

Fall Team Reflection by Nora Markey Athletic Awards Ceremony – Fall 2017

I was fifteen years old. I had on athletic shorts and a t shirt that had been carefully selected from several other t-shirts earlier that morning, and a new pair of running sneakers. It was our third day of practice and we were taking a van to a river in Vermont that we run along for 5 miles. I buckled my seatbelt and sat quietly, looking out the window. Dr. C whipped out of the driveway, and shouted “Are you guys ready?!” to the backseat. *Ready for what?* I thought to myself. “READY!!!” Lauren Ilsley, the current captain, shouted back to him from the front seat, plugging her phone into the aux cord and cranking up the stereo. Suddenly, everyone around me was shouting out the lyrics to Stacy’s Mom. No, not just the lyrics. They were playing air guitars, doing the drum fills on the windows, and singing the background vocals. I looked around helplessly, making eye contact with the other new team members, trying to figure out what was going on. However, by the following Thursday, I was singing along, even tossing in a few car seat drum fills here and there.

Running cross country at Deerfield has been an incredible experience, and I wouldn’t change it for the world. It isn’t just the music we blast in the vans, although that *is* arguably one of the best parts. One of the most rewarding aspects of running cross country at Deerfield has been watching the team improve each year. People say cross country is an individual sport, but one runner can’t win a race for a team. A positive peer pressure and a common desire to win caused us each to learn to run as hard as we possibly could, not for ourselves, but to carry our own wait for the team. This year, when we won New Englands, it didn’t feel like an accident. Rather, it was a goal that we, as a team, had been working hard towards for years, and had finally achieved.

However, the actual competition is only a small aspect of the team experience. Being on a team at Deerfield is like having a second family. Being a family, conflicts and tensions are sure to surface. It isn’t perfect, but it’s still great. No matter what, after a particularly stressful day, I can count on practice after school and my team mates to provide an upswing to my day. Even hard workouts, on torture tuesdays, as we came to call them, became an outlet: running as hard as I could and a little more after that. Team dinners after workouts like those, having pushed through the pain together, were always full of laughter and joking.

I’m not the top runner for Deerfield, and I never have been. But I am *a* runner for Deerfield, and therefore am a vital member of the team. Sometimes I struggled to remember this, but a team is the sum of its parts, and without each part, it would break down. No matter the role you find yourself in on the field, court, ice, turf, or trail, never doubt your importance to your team. Perhaps you aren’t responsible for the point scoring. Maybe your role is to provide support and encouragement to those around you. Maybe your role is to be an example for the underclassmen. Maybe your role is to be the gel of the team, bringing everyone together. Maybe you’re an example of what it means to work as hard as you possibly can. Whatever role you find yourself in, on whatever level team you find yourself in, remember this: you have an impact. You have not only an impact on the team, but an impact on the way each individual on the team experiences Deerfield. Whether you’re the leading point scorer on a varsity team, or second string on a third sport, small actions like sitting next to a shy freshman on the bus or giving an emerging player a pat on the back after a particularly good play may seem make and break the team experiences for everyone. These little things turn a group of high school kids tossing around a ball on a field into a team.

I will carry with me the lessons my team taught me forever. I'll remember how much training it takes to be a good runner when I feel like none of my work is paying off. I'll remember the sacrifices necessary to achieve a goal. But more importantly, I'll remember what it means to count on people, and to have people count on me. I learned to work hard even when I was tired and stressed; so was everyone else on the team, and I couldn't let them down. I'll remember what it felt like to have completed a race and know I left every possible ounce of energy I had out there. I'll remember what it felt like to have someone cheer for me, reminding me how important it is to cheer for others.

I urge you all, while reminding myself, to recognize just how incredible the experience of a team here is. Whether you're on a quads soccer team or varsity squash, relish in the moment the green machine rounds the MSB corner and everyone starts to, albeit off key, sing the fight song. Relish in the sweaty, spirited team dinners and "oggachee" chant before games. Relish in the cheesy but meaningful pump up speeches from coaches and captains. Sing the drum fills to Stacy's mom, or whatever your team's equivalent stupid anthem is. Breathe in the cold air getting on a green machine the Saturday morning of a game. Cheer loudly for your team mates, give that underclassmen a hug after the game, absorb the wisdom of your coach, partake in silly team traditions. Take it all in. Learn from it. Live it. You're a part of a team, and that is something special.