

Matthew Vernon, BBA, April 2024

I first started running in 7th grade when my dad drafted my brothers and me into the Father's Day 5. *I* was on the MEMS soccer team at the time, although I didn't really have any other *running* experience at the time. Needless to say, it wasn't exactly a *fast* 5k, although I did manage to complete it without walking. However, this race was what set the stage for me to *transition to* the cross-country *team* after *I* graduated MEMS and began as a freshman at Burr and Burton Academy.

Cross-country was a rather different type of competition than I had experienced playing soccer. *I* was used to putting my all into a game, but there was often a poor attitude around it *wherein the ultimate* goal was *to* beat our opponents and sportsmanship was often just *considered a bonus*. *Mind* you, this was a middle school team, yet a culture of supremacy had *already begun to* emerge.

In contrast, cross country running (and track and field for that matter), are ultimately forms of self-competition. I performed a poem for Poetry Out Loud that I think gracefully captures this contrast in a runner's outlook - in which one approaches a race "With *only* love of the clock and the underfooting and the other runners," (Stephen Dunn). The clock is representative of self-improvement, while the other runners are what make the amazing cross-country community possible. This group played a huge role in my transition to high school, and even after four years the best and longest-lasting friendships I've made have been through the team. I'm getting together with one of our captains from last year to train for my first marathon this summer. I had the honor of pacing a teammate to his admission to Air Force Academy - and although we later learned that pacing the mile trial wasn't allowed, *it* was good practice for *the* second time around. There's nothing like the shared pain of a hard race or interval run to bring people together.

Running has also helped me to develop a persistence and doggedness *that* I've brought to other areas of my life. After I reflect on running myself to *the point of tunnel* vision and lightheadedness to break five minutes in the mile, or pushing hard enough *in* the 800m that *I* collapsed across the line with scorched feet, suddenly writing that essay doesn't sound *all that* bad. This has been true for me in relation to anything requiring persistence -whether *playing* the viola or studying for a chemistry exam - as I know firsthand that I'll get out what *I* put *in*. Running is often a mental game just as much as a physical one: after *I* had run my first half-marathon and knew how it felt, running subsequent races required far less training, since I knew I was capable of going the distance. Through BBA's Student-Athletic Leadership Team, and through my position as captain on the track & field team, I'm trying to bring as many as possible into our fold so that they can both share the experience of what it means to run.