

## “Countless Moments of Perfection”

Elbows are flying, five hundred muddy running shoes are accelerating to full speed, and the smoke from the starting gun is only beginning to clear. Just moments earlier, almost two hundred and fifty anxious girls stood motionless at the starting line of the California State Cross Country Championship race.

I briefly glance around. The only thing I am able to detect is my excited coach equipped with his bleached hair and his strikingly noticeable orange cap. He has to scream with all of his strength in order to overcome the drowning noise of the thousands of spectators. He repeats the familiar encouraging words: “Great position... now relax and settle into a good pace. Let the others push you. You deserve to be here. You’ve worked hard for four years and now is your chance to shine! This is it, Betsy!”

I find it overwhelming that the race for which I have been training for four years is finally unfolding beneath my feet. I need to concentrate and remember that every mile I have run, every choking afternoon I have spent in the stuffy weight room, and every tiresome hour I have spent training has been in preparation for this moment. Twenty minutes of sacrifice now will provide me with future years of satisfaction.

After the carefully executed race, I finally cross the finish line. I tear off my race tag and hand it to the official. My strong performance today has proven to be an outstanding addition to an unforgettable running career and an extremely enjoyable and successful high school experience.

I once asked my coach what I could expect to get out of cross country and what it has to offer. His response excited me. He simply replied, “Cross country will offer you countless moments of perfection.” I now recall this statement with feelings of gratefulness and pride, because I believe that I have taken advantage of every aspect of the sport and that cross country has helped to shape me into the person I am today.

I have learned to be responsible. As a team captain, I became a role-model for dozens of younger athletes. I established myself as a leader early on by presenting myself as an intelligent, mature young woman, and at the same time I managed to become very close friends with every one of them.

I have learned to be self disciplined. I have never been told to run. Nothing has held me back. When it is hot, I drink a lot of water. When it is cold, I wear long pants and gloves. I simply continue to put one foot in front of the other, no matter how badly I want to stop.

I have learned to be proud, but I have also learned the importance of being humble. I know there is always someone better than me.

Most importantly, I have learned to be respectful. I have grown to respect my teammates and competitors for the same reasons that I respect myself. We all have gone through the same difficult training and we all have aspirations to be the best we can be.

Cross country has offered me more than I ever imagined. I can only hope that I have been able to give back to this sport what I have taken away. From responsibility to self discipline to integrity to pride, my experiences with running have proven to be the most memorable and the most valued of all my high school experiences. Truly, they have been countless moments of perfection.

–Betsy Sale (01)

Betsy, a three year varsity runner, was the team captain of the State Championship qualifying varsity girls squad in 2000. She went on to attend Cal Poly where she majored in civil engineering.