

Ethan Hickland, Salem, April 2024

Somewhat paradoxically, running is both an opportunity for me to have an enjoyable social experience and to turn off the outside world, sometimes within moments of each other.

Seeing and meeting the community that exists within the sport of running has been one of the most enlightening experiences of my life. My comfort with everyday interactions has grown as I've met new people in the running community. I credit spending more time around other runners and at races outside of my hometown with pushing me out of my comfort zone and taking me from the shy kid I was to the confident person I am today. Running has helped me meet new people and make connections with people I have met in other contexts as well. I have made new friends through track meets that I would not have had reason to meet otherwise. I have also formed connections through running with people at non-running events. For example, when I went to the HOBY Leadership Seminar my sophomore year I made new friends who were also track athletes. Even though I met them outside of track, I was able to forge a connection with them through running and make a new group of friends.

While running has allowed me to make connections with all sorts of people, it has also given me the opportunity to know myself better. When I run, I have the chance to collect my thoughts and enjoy some time to myself. Running allows me to temporarily disconnect from the outside world and is a great way to calm myself if I am frustrated or having a bad day. Running has become a therapeutic outlet for me and has helped me develop greater control over my emotions. I've found this to be the case both because running is an opportunity to relax, and also because it is inconsistent and has frequent fluctuations. I can't always run my best, but those experiences have helped me deal with disappointment and bounce back stronger. This has taught me the path to success isn't linear and just because results don't seem to be coming, doesn't mean that it is time to give up.

As I move forward I plan to continue to run, for various reasons. Whether it be the ability to stay in shape, connect with new people, relax or have a little bit of healthy competition with myself, running provides so many great benefits. I can't wait to continue taking advantage of them all while moving into the next chapter of my life!