



Both of our children, Austin and Alexa, have picked up on Cross Country as a sport.

Now personally, I don't understand it. The thought of running for three or more miles just for the heck of it makes no sense to me. If I were chasing a soccer ball, that would be totally different but Cross Country is a battle against your own mind and all the signals that your body is sending to it (like "I'm tired. My feet hurt. Can we rest? I want to throw up now.") with no distractions.

This past weekend, however, the sport of Cross Country gave me many perfect examples of one of the main principles of success - whether in business, sport or personal life.

A CROSS COUNTRY STORY

We were in Fresno for the California State Cross Country Finals to root on Alexa and the Mission College Prep girls team. It was a cloudy and rainy day, but a perfect day for running.

Alexa started running in the Fall of last year. In those early meets she was posting times for 5km in the high 20's. By the end of last season, her Personal Record (PR) was around 25 minutes. Understand that the fastest girls at this age run the 3.1 miles in 17 minutes, but even

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still Alexa was no longer in the back of the pack having improved her placement substantially.

Fast forward to this year. Alexa's training efforts (running almost every day plus other conditioning) had helped her trim more than another minute off her PR as she was flirting with the 24 minute mark. This brings us to race day in Fresno where she posted a time of 23:10, almost a whole minute off her personal best. And while there was nothing left in the tank when she was done, she looked strong throughout the race.

THE VALUE OF POSITIVE EFFORT

The above story is just a proud father relishing in the success of his daughter, but there were plenty of other stories that day in Fresno at the State Cross Country Finals including many races where the winning runner completely dominated the field. They looked so strong hitting the finish line while the number two runner was dragging those last few hundred yards. In each of these cases, you could see who was ready to win a mile before the end of the race. You could see it in their eyes and their stride as they ran.

These runners excelled because they worked hard in preparation. They trained hard for many many years. They love the sport and would do it even if they weren't being encouraged by their families and coaches. Mission Prep phenom Jordan Hasay, who is now running for the University of Oregon, is a perfect example of someone enjoying success because of the efforts they put in over the years.

Jordan trained hard because SHE wanted to, not because her coach demanded it.

THE VALUE OF POSITIVE COACHING

In one race this weekend, there were two girls vying for first throughout the race. One was from Mira Vista. The other was from Saugus. I had a discussion with one observer about who was going to win. Mira Vista looked loose and strong. Saugus was starting to shuffle her stride. The other observer predicted that the Saugus girl would win because her coach is notoriously tough and demanding, that the runner would be better trained and wouldn't want to deal with that

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coach's disappointment if she lost the race.

It seems sad to me that any athlete would be expected to respond at the top of their potential to a coach who was demanding, tough or mean in any way. I've been in sports most of my life and have coached youth for close to 20 years. In all those years of coaching (including more than 10 years in coaching adults in business and personal finance), I have never seen humans respond as well to demanding, loud or mean coaches as they do to someone who can help them capture their own inner drive and inspire them to work hard, train strong and reach for their potential.

Nobody more represents this concept than Jim Tracy, the coach of the San Francisco University High School Cross Country program who is also fighting ALS. If anything, his battle has inspired his runners to work even harder. The effort shows. The program dominates the Division Five field (and won again at the State meet this year).

THANKS

I am ever thankful that the coaching staff at Mission Prep are both positive and encouraging forces. Maybe that is why the program has done so well for such a small school. They help their runners find the inspiration to make the greatest effort throughout the season. In the end, that always pays off.

It paid off for Jordan Hasay who will someday represent the United States in the Olympics. It pays off for Jim Tracy's teams ... and it paid off for my daughter.

It just goes to show you can do whatever you put your mind to doing ... as long as you make the effort. Making that effort often depends on having a good coach help you along the way.

John

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