

Sarah Hartlieb
12th Grade
Schoolcraft High School

Dear Coach

Dear Coach,

You were right. Ever since the first practice, the first blistering meet, you have taught us- groomed us- for our wondrous futures. You weaved these lessons of determination, selflessness, and confidence into the fabric of our lives without us even knowing it. You lead by example, using these unique qualities every day and for that I am truly grateful. I would like to take the time now to thank you by reflecting on the myriad of lessons you taught me.

You taught me how to be a hard-working teammate and a fair competitor. During our pre-season meetings, you always used to say, “Champions are made when nobody’s looking.” In these meetings you would reveal to us the secret to being a headliner in the paper come the end of the season. The secret was to work harder than anybody else, and to be patient in waiting for the pay-off of that hard work. This dedication was not limited to our workouts, though; it included eating the right foods that would fuel our body so we could handle the intense workload. It also included continuing the wise choice of not getting into trouble which would jeopardize our season and worse, tarnish the team’s reputation as a whole. When I didn’t believe in my own strength, you urged me to run just one more tempo mile. And come race day I was ready to compete, to give it my all, to win. In those ways, as a leader, you encouraged me to be the best runner I could be.

Another lesson I took to heart was that, as humans, we all make mistakes and cannot be perfect. “You are a human being, not a machine.” I remember your words after a bad race or a hard workout that I just couldn’t finish. Bad days happen. Not every race will allow a record-breaking time, and your body won’t always be able to handle what your mind is yearning for. One can only do his best, and if he does so, then nobody should be dissatisfied with his efforts. Because we all have bad days and we all make mistakes, you taught us to always be humble. You never know how much of a difference one point makes, until that is the point that puts your team in second place, and you had already celebrated the win. As a leader, you let us make the mistakes, so we could truly learn from them.

You taught us to always keep going. In the infamously punishing last kilometer of a race, I can think of my teammates’ needs before my body’s plea to stop. You taught us to dig deeper. Your example of leadership taught us that at the finish line you feel just as awful whether you ran that race with every honest ounce of energy in your body, or if you ran it holding back. It is better to look deep down inside your soul and know that you must give it your all because fate won’t tell you when it is your last race to run. And you must push yourself forward because the reward is so much greater than the temporary pain.

I remember sitting in a group with my teammates at practice and you, ever-so-casually, told us that someday it would hit us, just how much we learned and transformed over our high

school years. You told us that some day we would write you a letter and the beginning would read, "Dear coach, you were right." That day is today. I now understand that you were not just a coach to me, but a teacher, a persistent encourager, and a leader helping me to see my full potential. You instilled in me the same precious qualities of an independent, hard-working leader. You taught me to encourage others, learn from my mistakes, and never give up. You taught me to be a leader myself and to pass it on to others, perhaps one of the most valuable gifts you bestowed upon the runners you coached, and for that I can never thank you enough.

Sincerely,