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THE RACE AHEAD

By Trent Mikles

As a nine year old boy I had a brain bleed and was temporarily paralyzed on my left side. This incident caused a huge drawback in my life. My left side has been significantly weaker ever since. A few years later in the 8th grade my parents decided that a good form of therapy would be to join the cross country team. I found this to be some sort of cruel joke on their part. I had trouble walking short distances I had no idea how I would be able to run miles.

The Elk City Cross Country team had won the state championship five years in a row. This was a top of the line program. Coach Mark Heard demanded perfection from his athletes, and he got it. This made my first day even more intimidating. What would he think of a kid who had trouble walking? I exited the school bus almost trembling.

At the first practiced we were ordered to go run one mile. This was an effortless task for the returning runners, but it seemed impossible to me. Coach Heard immediately noticed my limp and confronted me. I told him of my weakness and history. He told me that being a long distance runner is something anyone can do with practice. He said that he would help me overcome my weakness.

The first few months of the season crawled by. Eight weeks in I could finally run one mile without walking. This was a huge accomplishment in my mind. Most of the other runners were able to do this from day one. I treasured this and I was ready to go for two. I found that building up the stamina to run two miles was not too bad.

Race day was quickly approaching. A Jr. High boys cross country race is two miles. I had finally built up the stamina to run two miles but I was much slower than all of my teammates. I could run two miles in 18 minutes, while my teammates ran closer to 14 and 15 minutes. I pushed hard my first race, but still I placed last. A week later was race two, last place again.

My first year of cross country, I became quite accustomed to last place. This would seem sad, but my left leg also had become much stronger and I could walk significantly better. My parents' decision to force me to become a runner although seemed harsh at the time, turned out to be a great help. I continued to run cross country the remained of Jr. High and High School. I became increasingly better, and eventually was a fierce competitor.