

Two physical therapy
appointments, and
everything in



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Two Minutes and Twenty Seconds I could feel the sun beating down on my shoulders left exposed by the orange racerback jersey I wore as I stepped down off the bus to compete in the 2017 Sectional Track Meet.

The day was too hot for my liking. Ideal running weather is 60 degrees and cloudy; this day was far from it. The thought of recovering post race in that heat had made me shudder.

The smell of the rubberized Rosholt High track and the sweaty athletes was all too familiar. Two minutes and twenty seconds; as I went through warm-ups with my team that day the thought of running the perfect 800 was stuck in my head. Our 3200 meter relay team needed good handoffs and a strong start. I had to run 1: 08 or less on the first lap, no more than 1: 12 on the second, with a solid kick. Times in this sport define you, they don't lie. What you run is all you. You create your own success here.

I looked around at the other athletes. I wondered about their training, the sacrifices that they had made to be here. I hoped that everything I had to put into this race was enough. Warm-ups seem to drag on forever when you're waiting for a meet to start, and that day they had felt especially long.

The sound of first call for the girls 3200 meter relay made my stomach instantly drop. My relay team and I stood waiting anxiously in the bullpen. The time between first and final call felt like an eternity. As we jogged up lane six to the start, I thought back on all the hours spent practicing, no less than perfecting this relay. All the weekends consumed by running until I thought my legs would fall off and my heart would give out.

Maybe now it's all worth it. "Runners on their marks!" a pause, "Set!" another pause, the gun fired, and Brynn took off. This was my least favorite part of the relay. Watching our first two runners finish their legs of the race was nerve wracking.

I remember looking into the stands and seeing only my father there to cheer me on. He has always been there for the meets, practices, physical therapy appointments, and everything in the last four years that I had been running track. I could not have thanked him enough for that. I realized that my mind had been wandering as Magan ran past me on her last lap, it was almost time for me to run. My head was buzzing with focus as I stepped into the exchange zone, the invariable red triangle to red triangle. I felt at home there, between those two faded garnet marks, cracked by the sun and the wear of years of track spikes passing overtop. I stood there, eyeing up my competition, mentally preparing myself to run the race that was a part of me. "Go!" I heard Magan yell, I took three quick steps and heard "Stick!" being called.

That was my emblematic starting gun. Baton in hand, I began what I had not known would be the last 3200 meter relay of the season that had shaped me as a runner. My arms pumped and my legs drove me forward in the rhythmic way that I have grown so accustomed to. The burning feeling in my chest and quads pushed me forward. Everything in this season, and in all the seasons past, has led up to this. "Let's go Lex! Leave everything out on the track, pass that girl!" I could hear my coach shouting from around the turn of the last 400 meters. The image of my team standing on the outside of the track cheering me on will forever be in my memory.

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In this sport, your team is your family. Coming into the last lap of the race, I managed to bring our team up two places. The feelings in my extremities started to fade as I started my kick with the daunting thought of two minutes and twenty seconds still stuck in my head. I handed the baton to Natalie in the seamless manner that we had rehearsed in practice until our hands had gone numb. After I stumbled off of the track, I collapsed into a heap of sweat and pain. My heart was beating faster than it ever had and my vision blurred. I thought I might pass out, everything hurt and I couldn't catch my breath.

But that feeling was nothing compared to the pain I felt when the leaderboard had confirmed my worst fear; our time as a team had been 45 seconds too slow. I spent days thinking about that race, contemplating whether I was proud that we had made it that far or heartbroken that we hadn't made it farther. Today, five months later, I can say that it was worth it. Every second of that season spent icing shin splints that I thought would never go away, running 50-mile weeks, pushing myself until the burning sensation in my muscles and chest was simply unbearable and I swore my heart would give out, the mornings waking up too sore to move from last night's practice, my thoughts being solely centered around my training, and the hours spent practicing; day in, day out. It was all worth it in that instant when the baton left my hand. I knew that the season that had shaped my running was over.