elbow; I felt the tingles go all the way up my arm.

That was it; no more fooling around, and I took the lead. One girl followed close behind me, her name I would later find out, was Emily Lanois from Hamilton Wenham. She would become one of my most grueling competitors, and a beloved friend. We ran around that track at Andover ten times together stuck to each other like glue, I could feel the pain like never before. I was almost there. only one lap left to go. but I was exhausted

and she was one year older and one year more experienced. She blew by me, and there was nothing that I could do. I finished the race in a fair, yet disappointing second place, I wished Emily congratulations and stood there with my hands on my knees panting from exhaustion. Out of nowhere, I felt the warm embrace from my teammates. I could not believe it; I did not win yet they were still so happy for me. As I stood there with my team there was a lot more hugs and still more congratulations.

It was in that moment that I realized what it actually means to be a part of a team. It means that no matter how you do, first second or somewhere in between, as long as you give it your all your team will always be there for you. For the past four year this has still held true, my team has been with me through the bad times and the great times as well. As a captain and upperclassman of the Pentucket Regional High School track team and a volunteer for the River Rivals Summer Track Program I am proud to say that I am now able to pass on the important lesson that I learned so young as an incoming freshman. Now, the incoming freshman for years to come will be able to learn this lesson as well; we cry, scream, laugh, and train as hard as we can, as a team.

This important team lesson proved true once again when one year later when I was now a sophomore and Emily Lanois a junior. Once again we were facing Hamilton Wenham in a dual meet, and it was time for the last event, the 4x400 relay. Each team would have four runners run a blazing fast three laps around the track as fast as their legs would take them. I was the fourth runner to race in the relay, the anchor leg, and so was Emily. This was not just any race though, it was the last event of the last meet of the season, it was all tied up and both of our teams undefeated. Whoever won, would be Cape Ann League Champions. I cheered on my teammates to get me a lead as each one

ran their hearts out. As the race progressed it flip-flopped back and forth from who was in the lead. But, when the baton was handed off to me, I had a miniscule one-foot lead on Emily. I knew she wanted this, but I knew I wanted it more. We raced around the track, as family, friends, teammates and coaches from both teams screamed out Emily's and my name. I could feel her warm breath on my back, and I knew she was close; I had to keep on pushing. We came around to the home stretch of the last lap, both of us pushing our bodies to the extreme. We past the finish line so close we could not be sure who won. We waited in anticipation. Then we heard the official scream "Pentucket wins!" I was overjoyed; the words could not have sounded any more gratifying. The rest of the team ran over and tackled me. Everyone was screaming you did it! But I sat there only for a moment before confidently smiling, as I said no "WE did it"! It is with great honor for me to say that in my four years on the Pentucket Track Team, we have been awarded the States Sportsmanship Award two times, in 2008 and 2010. It goes to show you the sportsmanship this team embodies.

Over my four years as a Pentucket Athlete I have earned many titles; State Champion in cross-country, two-time Division 3 State Champion in the mile, two-time Boston Globe All-Scholastic Athlete and most recently named Boston Globe Athlete of The Year. To this day I remember that relay race and however satisfying these accomplishments are I know they would not have been possible if it had not been for the support of my family, friends, coaches and most of all my team cheering me on every step of the way.

So when answering the question, "What does running mean to me?" I would say it means teamwork, determination, and opportunity. It has allowed me to accomplish my

