

The 1999 Cross Country North Coast Championships My Most Memorable Competitive Experience

I know that somewhere later in this journal it asks us to talk about that perfect race.....the race we have yet to run. But looking back less than two years ago, I can't help feeling that this moment has already arrived. "Why are we doing this?" we'd ask ourselves periodically throughout the season. And then the simple response we all knew, "Because we want to go to state." From the first day of practice we had our eyes set on this unimaginable objective, a surreal feat. My friends (actually role models) carried us wistfully through the season on wings of motivation and determination.

And so the day finally arrived. Our dreams were put on the line, literally, as we waited for the gun. I had never felt closer to my teammates than just before the race when all seven of us took a communal squat. The race began and we sprinted down the grass, making a bee-line for Hayward's marshy track. "Good start ladies! Way to get out there!" Even Chuck had something encouraging to say. And there we were...three purple uniforms in the lead pack. There was no way any of us could have predicted what would result. Then something hit Sarah; she went out, because there was something more she was out to accomplish. As soon as Erin and I saw that, of course, we went for it as well. No hesitation had been necessary; the decision hadn't asked for thought. Suddenly, it didn't matter what we were running for. A second place finish, guaranteed access to the state meet, meant nothing. We wanted it all. Three of us running stride for stride. Inexperience and awkwardness diminished and heart quickly took over. If it weren't for the throngs of people and the girls in green on our tails, it might have seemed as casual as a day at practice.

The last 400 meters approached us and we dug deep (Poured some more on the griddle, felt the burn, gave it our all, etc.). Instantaneously the girls who were trailing us dropped back. There wasn't much I was thinking about at that moment or much that I could hear besides the breathing (When you know a teammate that well, their breath is as individual as their voice.). When we emerged from the "hill" and onto the final straight-away, we had it.....we'd taken one, two, three. It was the hardest race of my life; I'd pushed myself to the limit. People came up to hold us up and it was then

on the shoulders of the rest of our girls to feel the rush and make the choice. And they totally stepped up; it was an amazing moment. My dad knew the results before anyone else. Finishing his last tally marks, he was proud to announce that we had taken first. We would be attending state. Seven tickets for the ride we'd all earned. Soon after was the awards assembly, where Regina Jacobs gave us her congrats and shook our hands. I don't think any of us stopped smiling the entire time. We were handed a huge trophy, a compilation of metal and plastic which we welcomed with a hideous amount of love. The race was on continuous instant-replay in my mind until the crash and burn arrived around six o'clock that evening (And even then I'm sure I dreamed about it).

Looking back to that day, I still get a little giddy. I remember Erin receiving the Power Bar Award and how we all swooped in to give her a cheesy group hug for the camera. I think of Sean and Corey decked out in purple to watch us run down in Fresno at the state meet. I picture the look in Lindsay's eyes when she jumped off her seat on the jungle gym to watch us finish. (I felt like she might have even looked up to me for a second.) I recreate every emotion of that day as I draw the experience out of my memory. I throw nervousness, exhaustion, and relief on top of the permeable feeling of complete ecstasy. Those long twenty minutes make-up one of the most inspirational moments of my life. Though it will always be with me, I realize that it's never been smart to live in the past. This day gives me a taste of what our team's working towards each season. It provides me with the confidence that if we truly want it, then it will be ours. I have to hold this day in my pocket as I go in search of greater things to join it.

-Ashley Allen (02)