

Read Deveny Peterson's Essay

Running has been my passion since I was nearly nine years old. I fell in love with it when my mother signed me up for a 5k race in my town. Soon after starting sixth grade, I joined my middle school's cross country team. I ran all three years there, and was eager to begin training with "the big dogs" in high school. I surprised myself by making my high school's varsity cross country team as a freshman, and earned my first varsity letter. Filled with ambition, I could hardly wait for the next cross country season. As my sophomore season began, however, I realized that I was not as fast as I had been the previous year when I had made varsity. Despite all my effort at practice, I was not fast enough to make the top seven. Instead, I was to sit out as an alternate and watch from the sidelines as the rest of my teammates got to compete in regional finals at the end of the season. I was disappointed in myself - I had let my team, my coach, and myself down. I began doubting my abilities and my confidence plummeted. I knew that if I was to continue doing what I love, I would have to accept defeat and move on. There was no use dwelling on the past. My first steps toward progress were allowing myself to let go of my frustration and choosing to learn from my experience. I remember as I watched my teammates race in regional finals without me, I was filled with a determination to train harder than I ever had before. I was willing to do whatever it took to prepare for the coming season. That winter and spring, I trained religiously on my own so I could start the next season strong. Even during my off season, I was committed to improvement. I spent countless hours after school during the winter at the track or on the bleachers. Finally, my hard work paid off; my junior year of cross country, I kicked off the first race of the season with a personal record. Today, I am the strongest I have ever been as an athlete, both physically and mentally. I have developed a new kind of self-confidence - one that doesn't fluctuate with the stopwatch. Looking back, I realize that I never could have become who I am today without first experiencing failure. I never would have learned that my times do not determine who I am as a person. Furthermore, this experience taught me that sometimes, even your best will not be good enough. What really matters is that you give your all and never give up. Before races, I would always approach the start time telling myself to "run a good time" or "finish my race in the top seven". Now, I tell myself to do my very best and run a race that I can be proud of. By shifting my focus from my overall performance to the amount of effort I give, I have improved with every season. Now that I am a senior, I have been able to use this knowledge and experience to help motivate and encourage the younger runners. I know that my past defeat has helped shape me into who I am today - not just as an athlete, but as a person.