

HOW HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETICS HAS IMPACTED MY LIFE

By William Robinson
Stonington High School

As a young child, the words flying from my mouth were never fast enough to match the thoughts racing through my head. Long car rides to unknown places were not seen as precious opportunities for sleep, but as chances to count signs and find all 50 license plates (I got twenty once). “I don’t know” was swapped for “I’ll figure it out,” free time was swapped for reading time, and sleeping was swapped for dreaming. Whatever I was doing, I was thinking. Regardless of whether there was an answer or not, my young mind searched for one. The world was an ocean and I a sponge.

As I grew older, my thinking shifted. Age brought me knowledge and experience and soon, years of constant thinking lead me to constant worrying. Suddenly, everything took on a darker hue. The world was a daunting place to me as an eleven-year old and what I know about it and its evils scared me (in fact, it still does). Many nights, I would lay awake struggling to understand my fears, to rationalize them and forget them. But I could not escape them. They followed me like a shadow until I could barely sit ten minutes without being enveloped in their suffocating presence. It was time for a change.

In ninth grade, I joined the cross country team and the shadow began to shrink. Sports were always an outlet for energy, but rarely did I feel happy when playing them. Competitive by nature, cool autumn days spent running up and down soccer fields were seen as challenges – opportunities for me to compete and win. In cross country, there were no white lines to contain me, no complicated passing sequences to befuddle me, just pure, simple, movement. Lacing up my shoes for the first long run of my freshman season, worries of the various sprains and running injuries I had read about began to seep into my mind. As I trotted those first few steps, however, and broke into stride, worries of tendinitis and plantar fasciitis faded away like a fog over my brain. Running with my teammates through the quiet backwoods of our high school, the thoughts and fears held bottled within me were released. There were no crazy diseases to worry about, no debt ceilings to fret over; there was simply me, the road, and the sound of my breath.

Training and competing in cross country and indoor and outdoor track throughout my time in high school have brought me inseparable friends, riveting success, and devastating losses, but through it all, I have grown as a person. For that, more than anything, I am thankful. Although I did not realize it as I worked, laughed, and ran with my teammates throughout the years, every step, leap, and stride I took was simply a page in the life chapter that I know now as high school sports. Undoubtedly, I would not be who I am today without high school sports.

Now a senior and a captain of my high school’s cross country team, I have been on innumerable long runs and ran a lifetime’s worth of stress-filled races. Years have passed since those first few steps as a naïve ninth grade runner, yet with every stride, I can still feel the rush of emotions that struck me as a freshman. The world has grown darker in its complexity as I have matured and grown in experience, yet I can still find peace in the same places that I did as a younger, more impressionable teenager. My mind still wanders and those shadows still remain, but I now that at least on my runs with my teammates, I can find myself alone, free of my shadows and full of the bright future lying down the road.