

Since I was a kid, all of my friends loved basketball, and their love of the sport grew on me fast. Really fast. Yet my ability to play basketball also ended really fast too. After averaging 0.7 points per game in my junior high career, I had a back injury that prevented me from playing, and my dreams to play basketball alongside Jeremy Lin and becoming the shortest person in the world to dunk were permanently squashed.

Now let's fast track to my high school years-- my high school had a mandatory sport requirement, so I quickly jumped the gun and joined cross-country. I somehow believed that being capable of passing an 8th grade PE class where all we did was sit there and eat snacks meant I was ready to run miles on end. Little did I know about the adventure that I was about to embark on. One that would change my perspective on life. Permanently.

I'm not going to lie: the first season was hell. I would consistently finish workouts 15 minutes later than everyone else. I would be ready to pass out due to fatigue after a mere warm-up. I still remember how, once, while I was still trekking to the finish line, the officials thought everyone was finished and had already stopped the clock. My time was about 30 minutes for a 3-miler, making me the slowest person in the whole league, and often one of the slowest at any of ultra-large invites. Finishing last everytime does get to you, and the thoughts of quitting came weekly. I quickly lost count of the times I cried in anger and frustration in my dorm room after races. Fortunately, the coaches and then leaders on the team encouraged and pushed me to move forward, and I made what seemed like an illogical decision to move forward.

Little by little, my hardwork showed. My times began to improve. By sophomore year, my time did improve by 45 seconds, while everyone else improved by a few minutes. So, by end of sophomore year, I was still last. Imagine: there was the Prep League, featuring the five top high schools in the area. And then there was the Ken League, a one-man league where the runners were just as slow as some of the people walking. My classmates openly mocked me, and one even directly asked me why I suck at running. However, all this crap fueled me more, and I knew I want to prove every single of these pundits wrong.

And so I fought on

By junior year, I was running the courses at about 21 minutes, and I was even able to break the 20-minute mark by the end of the season. After every race, I felt more motivated and I began to believe that I would be a fixture on varsity by the beginning of senior year. To further boost my confidence, my mile time in track was close to 5 minutes. I could have only dream of a time like that. 3 years ago, I could barely run one in 9 minutes.

Yet, by the time senior year rolled around, everything plateaued. Despite all the miles of sweat and dehydration during the summer, my time actually became slower. The basketball injury in 8th grade has come back to haunt me in full swing- the lowest bone in my spine never fused, resulting in extra pain and strain through even normal workouts. My back pain only worsened throughout the season, and my improvement stagnated. Practices felt as if it was torture. My favorite hill workouts turned into monstrous tests of mental strength. At one of my last track races in April, I literally limped to the finish line, and immediately bursted into tears as I realize my

last track race ended in pain and struggle, not in a personal record time. But just as I felt like things came to a disappointing end, my last official race as a Webb School athlete surprised me in ways I've never expected.

It was early May, and it was the Bonelli Park Triathlon, which my school's triathlon team races in annually. I was tasked with running the 10k route of the Olympic distance triathlon. After a speedy swim by my junior Olympian teammate, my biking partner quickly changed gears and disappeared into the path, quickly peddling and trying to build the lead we collected.

20 minutes passed. 30 minutes passed. 40 minutes has passed. Almost every top team has already begun the running segment. Yet still no sight of my teammate. Now, at 45 minutes, my teammate finally came in with a bleeding leg, and a semi-broken bike. It turns out he had injured himself during the race. At that point, our team had to decide whether to continue, or just call it quits. I decided without a moment of hesitation to run as fast as I can, and to hope for some sort of miracle. The next 30-ish minute was blur: I ran like this was the last race of my life, and somehow was able to pass 30 to 40 racers. I ran at about 6:15 to 6:30 for every one of the 6 miles; before this I could only run 6:45 or 7 minute per mile on a good day. Our team ended the race finishing 2nd.

I have learned from running that, in life, if you give more than your all in something, you will never cease to amaze yourself and others. If you told me freshmen year in high school that I will improve my 3 mile time by over 10 minutes, and that my mile time will decrease by more than 4 minutes, I would have probably laughed at you and told you to shut up. Cross-country has taught me that if you

dream big enough and are willing to go the extra mile, even if what you want seems impossible, chances are you will reach it.