

## Why not us?

Why is ours a goal that has never been reached by a cross country team in school history? You could say it's because we haven't had the runners, but I believe it's because we haven't believed with 100% certainty that it's possible. It's true that a great deal of our success will come from our abilities and our racing strategy on race day. Your legs, lungs, and arms have to do some work. It's 3 miles of adapting, strategizing, and pushing your limits. It's 18ish minutes of effort, of focus, and of determination to succeed. The thing that will do the most work on race day, however, is your head. Coming in a close second will be your heart. The quote about running the first mile with your legs, the second mile with your head, and the third mile with your heart is spot on. I know how badly you want it, and how your heart's desire to be a state qualifying team more than you can put into words. It's not the heart that needs to want it. It's your head that needs to believe it. Coach Ideran and I believe that you girls are the team to make this happen. From the first time we ran up the hill at Crossroads to the last mile repeat in Prescott, you have put in the work, and it is time to show it. I'm sure you've heard me use the phrase that "consistent effort over time" is how you succeed as a distance runner. This team is the epitome of that phrase, the IMPROVEMENT has been impressive to say the least, and it's time to see the success in a very big way.

Our hearts are full of love for you, and we are bursting with pride. Is it related to results? Yes...in some ways. We are so proud of all your hard work and all that you have accomplished. We are even more proud of you for the people you are. For the fact that you come together and support one another, build each other up, and push each other to be better people. You literally are the best people in the entire school, and we want nothing more for you than to be successful and be THE TEAM to qualify for State!!! So...back to some things you need to realize and keep in mind in your preparations.

One...everyone in the race is nervous. State is on the line for every team. Even teams that you assume will qualify are not guaranteed that spot until the race is done. Two...just as you are concerned that other teams will race well, the other teams are thinking about how good we are, and how we could beat them. When we run in our pack and find our RHYTHM, no one will be able to stop us. As humans, we have the tendency to build our competitors up like they are superhuman or don't have the same fears or weaknesses that we do. The fact is, they are exactly the same as you and in the same position as you. Everyone racing wants to qualify for state. Everyone is nervous. Because of these nerves, sometimes crazy things happen. Races can go out really slow, or they can go out extremely fast. Remember that you have 3 miles to adapt and respond, and you must TRUST your teammates, your training, and your coaches, and know that you are in the best possible position to succeed. So, rather than being afraid of the other teams, make them afraid of you. Be DISCIPLINED and follow the race plan.

As uncomfortable as your nerves can be, it is exciting and exhilarating to be in this position--on the brink of doing something incredible. I can feel it, and I know you can feel it too.

When I first started running, I didn't actually like the feeling of putting one foot in front of the other as much as I did the feeling of accomplishment when I was done. It's what kept me going. It's still what keeps me going. That feeling is what I hope each of you experience with the sport of distance running. When you are in the middle of a race, I know that it is very difficult to convince yourself to take a RISK and make a move. You tell yourself silly things, and you slow down or stay where you are. It really doesn't take that much more effort to stick with a teammate or close a gap on a competitor, or to pull away from someone with less than a mile to go. When the race is over, you won't remember any pain from the race itself, or what your legs felt like when you decided to push, but you will remember the sense of pride when you're done--a feeling you will carry with you always. You won't think about your lungs, your legs, or any other body part for that matter. What you will think about is how proud you are for making that move and how that move had a direct impact on the results.

When I was in high school, my number one goal was to be an All-State athlete. Period. As a sophomore, my 4x800 relay qualified for State, but we did not advance to finals. As a junior, we again qualified, and we made the final as well! In track, the top 9 are All-State, and 12 teams make the 4x800 final. Well...we placed 10th. As a senior, I finally decided to trade in my volleyball knee pads and join the cross country team. We became the first State Qualifying team in Batavia's school history. I was the number one runner on the team. I had placed in the top 5 in most of the meets throughout the season, and I knew I was in the hunt for a state medal. In the race, I did not get out quite fast enough. I managed

to pass roughly 100 girls throughout the 3 miles, but I came up 4 short. I placed 29th, 4 places and 4 seconds out of the All-State finish I was working so hard for. I still remember the cool down that day, and how my teammates picked me up and put me back together. Those girls are still some of my best friends, even 15 years later. I promise--there is a greater point to this. Following the State meet, I ran in the Mideast Cross Country Championships. It is designed to be a race for the top senior boys and top senior girls from Illinois, in which they come together and race as a team against other states from the midwest and east. I had finished 29th in the State and was not the fastest senior girl traveling to Ohio to compete with Team Illinois. In fact, several of the girls had run faster times and had earned the state medals I wanted so badly. What I realized after meeting these girls was that several of them never should have beat me. They were great girls, and I ended up competing against them in college and still run into a few even today. But they weren't better than me. I didn't know that before. I learned it too late. After spending 36 hours together, I knew that they did not work harder than me, and that they weren't mentally tougher, or more talented. What they did was race like they belonged. I was a little more tentative than I should have been, and I didn't put myself in the race. When I got to compete against them again, in the Mideast Meet, I beat all but one--and she was legitimately better than me--I'll admit it. The point of the story is that going to the line, I didn't truly believe that I was good enough to get a state medal. I wanted it with all my heart, but I didn't believe that I could actually make it happen. What you need to know is that you ARE good enough to qualify for state. I have been around a lot of teams, whether competing myself or coaching, and I can, with 100% certainty tell you that you should have the CONFIDENCE you need when stepping to the line. YOU ARE GOOD ENOUGH. YOU BELONG AT THE STATE MEET. AND YOU CAN MAKE IT HAPPEN.

I want you to learn from my experience, as it helped to put the girls I competed against on a level playing field--which is where they belong. I wish so badly that I could go back and re-run my race at state during the fall of my senior year. I know the result would be different. If I could give my high school self any advice, it would be to trust my training and to be confident throughout the race. That confidence turns into self-belief, and that is what you need to achieve your goals. One of the scariest parts of all this is that you don't get to re-do the race. All the things you think about after the race that you wish you had thought of during the race have to come into play. Give it everything you have, and we will not be disappointed.

Back to the first thing on my mind--Why Not Us? Why Not Us? When you are sizing up the other girls on the line, tell yourselves a few things. Those girls on the other teams...they are not better than you. They do not work harder than you. And they certainly do not want this more than you. They are just as nervous as you. They have to run the same 3 mile course and handle the same emotions and nerves. Staying calm, relaxed, and focused is so important.

Believe in yourselves. Trust your teammates. Trust your training. Trust your coaches. You have the support and love of your team, your families, your coaches, your school, your superintendent, and every alumni in OE history. We believe in you. You can accomplish this goal.

Most of all, have FUN. These nerves and feelings you have right now are things you will look back on and wish you could feel again. It may seem unbearable to wait to Saturday to race, but enjoy every moment. ENJOY the journey and embrace how it feels to be on that brink of something incredible. Greatness is within our reach. Let's go out and grab it!

Joy. Rhythm. Discipline. Confidence. Self-Improvement. Risk. Trust.

Believe it...we can do it!

Sincerely,  
Coach Cook (Philly)



## Let's Race

Back in the beginning of the summer, when Cook and I sat down and started planning out the season, we were excited. Excited for the group we got to work with; excited to build off the previous year; basically just excited to get running. We felt at the beginning of the summer that this group could be special. We felt at the beginning of the fall season that this group could be special. With each workout, each long run, each weight room session, our **confidence** in that feeling grew. In all my years of coaching (XC, Track, Basketball...whatever), I've never had more fun coming to practice every single day than I do with this group. I mean that as seriously as I can possibly say. And very quickly, that feeling codified into two beliefs. First, a belief that this team was special. Second, a belief that this team would qualify for the state meet. It's a belief that has guided every practice and meet since September. It's a belief that I am confident you guys share as fully as we do.

Now, into the week of Sectionals, the first belief is for certain: this team is special. You as an individual are part of something special as a group. I think you all get that. In fact, watching you figure out this fact throughout the year has been part of what has made coming to practice so much fun. The attitude, effort, **discipline, confidence** and **joy** we bring to every workout, recovery run and meet is a testament to the culture of this team that you guys have built. It is a culture that is truly special; there is no doubt about that fact.

The second belief will be decided on Saturday. It will be an emotional day from start to finish. Prepare yourself for that, and know that it is normal. You should feel emotions and nerves. That means you care. When the gun goes off, those nerves will leave and you will focus on the task at hand. The beautiful thing about running is the fact that no matter how well you've trained, how much you care, how badly you want it...you still have to show up and race. The race doesn't care about your feelings, your training, what you think you deserve. When it comes to qualifying for the state meet, deserve has got nothing to do with it. Those spots go to girls who step up, find their **rhythm** and race. Know that your training, work, effort and **self-improvement** have gotten you to a point where you can toe the line with **confidence** and race. You can control yourself and how you react to the pain that comes with racing hard. It should hurt. You are running hard. But you are separate from the pain. It will be ok. You will take a **risk** and make it even better than ok. You will make it special.

I'm going to give you the same advice I give all my track athletes at the state meet (and the same advice I got as a high school athlete before a big game): At some point when you get to the course (before the warmup, during the warmup, as we head to the line...whenever it fits your routine), take a minute, pause, take a long look around, and smile. I mean it. Like ear-to-ear...a big-ass, Katherine-waving-to-the-camera type smile. Look at your teammates, your coaches, your parents and friends. Know that you are a part of something special. Take **joy** in the fact that you get to do this with them. Take **joy** in the fact that you get to run. And as you're smiling, **trust** that your teammates are doing the same thing.

**Trust** your teammates. **Trust** your training. Your teammates have your back. Your coaches have your back. We are proud of you and we love you.

So fit. Let's race.

-Ideran





## Letter to 2017 OEHS XC Sectional Team

My name is Ariel Michalek and I graduated from OEHS in 2012. I ran cross country all 4 years and absolutely loved it. I just wanted to send some support to you guys and let you know that it is so exciting to hear that OEHS has a chance to make state as a team! Here are some things that I would like to share with you about my experience as a former OEHS XC runner.

Being part of a team was something that I had always valued since I was a multi-sport athlete since I was a kid. When I joined the XC team at OEHS, I learned so many things from just being around my teammates and all the experiences we shared together each season. Competing for the team was one of the best feelings each time I toed the line. Having so much support for each race was what can help push you each race to run faster or pick you up when you are struggling through one. With a team, you have the chance for so many different opportunities and while at OEHS I was able to be a part of a conference winning team in 2009. Our sport may be run individually by each person but each individual matters on the team no matter what their capabilities are.

Looking back at my 4 years, I appreciate so many different things that happened due to being a part of the XC team. If I had to choose one thing to have appreciated the most, it would be the endless support of everyone around me. At practice, my coach would push me hard so that I was able to achieve the results I wanted. On runs, my teammates would entertain each other in order to build a bond between each other. At competitions, I had my family as well as teammates and their families cheering me on all over the course. Those moments are something that made a difference for me and helped me succeed along the way. Without all this support, it would have been very hard to achieve the things that I did in this sport.

What I have learned from this sport is that it takes hard work and determination to reach your goals. You cannot control anything else but yourself so make sure to do everything you can in order to succeed. There are so many other things that I learned along the way as well. I learned that you may have to take so risks in order to see how far you can get. I learned to never take advantage of the opportunities that you get because someone else may not have the same chance as you. I learned how to be a good teammate and leader for those on my team by showing support and being a shoulder to lean on when times are tough or being a goofball to make things fun sometimes. There will always be things that you can learn while in the sport so make sure to share those with your teammates because they may need to hear it too.

Accomplishing goals is something that every runner aims to do each season. They differ for each runner as well as each team. During my time on the OEHS XC team, I had so many different goals and they changed each year. I remember running my first race freshman year and thinking that I was terrible at the sport. I ran 3 miles in about 24 minutes and I was devastated afterwards. I thought that I was going to do better than that when I toed the line. After that race, I talked to my coach and dad about how to run faster next time so that I could know what to do better next time. From that moment on I started running faster each race and achieved so many of my goals. The biggest goals that I have achieved in high schools were winning state in 2010 and being runner-up at state in 2011. There were many goals that I achieved in between such as winning regionals, winning sectionals, and being a 4 time conference champion in XC. I achieved more goals than I could have ever imagined after my first race my freshman year and I am so grateful for all the opportunities I had in order to get there. In regards to team goals, we had some goals that were met and that we were just short of. We won conference in 2009 and were a close second in 2011. We made it to sectionals as a team in 2010 and I am so proud of all the things that we were able to accomplish as a team. We all have goals and you have to take all the possible steps in order to achieve them. All of you have the capabilities to achieve any goals you set. You just have to believe in yourself and your training and the rest will come with it.

My teammates changed year after year but I definitely have so many memories to look back on with them. What I remember most about them is that they always were there for me and we would always have fun. We would have team pasta parties and joke around on the bus. I just remember making so many different bonds with members of the team. One of my favorite memories with my teammates would be from my freshman year. We had a team get together and made fun t-shirts, played games and even wrapped cars up in toilet paper. It was my first experience with the team and it was amazing. There are way too many memories that I could go on and on about but the important thing is that you make those bonds and are able to look back on them. Some people have made lifelong friendships out of them and those are great to see. I always can look back at all the pictures I took each year and remember how amazing it was to have the teammates that I did.

Being part of a team is important because it allows everyone to work together to accomplish something great. While on the XC team, we would all talk about our team goals and figure out what we needed to do to get there. Those team goals helped push me each and every day of practice as well as in each race. I wanted to make sure that I did all that I could to help the team reach our goal. For me, this was scoring as high as I could so that we had less points to add up. The team aspect of the sport was something that I always enjoyed being a part of and the team was always supportive of my goals. That is how a team can challenge you to be better.

As an OEHS XC alumni, I would be so proud of you guys if you were able to qualify for state as a team. We want to make our program stand out among the rest and show everyone that OEHS XC is the real deal. This is something that nobody else can say they have done before and I think it would be amazing if you guys could say that you did. I have been down to state in XC and it is one of the most incredible atmospheres to be a part of. You guys would be the first in school history to do it. That may scare you or make you more nervous but you have to zone those things out and focus on the feeling of accomplishing the top goal. Being the first in something may bring more nerves before the race but use those nerves as a positive energy. Embrace the moment and go out there and give it your all. As long as you do that, you give yourself the chance to do it. I believe that you can achieve this goal and all of us former runners for OEHS are cheering you on to do just that. This would leave behind even more accomplishments to add to the OEHS XC legacy and that is the most amazing part.

Why do I care about the success of your team? As an alumni, you think of the success that the school makes in the sport as progress that shows OEHS is becoming a school that has accomplished so many things athletically. I think that this team is something amazing to be a part of and seeing each of you go through the journey yourselves is amazing. All of the things I read about or hear from Coach Cook are something to be proud of. It also is something that I feel I am a part of in a small way. I was part of the teams before you and to me that means that we laid down a foundation of what OEHS is all about. Your team is growing on that foundation and that makes me proud to be a XC alumni.

If I could go back to the big races in high school, there would be so many things I would tell myself. Instead, I will tell you some things I wish I had known on those days. For starters, nerves are okay to have. I remember every race being nervous all morning and then the minute the gun went off, they went away and the race went great. Nerves can be good so don't be afraid to have them. Another thing that may have helped me in high school was having confidence in myself no matter what happened that day. I know that it may be hard to believe in yourself at times but having that confidence can give you a mental strength throughout the race. If you don't doubt yourself, then you are more likely to accomplish one of your goals. However, if the outcome is not what you wanted then you cannot give yourself a hard time. You have to pick your head up and put in more work the next week. It is so hard to be 100% consistent every race so look at the good things that happened in your race and be proud of those moments. With the bad things, look at ways that you can improve those for next race. It seems hard to do this but once you try it out, it can help so much in the long run. Those are some of the most important things that I wish I would have known from day 1 and I hope that they help you for the rest of your career at OEHS.

It is hard to figure out how to keep calm in big situations. When it comes to racing, you have to find the way that works for you or try someone else's way if yours hasn't been working. For me, I would have nerves all day but I would joke around all morning and then I would listen to a playlist I had for myself with some pump-up music if I had the time. Then, it would all set in during the warm up. I would have to just breathe and focus on what I wanted to accomplish that race. Once I got to the starting line, I would still have nerves but I would get my mind in the zone. I would forget about all the irrelevant things on my mind and think of the one thing that I wanted to do during my race. That helped calm me down a good amount but like I said before, I had nerves until the gun went off. This worked for me but may not work for you so think of some topics that calm you down or find a song that has a good running rhythm and sing it in your head as you are in the starting box. Just try anything you can and you will eventually find something that works for you.

Staying motivated is something that so many people have struggled with at some point in their life. With racing, everyone has their own ways of motivating themselves each race. For me, I did not really have something in my mind that kept me motivated. I would prepare myself mentally throughout the week and the day of the race. Once the gun went off, I would just let all my thoughts go and think about absolutely nothing during races. I would just get to the point where I felt like I was in some kind of zone and there was no way to get out of it until the race was over. This helped me so much throughout races in high school because it

allowed me to leave doubt back at the starting line. Having nothing on my mind was one of the keys to my success. There would be points in races where I knew I needed to speed up or make a move and I would tell myself to do that but right after, I would go back to thinking about nothing. This took practice for me and each race it was easier to zone out and race my heart out. It may be something to try during a workout or you may have your own way of staying motivated. There are many strategies people can use. One I learned in college was to have different colored bracelets and label each one with something that would be useful during races. For me, I tried this and put on a blue bracelet that I labeled as confidence. Every time I lacked confidence, I would look down at this bracelet I would be reminded to have confidence in myself and I would lose all the doubt I had and kept racing. That is something that worked for me when I could not get into my zone. You may have more than one thing that works for you so find a few ways that work and use them.

In high school, so many different things can cross your mind and throw you off balance. Positive thoughts can help motivate and give you confidence while negative thoughts can make it seem like there is no hope. At the beginning of my running career, I would try not to let people get in my head but it happens. I learned from my dad that people can say whatever they want but you can always prove them wrong. So that is always what came to my mind when negative thoughts crossed my mind. Prove everyone wrong and show them that you are capable of accomplishing greatness. This idea gave me so much strength as my running career went on in high school. I would just breathe and know that I could show everyone that they were wrong. I never let things get to me because I always let my racing do the talking. People can be mean and stomp on your goals but don't let them. The moment you let them, they win and you lose all the confidence you had. Use the negativity to fuel you in races or turn the negative thing into something positive. IT may be hard to figure that out at first, but there are so many different people in your corner who can help. It is easy to say negative things to people but what they don't know is how strong you are. You can accomplish anything you set out to do so show everyone else what you are made of and never stop.

Breakthroughs are something that everyone wants to have each season. For me, I had my fair share of those while running at OEHS. My first breakthrough race was the winning conference my freshman year. This changed everything for me. My other breakthrough races were winning my first big meet, winning conference, winning regionals, winning sectionals, and winning state. All of these races are reasons why I became the runner I was in high school. Thinking back at what helped me at those races, I had all the support in the world and I did not have any big expectations for myself at the beginning. The minute I won conference freshman year, I felt like I was going to be a great runner later in my career. I don't remember each thing that helped me but I know that never giving up was something that gave me the opportunity to reach for the stars and achieve so much. I always wanted to do better every race. My dad would challenge me to run faster and faster each race and he is a big reason I was successful in high school. I remember him going through all the people I was racing and who to look out for. He helped me strategize for the big races along with my coach and it made a big difference. I didn't know that I was going to have a breakthrough race until it happened. You will know when you have one. You will feel like everything you have done to get there has paid off and you are invincible. That feeling is something to hold on to and use it to keep pushing towards another breakthrough race later on.

Crossing the finish line is something that we do every race and each time it is completely different. The biggest race I had in high school was state 2010. This was the year that I won my first ever state title. I remember crossing this finish line and being tired from the race. . I felt so many different emotions but most of all I was stunned. I could not believe that I had just won state. It was so surreal. As I walked out of the finish area, there were dozens of people trying to talk me. I felt overwhelmed by all of the people but I talked to them about the race anyways. I kept thinking about where my family and coach were because I wanted to see them. Finally, my coach found me and she was freaking out. She gave me the biggest hug and it validated everything we had done all season. All the work I had put in was all worth it just for this feeling. My parents were crying of joy because they were so proud of me and knew that I could do it. I had so many people who came down to support me and they all made the experience so amazing. I had everyone cheering me on and people telling me how great I did. It was one of the best moments I have ever had in my life. It didn't sink in that I had just won until later that week but I will never forget the moment I crossed the finish line that day.

If I could have given myself advice prior to big races, I would tell myself to relax and enjoy the moment. There will be bad races in your career but there will also be good ones. Take each race as it comes and focus on them one at a time. Don't psych yourself out, make sure to do all the little things, and never give up. I know that these are all such common things to say to an athlete but they are so helpful. Knowing these will not magically improve your times but it will help you mentally and give you all the strength to succeed.

I have told you so many things about my experience and I hope that you are able to use some of it as advice or as motivation. I believe that each of you has so much to offer to this team and can be successful. I know that I haven't talked to all of you before but I see the things that you are doing through race results, reading the website, or talking to Coach Cook every now and then. You all have been working so hard all season and I cannot wait to see how the rest of it goes!

Go Wolves!  
Ariel Michalek

p.s- if you ever need someone to run ideas by or want me to go more in detail about anything that I mentioned about, feel free to contact me and I would be happy to help.

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Dear Oswego East 2017 Cross Country Team,

This feels weird to type...seems like yesterday I was in your shoes. Let me introduce myself, my name is Reghan Quick and I graduated from OE in 2013. I ran cross country all four years, but I must say Senior year was by far my favorite season since we progressed as a team into Regionals and Sectionals. I was an alternate for the top 12. I was so anxious, but filled with excitement from what we had achieved and what was yet to come. Personally, I never thought I would be top 12 again after my injury my freshman year. I had bilateral stress fractures in my shins (4 stress fractures) and having to sit out the entire season was a blow. The doctor told me that I might have to quit and not run again. I was in the top 7, and now my new role was to carry on as the team assistant. I was devastated. However, I kept pushing myself and eventually made it back to being in the top 12 senior year and became part of the team that was running for regionals. I would not have made it to that point if it were not for my team members. I have them to thank for pushing me to be better each and every practice and race. It was their excitement and motivation that pushed me through the first season back to keep going. It was them I could lean on for support when times were tough. It was them I can thank for getting me to where I was senior year. They have taught me the meaning of a team member, and most importantly, what it means to be part of the Wolfpack.

Some people say that cross country and track are individual sports, but I believe that is far from the truth. If it weren't for each and every one's hard work, you would not have already achieved so much in this short season. All of you are included in that achievement. This includes those of you who practice and are not running in the race; if it weren't for your motivation through practice and taking splits, the team would not be where they are. Same for those who cheer on the sidelines (that was me!). If it weren't for your motivation and your voice, the team would not be able to kick- it in, cut down on a split, etc. Each and every one of you holds a crucial part in the accomplishments of the team.

Some of you may be really excited, while others of you may be really nervous. I know from my end, I was a mixture of both, more so on the nervous side. Nervous -because I didn't want to let my team down; it was one thing to let myself down, but another to disappoint my friends and members of the pack. It's okay to feel that way, if you give your best shot, then you did your job. You all have already accomplished so much and should be proud of yourself. I know. As an alumna, I am so very proud of each and every one of you!! When I read the message from Philly (Coach Cook), that you are the first team to qualify for state, I was jumping with joy!! I was feeling the same excitement and a sense of pride!! In the short four years of 2013 team graduating, so much has been accomplished.

When its time to line up at the starting line, think of the highlights of the last season or your running career at OEHS thus far. Think about everything that you have done to get to the point that you are now. Hold onto a certain memory and run with it. My biggest race for high school was my conference race senior year since I knew I probably would not be running in regionals, but I treated it like any other race. Pretend that this may be your last race and leave everything on the trail. For me, I clung onto my devastation freshman year and stomped all over it at conference. I told myself that an injury holds nothing over me. I believed in myself, and you need to, too. I believe in you guys and am so very proud of you all!!



Good luck at Sectionals, you will do wonderful!! The alumni are all very proud of you!!

- Reghan Quick (Class of 2013)



Hello guys, my name is Mari McDowell and I graduated from Oswego East in 2014. I have a feeling of nostalgia every fall because of cross country. I remember arriving to a meet and feeling the crispness in the air and hearing the crunch of leaves below my feet. There was a sense of excitement in the air too, and it kept me coming back for more each time. I remember lining up at the starting line, anticipating the gun and feeling the rush of adrenaline when it went off.

I want you guys to remember this feeling.

During my races I always tried to disconnect my brain from my body. I may have felt some soreness or pain here or there but this was my time to tough it out and run. I would run confidently, with my head up high, and long strides. I made it a mission to pass as many girls as possible and to use all my remaining energy to sprint to the finish-remember keep your knees high and stay on your toes and plow through that finish!

Finally, I want you ladies to look around you, everybody on your team, including coach Cook, wants you to succeed and cares about you. This is not only a team, but a family. I still have my group chat with my old cross-country girls and we talk every day! I want you ladies to trust each other and work together, there's no better feeling than running with your best friends every day. I'm so proud of you ladies because you all have the ability to do what past teams haven't achieved. I want you guys to know that so many people are supporting you and rooting for all you guys to achieve your dreams.

Run smart and run fast!

Mari McDowell





Hey fellow wolf!

My name is Hannah Baur and I graduated from Oswego East in 2015. Currently, I am a junior attending the University of Illinois and am studying Animal Sciences. Looking back, the thing I miss most about high school is most definitely being a student athlete! I try working out on my own free time every now and then, but it just isn't the same when you aren't working out with teammates by your side. The pack mentality played a huge role in my confidence and amped up my adrenaline, both during practice and at meets. I also miss the small silly things, like our bus rides to the meets and hanging out in the athletic trainer's after practice where we all took ice baths and talked about our days. I definitely took these factors for granted and wish I could be part of a team again. It was the best feeling when we all finished a race and did really well, together as one competing team. We all had our own personal goals, but we didn't let our individual aspirations distract us from our team goals either. For me personally, I had the goal of being an all-conference athlete from the very start of my running career. I'll never forget how thrilled I felt when I finally did reach it my junior year, and senior year as well. For both seasons, it was just one of those races where my body just clicked and everything felt in sync. I didn't feel the sharp pain in my lungs or the fatigue in my legs anymore; I felt GOOD and it felt even better when I surpassed my competitors during the final stretch. I hope you have experienced this feeling before, "Runner's high" as they call it, and wish it upon you in your upcoming races!

Being a part of this program for four years and being a captain for my final season has taught me valuable skills such as the importance of communication, commitment and leadership. You have fantastic coaches, countless athletic resources as your disposal and access to equipment that unfortunately not every high school athlete may have elsewhere. Use these to your advantage! To see the first team from OE qualify for state would be amazing and would make me very proud. Even though I've graduated, I still care immensely about the success of the team. The program itself has developed so much since its start and seems to improve even more with each year! I wish you the best of luck these upcoming weeks; I know these "big" meets can be intimidating, but it's important to stay positive if you want to perform well. My advice to you would be to remember that you only have so many opportunities to experience the excitement and thrill of a cross country meet, so make it count!

Best,

Hannah Baur

Class of 2015





HI (it's Annie) AND CONGRATULATIONS!!!! I am so excited for you guys and I cannot wait to hear how you preform. I bet you're super nervous but make sure that you try to find it within yourself to be at least a little bit excited. I think my number one regret looking back is that I let my nerves get the best of me and that held me back. Sometimes taking running too seriously has the complete opposite effect on your performance, so remember to have fun and don't let girls at the line intimidate you (because you're better, duh). During sectionals stick with your pack or at least one of your teammates. I know Philly and Ideran have instilled that in your head at least 2000 times but it is extremely easy to fall off when you're nervous and tired. I vividly remember Kathleen Sim literally looked back at me during a race and I will never forget how mad I was at myself for not sticking with her. If you drop off you're not only hurting yourself but your teammates too because they need you just as much as you need them. During races, I would make moves by picking a point ahead of me and then surging; I found that when I looked at the backs of the people in front of me it slowed me down and intimidated me. I have so much faith in you guys and it makes me so happy that you guys are having such an awesome season, but end it that way too. Remember that the pain is temporary and it is worth it! You're already fast enough and **TRUST YOUR TRAINING**. You did not put in countless hours of practicing and horrible ice baths just to let your confidence hold you back, so make sure you tell yourself every day that you are more than capable! Most importantly, don't listen to music and isolate yourself the entire time before your race; talk to your teammates!!!! Pick each other up, **LAUGH**, and shut down negative talking. I am a freshman in college now and I go to Bradley University and the number one thing I miss the most is running. Running on a treadmill is not the same as laughing until you pee your pants on long runs with your teammates. The comfort of being on a team is something that I didn't even realize I would miss the most. The flow of your lifting group and running pack is something you might never find again after high school. Your teammates know your goals, your insecurities, and your funny life stories and don't take that for granted. I don't think I'll ever find a group of girls even comparable to my teammates and I'm so thankful for the time I did have on the team. You guys will do awesome and I'm excited to see you all in Peoria ☺. Here are some of my finest moments during XC:

1. I slipped on ice during a four mile run down Ogden and Kathleen, Katherine, and I ran back but decided to cut through a corn field and Two German shepherds attacked me. Moral of the story: don't take shortcuts!!!
2. A bug flew in my eye during 400 repeats and I rubbed my eye so hard that my contact fell out and I had to finish the workout half-blind.
3. Every time we would run behind the bleachers to run the mile-loop, there was a 99% chance I wiped out







Amanda,

Hi! My name is Mollie Karasch and I graduated in 2014. I'm currently a senior at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. From what I've heard your senior season seems to be going really well and I'm super excited to hear that the team is so close to qualifying for state. Most of my fondest memories of high school were from competing on the cross country team.

What I appreciated most about being on the team was the constant support of my teammates and the connection between all of us to reach our goals. Without their encouragement during practices and at meets I would not have become the runner that I had wanted to be. Being part of the team made me better because I knew that we needed to work as a team in order to accomplish both our personal and team goals. We were each other's competition, as well as, each other's biggest cheerleaders. We would go out working towards the team's ultimate goal.

By the end of my senior season, I accomplished most of my team and personal goals. A goal of mine that I had, had since my freshman season was becoming an all-conference athlete. Going into my final conference meet, I knew that this was my last chance to reach my goal and I was closer to accomplishing it than I had ever been before. At the starting line, I was in the mentality that I would place in the top 14. During the race, I kept counting off the runners that I was passing and kept pushing forward to hopefully reach my goal. I remember that the only thing on my mind was that I had to keep passing people, I needed to be near the front of the pack. Upon finishing the race, I was unsure about if I had placed or if I had missed my chance. During our cool down run, Coach Cook pulled Hannah and I aside and told us we had both made all-conference. The amount of excitement that we both had at that moment was unbelievable. I'll never forget that feeling.

There were two breakthroughs in my running career that I remember clearly from my senior season. One was during a practice where we ran intervals. The intervals were done over a 4 mile "course". I had been in the front of the group for most of the workout. I was never one of the people who was at the front of the group during workouts. I always fell somewhere near the middle of the varsity pack. Near the end of the workout, I was significantly ahead of the other girls. I remember being a little under 800 meters away from finishing the workout and feeling like I was unable to go any faster than the pace I was at. Coach Cook began running with me and pushed me to stay with her as we increased speed. I ended up finishing that workout extremely happy with how I had done. I broke through what I thought I could do and surprised myself with what I was capable of running. There was also a race where I had an extremely big breakthrough was at a race at Niles West. I was feeling great going into the race. I ended up placing in the meet and finishing 2<sup>nd</sup> for our team. I had never placed so high among our roster. Throughout the season, I learned to always reach further than what you think you can do, you might surprise yourself with all of the things you are capable of.

My biggest race during high school was my senior season's sectional meet. We were on the radar as a possible state qualifying team. Our team was in the mentality that we would place in the top 5. During the race, our team gave the race everything they had. Most of us had never run as fast as we had that day. Almost every member of our varsity team pr'd. Hannah and I ran most races together because our paces were similar, and we pushed each other through the race. I remember that after crossing the finish line I couldn't remember breathing for the last 100 meters of the race. I knew that I ran the



hardest and best race that I had in me. I do not regret anything that happened that day and know that each one of us had run the best race that any of us was capable of racing. It was a race that I will never forget and was a great way to conclude my competitive running career.

As an alum, it would be incredible to see the first team from OE qualify for the state meet. I was a freshman when our first girl qualified and won the state race. And I was a senior when our team was only 2 places away from qualifying in 2013. A goal that the team had during the 2013 season was to be the first team to qualify for the meet, but unfortunately, we were unable to qualify. From what I have heard about the team this season, I believe that you are very likely to qualify. The things that you all have accomplished this season is amazing. Seeing you qualify for the state meet will be super exciting.

If I could give advice to my high school self about these types of races, it would be to put everything out there during your races because you will never be able to repeat that exact race. At the time that we were finishing our cross country season, I didn't know that, that would be the last time I would compete on a cross country team. You have to live in the moment and don't hold anything back.

Whenever I was nervous about racing, I would calm myself down by tuning out all of the surrounding noises and focus on what I was about to do. I would ignore all of the other things that were going on in my life and only worry about the current race. In order to stay motivated during a race, I mentally give myself pep talks throughout the race. If I start feeling pain in my legs or another part of my body I push those thoughts of pain away and focus on what I need to do to make it to the finish line faster. In order to stay positive during a race, I cheer myself on and focus on the positive things that I am doing during the race or what it will mean when I pr or place well. I also focus on the goals that I have for the race. I try to not focus on getting passed, and if I do get passed, I try to run with the girl who passed me. Do not let someone psych you out during the race. They are just as strong as you are.

Some advice that I have for you going into regionals and sectionals is to always be optimistic and never sell yourself short. Know that you can accomplish anything that you put your heart and mind to. When you are on the line at sectionals, remember that you are there to qualify for state. You want to be a part of the team that makes history. You'll be a part of the first Oswego East cross country team to ever qualify for the state meet!

I'll be cheering you guys on from Barcelona (where I'm currently studying abroad). Know that you have a large number of alumni that are super excited for you guys to be so close to this accomplishment.



When I was on the team we used to say: "Run the first mile with your legs, the second with your mind and the third with your heart."

Good luck in the rest of your season!

Mollie

Dear Morgan,

My name is Michelle Borycki and not too long ago I was in your shoes. I graduated from Oswego East in 2014, just almost four short years ago. I hope this letter will be just as important to you as it is to me. Reflecting on my time as an athlete is an emotional topic for me as I am currently a senior and my competitive running career is coming to what feels like an abrupt halt. I know you've probably heard this more times than you can count, but four years go by faster than you can imagine. I remember my last high school race like it was just yesterday. The difference that I hope for you, is that you take advantage of every race and every opportunity you are given to improve. For me, high school running consisted of a lot of excuses and missed chances. I was the best runner at my junior high and for some reason thought this meant something. I wasn't willing to put in the work or live the lifestyle required to be a successful runner. Although it was a long process, I grew to love running and the lifestyle that came with it. I grew to love the person running has molded and shaped me to be.



As many runners, my love for running was inconsistent due to many internal struggles. My biggest struggle with running is limiting myself. I tend to forget how hard I have worked after I have an unsuccessful workout or race and carry that with me much too long. I've let poor races/workouts represent myself as a runner rather than think of all the miles and hard work I put in. As obvious as it may seem, my advice to you is to avoid this at all costs. My biggest regret is not trusting in my training, my hard work, and myself. Countless times I had given up too easily and said, "Next season will be my season". Because you are just a sophomore, you still have many chances and opportunities. But don't let this dictate the present. I want to encourage you to never settle and to never resort to achieving your goals at a later time. The pain of pushing yourself and seeing great results is far less than the pain you feel after a disappointing race or season. Besides, how cool would it be to say that you were part of a team that made it to the state meet your sophomore, junior, and senior year?! That begins now!

A huge part of my love for running is contributed to the people that were and still are involved in my running journey. My high school teammates were and still are my best friends. We created a group message my senior year of high school and continue to talk in it almost every day now- years later. Although school has separated us physically, these girls are still near and dear to my heart and a part of my everyday life. Part of what brought us so close together was our common goal of wanting to push ourselves to be the best runners we could be. We were all drawing from each other's energy, passion, and desire. Although we never made it to state as a team, I think the program was moving in the right direction. Oswego East making it to state meet this year would mean as much to us now as it would have if we had made it in the past ourselves. This team has so much potential and it has not gone unnoticed. You have so many people that believe in you and are rooting for you!

I have included a cliché story that nonetheless I find to be very helpful. A teammate had passed this along to me in a time of mental struggle and I hope it benefits you as much as it does me.

*"There was a business executive who was deep in debt and could see no way out.*

*Creditors were closing in on him. Suppliers were demanding payment. He sat on the park bench, head in hands, wondering if anything could save his company from bankruptcy.*

*Suddenly an old man appeared before him. "I can see that something is troubling you," he said.*

*After listening to the executive's woes, the old man said, "I believe I can help you."*

*He asked the man his name, wrote out a check, and pushed it into his hand saying, "Take this money. Meet me here exactly one year from today, and you can pay me back at that time."*

*Then he turned and disappeared as quickly as he had come.*

*The business executive saw in his hand a check for \$500,000, signed by John D. Rockefeller, then one of the richest men in the world!*

*"I can erase my money worries in an instant!" he realized. But instead, the executive decided to put the uncashed check in his safe. Just knowing it was there might give him the strength to work out a way to save his business, he thought.*

*With renewed optimism, he negotiated better deals and extended terms of payment. He closed several big sales. Within a few months, he was out of debt and making money once again.*

*Exactly one year later, he returned to the park with the uncashed check. At the agreed-upon time, the old man appeared. But just as the executive was about to hand back the check and share his success story, a nurse came running up and grabbed the old man.*

*"I'm so glad I caught him!" she cried. "I hope he hasn't been bothering you. He's always escaping from the rest home and telling people he's John D. Rockefeller."*

*And she led the old man away by the arm.*

*The astonished executive just stood there, stunned. All year long he'd been wheeling and dealing, buying and selling, convinced he had half a million dollars behind him.*

*Suddenly, he realized that it wasn't the money, real or imagined, that had turned his life around. It was his newfound self-confidence that gave him the power to achieve anything he went after."*

The early mornings, summer miles, daily sacrifices, personal bests, and learned lessons should instill confidence within you. With confidence, you truly can achieve anything. Don't limit yourself. Don't slow down if you are racing next to a teammate that you think is faster than you. Don't limit yourself when you are racing next to girls that have beaten you consistently in the past. I have been a part of and witnessed many conference, sectional, state, and collegiate meets. Anything can happen. So, go out there and surprise everyone. Make it to the state meet for this first time in Oswego East history. Place better at state than the rankings say you will. Expect excellence and you will achieve just that. Stay calm. Don't doubt yourself. And most importantly, have fun. Soak it all in. Because before you know it, it'll all be over. And when it is over, do you want to reflect on missed opportunities or do you want to reminisce on how great it felt when all your hard work paid off?



I wish you the very best of luck! I know Oswego East will achieve great things within the next few weeks, and I cannot wait to see the results.

-Michelle Borycki

**Dear Abby,**

**You have been doing so well this season and all your hard work is paying off! I am so proud of you for leading your team each race this season. It is not easy having everyone relying on you to be #1 for the team every race but you have been doing that flawlessly. I have been in your shoes so I know that you are so strong and can accomplish so much. Coach Cook has been telling me about how you are running with the top packs and that is great. You give yourself the best chance to do well each and every race. Keep doing that because from what I have learned, it can give you so much confidence when you get to the bigger races later in the season. One thing that I think is important to tell you is that you have to believe in yourself and never doubt your abilities in a race. It is hard to do this but with the times you have been running, you are capable to leading your team to be the first OEHS girls XC team to make it to state. You have the focus and drive but now it's time to put all the pieces together. Take a deep breath and just put everything you have into this race. It is easy to underestimate yourself in any race situation and I have been there before. You have to go in to sectionals thinking that you can do it and have confidence that you can do well in the race. Go into the race and race like you have been all season. You have been successful in doing that so don't change it. Instead, use it to your advantage. So many runners get nervous and change their race strategy because they don't know how to handle it. Just stay calm and know that you have been doing well with your race plan all season. Take a few chances during your race and challenge yourself to run faster. Even if it's just dropping 5 seconds off each mile, that is still something that can motivate you during the race. You have a great opportunity this weekend so take it and do the best you can do. I will be cheering for your success and I wish you the best of luck this weekend!**

**Run fast, have fun, and Go Wolves!**

**Ariel Michalek**





Dear Elyssa,

I remember being on a team with you and seeing all of this great potential! You are seriously a baller and have so much talent in you! Being a part of the OEGirlsXC team was one of the best experiences of my life. The team was my family and they helped me grow into the person I am today. As you may know I still run track and field at North Central College and I've learned so much from that program, but also looking back to high school I learned a lot as well. I've learned a lot so here is some advice from my experiences.

First, the team you are on is your family so appreciate them, use them to help you, help them, spend tons of time with them. Second, I know you have some injuries and it can be hard physically and mentally to deal with them. I would take runs and workouts one at a time. Definitely ice, stretch, put your legs up often! If you have shin issues I highly recommend wearing calf sleeves when you sleep! Third, on race day to make the race easier break it down into parts! It gives you a central focus for that part of the race instead of thinking about the whole thing at once. Definitely run with your teammates and use them to build into the race! They are there to run, but also there to support you! Anything can happen in a race. The biggest take away from this is that running is great, it builds character. It doesn't take some super human ability to run fast and kick ass! All it takes is all you got, and I know that you have it in you. Believe in yourself, trust the process, and have fun! I would love to see the team succeed and qualify for state! It's so exciting!

Sincerely,

Ashley Buado





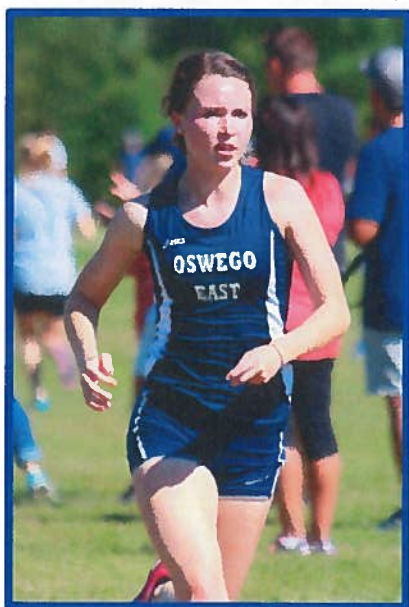


Hi Sammie!

My name is Alexis Henz. I graduated Oswego East in 2017. I was on the cross-country team all four years of high school. Being on the team is an experience I would not trade for the world. I learned things that I can take in life far past running. I hope you start to see the same thing I did. Looking back, I appreciate the team aspect the most. Yes, cross country can be a lot of fun, but we both know there are some hard times, being able to go through these experiences with your team is what made it all worthwhile. Reflecting on the last four years of my life, made me realize I would not be the person I am today, if it was not for the Oswego East running program. Doing cross-country you not only learn discipline and teamwork, but also you learn to have confidence in yourself. Throughout my four years I had hit some rough patches, but who doesn't. However, striving for those personal and team goals that you guys have set help you work through those rough patches. My personal goals changed a little each year, but I particularly remember one that stuck with me. I wanted to receive All-Conference all four years, which at the time was top 14 people. It was my junior year and I remember, I was in 14<sup>th</sup> with 400 to go, and I ended up in 16<sup>th</sup>. It was that race that pushed me to work harder and reflect before going into track and cross country the following year. The beauty about running is how much of an individual and team sport it is. You strive to make yourself better each day for the satisfaction for yourself, but all at the same time making your team that much better. Looking back, the most I remember about my teammates is, (and I'm sure you can agree to this since a lot of them are still there), how supportive they were. Each and every one of those girls have your back and want you to do your best. If you have a bad day or a good day use them, they all want to hear about it.



I have been keeping up with how the team has been doing this year, and you guys are doing great. I cannot wait to see how the rest of your season turns out for you guys. You are doing an amazing job as a freshman! I have known for the past two years that you were going to be a great addition to the team, and that is exactly what you are. Being in the top 12 is an amazing opportunity. I am so excited for you! Understand that you are gaining something that not everyone can experience. Being able to gain that experience of continuing your season helps you gain confidence and insight on future years. Don't underestimate what you can do! I know you can do great things for that team. Your times will keep coming down with support from your teammates and confidence in yourself. Believe in yourself that you should be up there in that top 10! You deserve it!



I want to leave you with a couple pieces of advice. The first is one I already mentioned, but stay confident, know that you deserve it and you can do it. I also suggest before big races just keep reminding yourself to take deep breaths, I know at times it can be a little overwhelming. One silly thing I did in high school and still do in my collegiate running, if I ever feel myself start to feel nervous, I take a deep breath and think in my head, "Alright Alexis, you got this." I know it seems silly but, it was a constant check to keep my confidence in check before races. One last piece of advice, is one that few people get to encounter in their high school career, we are both among those few. I know being put in the top group as a freshman can be a little scary at times, I was there with you, know that you belong there. You deserve that spot.

I wish the best of luck to you guys as you take on Regionals, Sectionals and Hopefully state!!!

-Alexis Henz



Hi Isabella!

My name is Rachel and I'm so excited that I get to write this letter to you. Just some background: I graduated OEHS in 2011. I ran cross country and track all 4 years of high school, and went on to compete in college. Although it's been almost 7 years since I raced on the Oswego East cross-country team, I remember that time in my life so vividly. I really do miss it!

Cross-country is a tough sport, no doubt about it. It challenges your mental toughness and confidence in a way that no other sport does. Personally, I really struggled with the pressure of performing well that I sometimes lost sight of the big picture. I'm not totally sure what you're feeling now, but I hope that my experience can give you some motivation and encouragement as you head into Sectionals.

As a runner, I didn't have a big break-through moment until I stopped focusing on the negative and started believing that I really was capable of running the times I wanted to run. It's crazy how your body can just surprise you in a race! I ran the 800 in track and I so badly wanted to break 2:20. I just couldn't ever do it and I was reaching my final opportunities to make it happen as the season was coming to an end. I knew the splits I needed to run, and as I stepped up to the line I made a choice that I was *just going to do it*. I was ranked 3rd in my heat, and top 2 finishers go to finals. I knew it was going to be tough because the girls ranked 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> had run way faster times than I ever had. I took deep breaths and when the gun went off, I did not let the girls in front pull away. I knew if I stayed with the top girls, I had a good chance at breaking 2:20 and making it to finals where I could score points for the team. Something crazy happened in that race. I just kept repeating in my head, "I *can* do this" as I watched the ponytail of the girl in front of me, and before I knew it, I had finished second with a time of 2:15. I was shocked! I was so determined that I didn't even realize how much faster my splits were. I hope that you can go into Sectionals visualizing your goal, and believing that it's possible. Isabella, you've trained hard and your coach literally is the best coach there is – you have to remind yourself that you are ready for this, and you are capable of a huge PR. You've made it to the top 12, and that's a big deal! The amazing thing is that you still have more to give. It's really just the mental games that can hold us back from achieving our goals.



I also noticed that I started to race better when I reminded myself that it was privilege and an honor to be able to compete alongside my teammates to achieve a goal we worked so hard for. Your teammates encourage you when you've had a bad race, and celebrate with you in the victories. I quickly learned that we were in this together. That is what motivated me to do my best, because it wasn't just about me but it was about my teammates too. My teammates kept me going in the midst of fatigue, when my legs started to feel heavy and my throat was burning. I knew that they were working their hardest, and I wanted to give it my all too. Even now, I can still feel the adrenaline and the weight I felt 7 years ago when getting ready to compete at Sectionals my senior year of high school. Your teammates will carry you through until the end. When you start to get tired, just remember them. You guys are fighting through the pain and fatigue for each other. That's the beauty of cross-country!



Isabella – Stay relaxed, visualize your goals, believe you can do this, and remember your teammates that you've trained so hard with to get to this moment. To be the FIRST team to qualify for state in OEHS HISTORY is amazing. What an incredible opportunity you guys have at your fingertips. You'll remember this forever.

SO EXCITED FOR YOU ISABELLA!!! You're going to run the best race you've ever run. I just know it.

Best of luck to you and the rest of the OEHS team! I'll be cheering you on!

-Rachel



Dear Emma,

I hope you are enjoying your season and your teammates so far, cross country was such a great experience in high school and if I could run cross country again I wouldn't hesitate. I am Ashley Buado, currently a sophomore at North Central College, and I was on the Oswego East team from 2013-2015. I still run track and field at North Central College and have learned a lot about running, myself, and life from both Oswego East and North Central. Running is such a great experience and builds tons of character. It takes a pretty tough person to put your body through so much stress, but the benefits of it outweigh that by so much! Take time to really step back and enjoy your cross season. Nothing would make me happier than to see the team qualify for state! The program has really been building since I've ran at Oswego East. I know that you're the #9 runner right now, so I hope you don't feel discouraged. I was in your exact same position my senior year. It would be so cool to be up there and race with the pack, but cheering for them is also an important part as well. It also might end up with you racing, so stay in the mindset that you are! You definitely have the potential to PR! If you're feeling nervous before your race, close your eyes and take deep breaths. What I find really helpful and do before most of my races is closing my eyes and saying positive affirmations to myself. You are strong. You are fast. You are aggressive. You are confident. It is really helpful for calming myself down and a good tip is to also say these to yourself mid race! It's a nice boost of confidence along the way. You have done such a great job this season finish it off strong! Believe in yourself and all will go well!

Sincerely, Ashley Buado





Hi Kitty!

It's Jess Eberly, and I am so thrilled to be writing you this letter! I'm writing you wishing you the best of luck with the rest of your cross country season. I am so proud of you and your teammates for everything that you have accomplished so far! Nothing fills my heart more than seeing oexc doing great things!

When Philly emailed me letting me know that I get to write your letter, I was so beyond excited. I'll never forget my senior year, going into only my second year of cross country, meeting the cutest bubbly little freshman who was just as Christmas obsessed as I was (which I truly did not know was even possible!). Whether your signing Lana Del Rey or your chicken nugget song, you always bring the most positive energy and most laughs, which is so important! I'll also never forget how dedicated and hardworking you are while keeping that big smile on your face. I remember one of the first workouts of the 2015 season we were running 300s in the grass. You completely blew everyone away, and we all knew you were moving on to big and great things. Ever since this workout I noticed your confidence rising and you getting faster and faster every day! As you guys move on to Regionals, Sectionals, and State, I know your positive energy and determination will carry you and the rest of the team to be better than ever before!



As I look back on my time at OE, there's nothing that I miss and appreciate more than running and my teammates. Cross country brought me some of my best friends, and has had such an impact on the person that I am today. For me, it was always hard to find motivation at this time of the season, but nothing feels better than finishing the season knowing you gave it your all, and that you did everything in your power to better yourself and your team. If I could go back in time and give myself some advice it would definitely be to not give up and not be afraid to be better than I was yesterday, whether I was done racing or not.

This summer I could definitely tell that you showed up and worked so hard every day! Looking through your splits I am so proud of you this season, and you should be proud of yourself as well!! You are such a huge contributing member to this team, and it is such a huge accomplishment to be part of the top 12! I'm so happy to see you become such a great leader and teammate. It would mean the world and more to me to see the first team from OE qualify for the state meet, and you will have been such a major contribution to this big-time accomplishment. As you guys are getting ready to head into these big races, it's so important to stay confident and positive. As a member of the top 12 you have so much power to keep pushing yourself and your teammates in practice all the way until the season ends! Never be afraid to be better, run faster, and accomplish everything that I know you can!



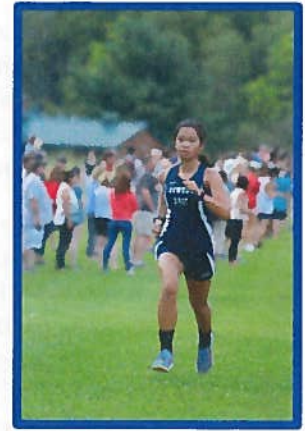
Lots and lots of love and luck,  
Jess





Dear Katherine Sim,

I'm aware you don't know me, but my past looks a lot like your present. I am a fellow wolf, a member of the "wolf pack." My name is Andrea Holm; I am an alumni of Oswego East. I graduated from high school in the year of 2013. During my four years at East, I was a member and team captain of the girls' cross country and track & field teams. High school running cultivated a true love and passion for the sport, that I was able to accept an opportunity to compete inter-collegiately at the NCAA Division II level for Lewis University, where I was able to race and run for another four years.



While in high school, competing on a team meant being able to put on the Oswego East jersey and where it with a sense of pride. Being dressed in the uniform meant to encompass what it really means to be a wolf: *"to be a leader, to be strong, powerful, courageous, and resilient."* These are all attributes that are embodied when it comes to racing, and racing *with a team*. Looking back, I appreciated the friendships I formed with my teammates the most. We created a bond that has been unbroken, and still to this day I am in constant communication with them. We established a type of sisterhood that some so rarely get to experience, which was developed through every long run, endless miles, painful workouts, pasta parties, and victorious races. These friendships, are what inspired me to *"push a little harder"* when the Lactic acid started to settle deep within my muscles as I grew with fatigue in races. We encouraged one another with a phrase we often recited: "Go BIG or Go Home!" meaning to *really* race, get outta your comfort zone, and not settle or be complacent.

One thing I remember most about my teammates is how they would ease my nerves. When we would be corralled in our tight box number at the start line of a race, I would look out at all the other girls from different teams wearing colorful uniforms with tight braids in their hair, and vibrant sparkly bows-- and then the flutters of a thousand butterflies would be swarming around in my stomach! I would get so nervous with the pressure to out perform my competitors, that cold sweats would run down my arms with the immediate sensation of having to go to the bathroom (for the hundredth time haha). But what *always* calmed me down, were my teammates. Having faith in the team, took pressure off myself. I knew that when the gun went off, and when the stampede would go chasing away, that I would still be surrounded by my teammates. The ones I had run all those miles with, and ran every painstaking work alongside, and there was comfort in knowing *we could do it together one step at a time*. Through running, I have learned that "alone we can do so little; together we can do so much." This isn't to say, that I sat back and let my teammates do all the work. I certainly "stepped up to the plate," and raced hard because I knew my teammates were relying on me, but that was easier to do with their contributing charisma.

As you probably know, racing can be a mental war between your mind, thoughts, and body. Your legs could be screaming "NO!" but your mind is demanding "GO!" One thing I do to stay motivated while racing, is to reflect on all the hard work that has led me to that exact moment (e.g. mile repeats, fartlek's, tempos, 200s, etc.). I obtain confidence in knowing how hard I worked to get to the physical peak I am at, and then remind myself of the goal at hand. Whether the goal is to win the race, beat a personal record, or simply make it across the finish line; reminding yourself of why you're enduring all the pain ignites a fire internally that can be used as fuel to remain persistent and challenge those negative thoughts as they occur. For you, this goal might be to qualify for the Illinois State Championships! Remind yourself of that amazing opportunity, and don't take it for granted. In the end, you will not remember the pain you felt during the race, you will only remember how excited, happy, and proud you are to have qualified for the state meet!!!

Another thing that motivates me in times of doubt or uncertainty, is when I reflect upon my childhood. My parents, always told me that I ran before I could walk. As a young girl, maybe age six or seven, I would race my twin brother at the local playground, to the Evergreen tree line and back to the swings. A distance that maybe span about 300 meters or so, my brother would always beat me down to the trees...but I would *always* beat him on the way back to the finish line (the swings). My parents would shout and cheer us on during these juvenile races, and after each consecutive win, I would tell my parents "one day when I'm older a college is going to give

me a scholarship for running, and I'm going to be a college athlete." So when the going gets tough, and I doubt my ability and talent as a runner, I think back to that little girl at the park who was so resilient. I think back to that little girl, who loved to just run. I remind myself that I run, because I love it--and I run for her. Even if, you do not have a similar experience, there is something deep within you that calls you to run. Whatever it may be, I invite you to channel it, meditate on it, and it should come forth in action by doing so.

One thing that I find helps me with breakthroughs in races, is when I turn the race into a game. I refer back to the "ABCs" of racing "Always Be Closing." So when you are working miles one to two, you can make it hunt. Remember, you're a wolf! Be a HUNGRY wolf! Pretend everyone else is your prey and go gobble them up! For example, you could promise yourself that once you pass a particular landmark (e.g. oak tree on the left) you're going to take three hard steps. Another example could be, you promise yourself that you're going to work up to the maroon colored jersey ahead of you (maybe 3 or four girls up) once you get to her, pick a new person to move up to! You'll be surprised how fun it can be and how many people you will start passing and picking off. When it comes to making turns, if you take three hard steps around a corner, you will leave the girls next to you and that will get inside their head's that you're pushing the pace and it will defeat them. It is important to take deep breaths, think about expanding your lungs with as much oxygen as possible. This will allow oxygen to be carried in your blood and get to your muscles, thus, you will not grow tired and fatigue as quickly permitting your body to move quicker for a longer duration. If you get to a top of a hill, take three big steps, as others will be tired from making it up to the top they will naturally slow down to catch their breath. I find myself constantly whispering to myself "you're fine, you're fine" and this helps me stay positive and focused. These are just a few racing strategies that I practice, and seem to help shift the focus in the race and make for big breakthroughs!

If I could give myself some advice prior to these big races, it would be to live the runner lifestyle as best as possible. Meaning, making sure to get an adequate amount of sleep each night, especially the week of an important race. For me, I need at least eight hours a night, it may be different for you. Making sure to stay hydrated, even when you are not thirsty. Drinking sports drinks or water, and limiting the amount of unhealthy drinks you consume (e.g. soda, pop, sugary drinks). Another important thing to do is eat a meal after a workout/run because it will allow for quicker muscle recovery! Make sure you pack a snack in your duffle bag, so once practice is over you can start recovery ASAP!! Preferably a snack that is higher in protein (e.g. nuts, peanut butter, granola bars, etc.) if your muscles recover quickly, then you will feel less tired during a race when you are at performance level. Making sure you manage your stress, stress can lead to an aroused state of distress, and your body cannot rest then. Thus, do your homework, study for tests, finish that paper! Do not procrastinate or wait to the last minute, you are only causing more harm to your body, and it WILL impact your race day performance. If you get to the start line completely calm, relaxed, and have no lingering thoughts of "oh man, I never finished that assignments for biology" you will be able to focus more intently. So my advice to you, is to try your best to live the "lifestyle."



As an Alumni, I would be ecstatic to witness the FIRST Oswego East girls' cross country team make it to THE state meet! I would be a very proud fan, and I would probably gloat to everyone that my high school made it to the state championship! When you're out there running on the course, remember that there are others silently cheering for you, rooting you on from afar! All of us Alumni are excited for you, excited for this opportunity you have been given, and excited to see how it unfolds!

Katherine,

be confident, be fearless, be unstoppable. I bet your feet will hurt from all the butt you will be kicking this weekend!! You *CAN* do it girl!

Dear Kathleen,

It's Abby Cain from the class of 2016. I can't believe you're already a junior! I remember your freshman year so vividly. I remember everything you went through injury wise. I remember watching you and Shannon do your relay race on wheels and thinking 'Wow! This girl is a fighter!' Needless to say, your freshman year was not ideal. I can say the same, in some regards, to my freshman year in college. However, things always end up going your way! Now I'm running at a totally new school, and almost two minutes faster than I did last year, and I want to continue to drop that down another two. Over the past two years since I've been gone from OE, you've grown into the leader I knew you would be. Not only do you do everything there is to help you get better, you also encourage and inspire everyone around you.



Personally, I know my best races were when I wasn't wearing a watch. The uncertainty really helped me push my pace when I wasn't thinking about it. I think it is so important to have some of those no-watch-races and base your race off of your judgment. Sometimes you can get stuck in a tempo pace during a race, which inevitably results in a bad time. Being able to distinguish the difference of a hard run and racing is huge for cross country runners. My best race was my junior year of high school in Peoria. I was able to race my race and continuously fight for my position; all while I wasn't wearing a watch. I remember crossing the finish line and looking up at the clock and realizing I had just PR'd by at least ten seconds.

Competing to me means doing as best as I possibly can with my teammates by my sides. The biggest thing I've learned through my years of competition is that racing in a pack makes the end result that much better. You hear Ideran say, "the strength of the wolf is in the pack" over and over, and that statement couldn't be more spot on. My sophomore year, a teammate and I raced our sectional race together and she finished just steps ahead of me. The only difference was she qualified for state and I didn't. Of course I was upset with myself, but I was more proud of the fact that we raced together. I was then able to travel to Peoria with her and cheer her on, which I knew the support helped her in the long run. Running is much more a team sport than an individual sport, and you, Kathleen, are one of the twelve keys to the success of the team going into sectionals. Going from a scooter, to an air cast, to a new PR of 20:47, is truly inspiring to both your teammates and me as well.

To be able to watch you guys succeed at sectionals this year would be incredible. I'm so proud of the whole team, and especially how far you have come. I always loved the atmosphere of the team at OE. Everyone becomes family, which allows training and racing together to come natural. Just by seeing y'all's results from this season, I know you all are prepared and determined to succeed at sectionals together as a team. It's time to push away all the negative and doubt in your mind and look forward to being the first team in OE history to qualify for state! In order to do so, everyone needs to be as positive and determined as possible.



If I could go back and give my high-school-self advice about these high-stake races, it would be to stay calm. I used to work myself up so much that I would end up sprinting the first 400 of the race, and, as you know, you can't do that for a 3-mile race. Staying calm by treating the night before and morning of as if it were a normal race day, but understanding that it is much more. Sticking to your routine that works for you, and realizing that today could mean something really big.

Your determination to push through any obstacle in your way is incredible. Every runner needs a teammate like Kathleen Sim to inspire, motivate, encourage, and be there to fill someone's shoes at any time. I can't wait to continue watching your times decrease. Continue being you and inspiring everyone you encounter. I wish you the best of luck at sectionals and your seasons to come!

Love,  
Your favorite Asian, Abby Cain :)



Dear Kendra,

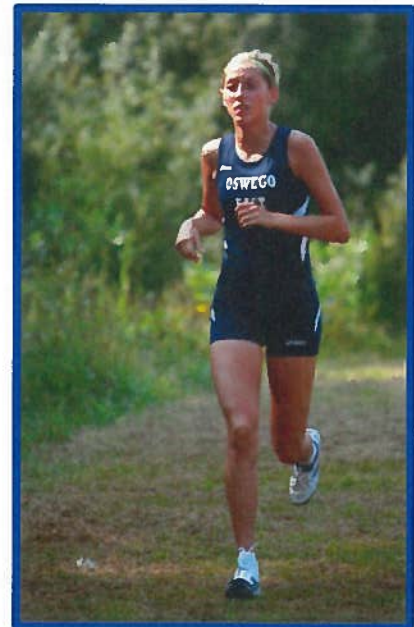
I have known you since you were about 10 years old. I have seen you do well on the softball field and I know that you are capable of doing amazing things with your running. You have been doing really well so far this season. It has been awesome looking at the race results and seeing you grow year after year in this sport. Coach Cook always tells me how you have so much spirit and are a great teammate and leader on the team. You are always smiling and I believe that you can achieve anything you want to.

I haven't been around to see you race but one thing I know is that you will give it everything you have when you toe the line this weekend. It is going to be such a fun weekend for you and I just wanted to give you my support. I am confident that you will have a great race and I will be rooting for you all the way! Don't be afraid to take a chance during the race or make a move that could benefit your race later on. Coach Cook has told me that you are worried about getting injured and that is something that everyone worries about. Don't let that fear get into your head. I have been injured so many times in my collegiate running career that I make sure to take every opportunity and run to my best abilities. This sport is so competitive and demanding on our bodies that we have to listen to what our body is telling us. If you feel good, push yourself a little every so often during the race. If you feel like you are hurting, just focus on making it to the finish line as fast as you can. Your body has been training for this moment and it can handle it. Just focus on the goals that you have for yourself and realize how much you want them. That should help lessen the fear of getting injured.

Motivate your teammate this weekend to achieve your team goals and I know they will listen to you. You are great with being a team player and that is something you bring to that team. You pick them up when they are down and make sure everyone is doing okay. This is part of your personality and what makes you a vital teammate. Go out there this weekend and leave it all on the course. Can't wait to see what happens this weekend. I will be cheering for you and I wish you the best of luck! Believe in yourself and everything else will fall into place.

Run fast, have fun and Go Wolves!

Ariel Michalek





Dear Kara,

First let me start off by introducing myself, my name is Halie Heidkamp and I graduated from Oswego East in 2016. I only ran cross country my senior year, but it quickly became such a huge part of my life and something I fell completely in love with. As I'm sure you are aware, running is such a unique sport, it not only gives you a sense of self accomplishment but also gives you the most family like bond with your team out of any sport (at least any I've played). Experiencing this in cross country caused me to run track in the spring of my senior year instead of playing a fourth year of soccer. Now in my second year of college, when I think back on my time on the team it fills me with a kind of nostalgic joy that only something you truly love can make you feel. All the memories I made with the girls on my team and the tears and fun we shared is something I will honestly treasure forever. I'm not sure if you've played other sports but from my experience cross country was the most family like team I've had because the pain of pushing yourself harder each race and pushing your teammates and celebrating when someone reaches a goal is so unique to running. Being a part of OE's xc team made me improve my athletic ability so much that it made me want to be the best version of myself in all aspects. It honestly made me try harder in school and branch out socially, things I really wouldn't have wanted or thought of to do if not for running and being around an atmosphere of an "always be better than you were yesterday" kind of vibe. I've also heard that you are the teams #5 runner with a PR of 18:48! THAT IS SO AMAZING! I hope you feel extremely proud of yourself for only being a sophomore and reaching a time like that! You should flaunt that proudly! (sorry for all the exclamations I just really want to get the point across how amazing you are for that girl 😊) I know that along with such a good time and rank on the team comes some anxiousness (heck we both know running and getting on the line before the race is super nerve racking). One thing I always did when getting on the line was I did three high jumps every time and then shook my legs out (it might sound dumb but maybe try it sometime) it really helped make my legs feel looser and less tense from nerves. When stepping up to the line I would just clear my head and tell myself "all right this is it, you just got to run, you're ready, all you have to do is run." The harder part, I know, is during the race. During that time if it started to get hard I would think "okay I just have to keep putting one leg in front of the other and pushing, this isn't going to kill me, it won't kill me to push a little harder right now to keep that girl behind me or to catch that girl in front of me." Which I know is easier said than done, but I promise you, positive thoughts during times like that will carry you



further than negative ones, even if it's only a few seconds. Every second counts. I also had a trick that worked for me when I would get tired and breathing got harder where I would breath through my nose for as long as possible and then when I had to, only breath out slowly through my mouth after breathing in with my nose. Something that always helped me stay motivated during a race was thinking how great it would feel to shave off even a few seconds of my time from before, and how much stronger it would make me feel if I did that. Because for me, at the end of a hard race that I gave my all and I improved by a lot, or even a little, it really made me feel like I could do anything. That is another thing that makes me feel lucky and should make you feel lucky now, is how we got or get to experience the high of running and improving and feeling like anything is possible. That is one of the beauties of running, you get out exactly what you put in, and when you get something good out you know it's because you gave it everything. The last piece of advice I want to give you Kara is to not take advantage of any race ever. You only get so many races as a wolf with this team and these great coaches, and take it from someone who knows, you'll miss it when it's over. So, make sure you put everything you have into each race and each practice because I swear if you do you will improve more than you ever thought you could. Take it from a soccer player turned runner who broke six minutes in the first year of running, if you put in the work you will surprise yourself with what you can do! Good luck with the rest of this season and all the ones to come! Keep working hard and push towards State, if there is a team that can do it it's you and yours!

I'll be rooting for you Kara!

-Halie Heidkamp

