

Running For Your Life

In the last mile of a foot race, you are exhausted. Your mouth is dry, legs are burning, and your mind is starting to question whether or not you are actually going to make it to the finish line. For the briefest moment, you start to wonder, *Why the heck am I putting myself through this?* But then, you manage to shut that voice inside your head down. You stand up taller, drive your knees, pump your arms, and charge over a hill to the sound of a cheering crowd and the support of family and friends eager to watch you pass some of the other racers. You feel unstoppable, like the strongest person in the world, knowing you conquered your own mind and accomplished something even you yourself weren't sure you could do. This is the power of cross country. And this is why you keep going out and racing each week.

Everyone faces challenges and tough patches in their lives from unexpected financial setbacks to relationship troubles to job-related stressors. It is how we choose to react to these challenges that defines us as people and determines how happy and successful we are in our lives. Many companies seek out former athletes (especially runners) as employees because they know that sports like cross country foster the mental toughness and strong character traits needed to be successful in the business world and in life. Although you must train your body to meet the physical demands of cross country, the sport is 90% mental, and those who find success in distance running learn the self discipline, confidence, and competitive drive required to take on life's challenges and come out on top.

While cross country isn't a glamour sport like football or basketball, this is where true athletes and strong individuals are made. There are no water breaks, substitutions, or time outs in a cross country race. From the very first day of summer conditioning, cross country runners learn the importance of perseverance, hard work, and discipline. They learn to set goals and inch their way towards them a few seconds at a time all season long. They learn not to be afraid to take calculated risks so they can have great successes. And, perhaps most importantly, they build confidence in their own personal strength and ability to overcome obstacles, pain, and unexpected situations.

Student-athletes learn the art of managing their time to be successful in many areas of their lives at once. They learn to deal with stress and pressure in a positive way, which makes them excellent leaders and self-sufficient employees. Additionally, years of being part of a team gives them experience working cooperatively with others and taking criticism from coaches, both vital skill sets in the real world.

What may seem at first like a sport for the non-athlete turns out some of the most well-rounded and successful people you'll ever meet. Women's cross country programs across the nation post the top team GPAs in their respective college athletic programs, and this can only be attributed to the character traits and life skills fostered in them to be successful in their sport. Cross country teaches athletes from a young age to set goals, overcome a variety of difficulties to meet them, and to believe in themselves. Throughout my time as a cross country athlete, I learned what my body and mind were capable of, and that makes a difference each and every day in what I can accomplish in other areas of my life.

As if the sport itself isn't rewarding enough, local cross country student-athletes now have the opportunity to earn a \$1500 scholarship from Tri-State Running Company each year! In an effort to recognize and reward well-rounded senior cross country athletes in the Northern Kentucky area, Tri-State Running Company awards this scholarship annually based on academic achievement, athletic accomplishment, community involvement, and leadership skills. See www.tristaterunningcompany.com

for more details or to nominate an athlete if you're a coach. And if you're not a runner yet, it's never too late to start!

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