

Dear John L. Parker,

I always thought that running was just a hobby, like collecting baseball cards, fishing, or listening to music. I didn't consider running to be anything more than a sport; it seemed to me that running was simply a way to stay in shape and to compete in a couple of races for fun. As a newcomer to the sport, I was not aware that I had only scratched the surface of what running truly is. Reading your book *Once a Runner* changed my outlook on the sport, for it taught me valuable lessons about dedication and setting goals.

When reading the book, I was amazed by some of the great feats that Quentin Cassidy accomplished. To me he seemed superhuman and immortal; the goals he achieved seemed impossible and even implausible. Yet there was something in the way he worked and trained that made me think, "If Quentin could work hard to achieve his goals, why can't I?" Staying motivated throughout seemingly endless training is a huge challenge, which I face day after day. For me, your book is a pivotal point of inspiration which drives me to work as hard as I can. Before my dad suggested your book to me, I was ignorant of the importance of dedication, but Quentin's career is an example to me of how sticking to running will bring great rewards.

Although I learned a lot about running, I believe that your book impacts my life outside of the sport more than anything. The great lessons I have learned translate to my school work, study habits, social relationships, and family. Dedication is not when you devote yourself to an activity; it is when you absolutely love something and do whatever it takes to pursue that goal to its fullest. This realization influences me to spend more time on hobbies and sports that I loved, such as studying topics that interested me, playing the piano, and working on computer programming in my free time.

*Once a Runner* also taught me the importance of setting goals. It's easy to just wander through life not knowing where you're going to end up, but setting realistic goals is the only efficient way that you can end up where you want to. I set goals for myself just like Quentin did. I may not be trying to run a four minute mile, but I have high standards for myself that I pursue with the utmost determination. I believe that this is the most important thing I have learned from your book is without an attainable aspiration, one won't achieve their goals.

I read *Once a Runner* as an eighth grader in my first year of running. The following year, I made the varsity team for cross country and we ended up winning the state championship. In my first track season, I also made varsity and qualified for the state meet, which we won as a team for the first time in 20 years. I have accomplished a lot over the last few years, which is a result of the hard work I've put in. From your book, I learned that hard work pays off, and I can attribute much of my success to the lessons you taught me.

Being a runner is not just about running. It is about growing as a person, which is what I have done over my career. The words "dedication" means something different to every person. As a runner, to me it means pouring my heart out into something I love without fear of failure. Dedication stays with you forever. Once a runner, always a runner.

Sincerely,

Jack Slagle, Grade 11