

Running on Confidence

I can breathe, I can breathe. I repeat this to myself as I draw closer and closer to the end of my race. The finish line comes into sight, and I start to sprint determined to reach it, just like every goal I've set for myself in life. Throughout my life, any number of things have influenced my direction in life. I have been influenced by my experiences growing up in Alaska, by the people that surround me in school, and by my numerous extracurricular activities. But overall the most influential experience in my life is being part of the running community. I started cross-country running when I was 11 years old and dove in headfirst when I started high school. Being on the team has taught me a lot about myself, including how well I handle leadership positions and how hard I am willing to work for the things I want.

The summer before my freshman year of high school I started attending cross-country preseason, I largely credit this when people ask how my high school transition was so easy. As soon as preseason started people were introducing themselves, and genuinely seemed like they wanted to get to know me. As the season progressed I aspired to be more like the upperclassmen on the team, girls who would run community races in tutus just for fun and who weren't afraid to be silly in front of the team. Throughout my years on the team I grew into the role, I led group activities, ran in tutus, and cheered myself hoarse at every race. During my senior year on the team, I was one of the many captains who helped ease the transition of combining teams. The two high schools of Juneau had recently been combined, leaving all of us in an unexpected situation. At the time our many teammates didn't know who to look to, so they looked at us. During this time I learned how well I thrive in leadership roles, I learned that I like being the person people look to for answers, and my confidence in making quick decisions grew. Suddenly my years of organization were paying off, everything I had learned as the oldest daughter was celebrated and even the other captains looked to me for answers no one had. Because of this experience, I am a confident leader, most of my life I wanted to be someone in the background, someone who blended in with a crowd, however, now I don't mind standing out and speaking up for the people who aren't being heard.

Running has taught me a lot about myself, but mostly it has shown me how hard I'm willing to push for the things I want. During my freshman season, I couldn't run a whole 5k without walking, I constantly had to take breaks during workouts, and I hated when people watched me run. During my junior year, I ran my first half marathon, the only walking break we took was to change our music, standing out in the crowd dressed as '80s workout Barbies. With my teammates pulling me along I have since run three half marathons, confidently pushing myself further than 14-year-old me ever thought was possible. As my running confidence has grown so has my confidence in life, I am willing to fight for what I want and push myself to do things I didn't think were possible. In the fall I will be attending Boise State University as part of the honors college as a first-generation college student. For much of my life, I didn't think I would make it to college at all but as soon as I knew that's what I wanted to do I started fighting for it. Now I am in the top 20% of my class and a member of the National Honor Society. I have

pushed myself past my limits in high school and am ready to take that confidence into the next chapter of my life.

While my time as a cross-country runner in Juneau is coming to an end, the lessons I've learned about leadership, perseverance, and pushing past my limits will carry me through the next chapter of my life. I am so excited to see what the future holds and am so grateful for every teammate that has gotten me where I am today.