

**the last season**

# the last season

OBSESSION AND HOPE  
IN CROSS COUNTRY RUNNING

BY GOLDEN KRISHNA

## **2004 Pomona-Pitzer Men's Cross Country Team**

*Name, Year, Hometown*

Rocco Addante, FR, Norwich, VT

Lucas Allen-Williams, FR, Carpinteria, CA

Michael Bergeron, SR, Essex, VT

Braden Boice, SR, Chico, CA

Richard Cannon, SR, Logan, UT

Nate DeFelice, SR, Sacramento, CA

Chris Dubois, JR, Portland, OR

Crosby Freeman, JR, Piedmont, CA

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Hans Hassell, SO, Winterport, ME

Mike Heaton, FR, Tucson, AZ

Adam Henry, SO, Scottsdale, AZ

Golden Krishna, SR, West Des Moines, IA

William Leer, SO, Minnetonka, MN

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Sean McCarron, SO, Iowa City, IA

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*Me: I'm writing a book.*

*Adam Henry: You're a senior at Pitzer...have they taught you how to write yet?*

...

*Me: I'll give you another copy when I'm done. Tell me what you think.*

*Crosby Freeman: I'll read it today. And tomorrow. And the day after. And the day after that.*

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## Introduction

*“It’s the question that drives us.”*

-- *Trinity, The Martix*

I love cross country running. If I could run cross country my entire life, I would.

Legendary professional athletes are often envied for their fame and fortune, but I envy their choice to stay athletes. As long as they remain gifted and healthy, they can participate until their goals have been accomplished. Ray Borque played 22 seasons in the National Hockey League until he won a Stanley Cup. John Elway played 14 years in the National Football League, then won back-to-back Super Bowls, and retired directly afterward.

As an amateur cross country runner with no professional league in existence, I had only eight seasons to do whatever possible: four in high school and four in college. The fall of 2004 was my senior year at Pitzer College and my fourth year on the Pomona-Pitzer cross country team, my final season.

Before the season started, I knew I didn’t ever want to forget it. The mindset and emotions I had for so long associated with the sport would never be felt again. At first, I just took bulleted notes for memories. Soon those

notes became stories, and those stories became this book. What you are about to read is the best my words can do to represent my last season—my personal thoughts, the people involved, and many of the influences upon it.

Looking back, I realize how out of touch with reality so many of my thoughts were. How consumed I was by cross country. So the pages that follow are a narrative of what I had become—an obsessed person.

What if I could be a varsity athlete in high school? Why can't I run two miles in nine minutes? What would it take to make NCAA Cross Country Nationals? These are three of the questions that have driven me.

Enjoy *The Last Season*.

**PART I: DESTINY**  
**2003 WEST REGIONAL**  
*Junior Season, Pomona-Pitzer*

DAY	DATE	MEET	LOCATION
Sat	11/15/2003	NCAA Div. III West Regional	Estacada, OR

# I: Rain

*“Tonight is not an accident  
There are no accidents  
We have not come here by chance  
I do not believe in chance  
When I see three objectives, three captains, three ships  
I do not see coincidence  
I see providence  
I see purpose  
I believe it’s our fate to be here  
It is our destiny  
I believe this night holds for each and every one of us  
the very meaning of our lives.”*  
-- *Morpheus, The Martix Reloaded*

I was stuck in a pack of runners.

Another blue and orange jersey passed by—teammate Nate DeFelice. His quick lateral hip movements created both warmth from familiarity and a questioning of my pace. “Should I go with him?” Bodily feedback mechanisms responded. “He can do that; I can’t yet.” Nate disappeared in the distance.

Running that second half of the 2003 NCAA Division III

West Regional Cross Country meet my junior season is a blur in my memory. As the Oregon weather had grayed the sky, my emotions had clouded my mind. Rain began to pour on us. My body mentally numbed, I barely felt a drop.

I crossed the finish line. I was breathless and delusional, yet still concerned about what mattered most. As I stumbled, sophomore Chris Dubois grabbed me and held up my frail body glued to a drenched Pomona-Pitzer uniform. My hands lay atop my head and my lungs wheezed as I forced out a few words to Chris.

Two years earlier, my freshman year, the 5’ 6” 130-pound blond Chris Dubois was a highly desired recruit. At the time, bringing in a gifted high school runner meant a chance to revitalize the team and to eliminate rivals. We got Chris, but his 2003 season wasn’t something we had imagined. He faced multiple stress fractures, which ended his sophomore year after only a few early meets.

There was Chris, holding me up just miles away from his hometown, Portland. And I was asking him if I had fulfilled the very meaning of my life.

## 2: Dreams

*“If you have a someone with a dream, if you have a motivated person with a dream and a goal and a vision, if you have someone who never gives up, there’s great hope. And that team taught me the persistence, the idea of never ever quitting: don’t ever give up; don’t ever give up; don’t ever stop fighting!”*

*-- Jim Valvano, Head Coach of 1983 NCAA Division I Men’s Basketball National Champions, North Carolina State*

I was just outside St. Louis, Missouri. It was May 2003, the summer before my junior year at Pomona-Pitzer. I’m ethnically Indian, and I was there for a traditional Indian wedding of a close family friend’s daughter, Kavitha (KUH-VEE-THA) Kosuri (COE-SUR-E).

Her brother Praveen (PRUH-VEEN), a lawyer in his 30s, took the helm of a filled sedan on an empty two-lane highway. He was driving us to the groom’s tiny Missouri hometown where we were to enjoy its only real amenity—a golf course.

I stared left out my back-seat window, watching the rows of fields go by. I hated golf. I hated Indian weddings. But I highly regarded Praveen.

I called Praveen my senior year of high school to help me

with what basketball coaches in the movie *He Got Game* referred to as “the most important decision of your life.” For me, it was narrowed down between two small liberal arts schools: Pitzer College, a Division III, Southern California, hippie-loving school; or Colgate University, a Division I, upstate New York, bastion of conservatism. They were complete opposites, yet I had no idea which athletic division, which coast, nor which political ideology to choose for my post-high school years.

So I called the wisest man I knew, Praveen. He had graduated from elite schools, but what was obvious from frequent family visits to the St. Louis Kosuri house gave reason to call—his ability to quickly grasp the heart of the matter. He explained that it is not about where you go to school, but about what you do when you get there. With that in mind, I chose the the environment in which I thought I could thrive over the higher ranked, seemingly more prestigious school. I chose Pitzer.

Two years later, I was quite pleased with Praveen’s guidance, and I was with him and older Indian male members of the groom’s family, whom I had not met before, on that car ride. I was typically animated around Praveen, but now I was drenched in thought.

Praveen was growing tired of the small talk in the front of the cabin. His eyes glanced at me through the rear view mirror. “Golden, you haven’t said anything for awhile.

What are you thinking about?” His deep voice and crisp lawyerly pronunciation always delivered great speeches and was now commanding attention from everyone in the car.

I didn’t even look at Praveen or any of the other Indian males. I continued to stare out my window, lost in the perfect alignment of Missouri cornfields. While they were thinking of the upcoming wedding and day of golfing ahead, I—pausing at the end of each sentence and spilling each word out slowly in just above a whisper—told them of my dreams:

“I think we can make Nationals. I really think we can do it. We’ve got a chance this year. We haven’t been there in years and I think we can do it...”

On and on I spoke about Nationals and the season ahead without any context, introduction, or consideration for the listeners’ interests or knowledge.

I didn’t tell them that I had recently started dreaming of this every night before I slept, or that I would be for the next several months, just what this dream was. In the fall of 2003, it was my dream for Pomona-Pitzer to qualify for Nationals—NCAA Division III Cross Country National Championships.

When I was done sharing, there was complete silence. Indians in America typically aren’t athletes beyond tennis

and are rarely successful in the sport. So few even know what cross country is, and even fewer can relate to being a serious athlete. The constituents in the car weren’t any different. After sharing my inner thoughts, no adult in the car besides Praveen spoke to me for the rest of the three-day marriage event. They all thought I was insane.

### 3: Portland

“...The bond we have as a team is unreal. Ridge runs just wouldn't be the same if I did them by myself all the time. Neither would be pounding the pavement on the mile loops or heading up Mills for the 803rd time. You may or may not realize it right now, but being able to toe the starting line of a race with the guys you've ran with for 4 years of your life; it's unbelievably powerful. Running just creates that bond, whether it be telling stories as we cruise the urban jungle, spilling the same sweat and energy during a race, or remembering funny shit that happened with the guys who have graduated and are long gone. Soon, I too will be one of those guys, and you all, running up Mills, will probably tell stories about me, just as people will talk about you after you're gone.

...In futuristic terms, Crosby and Leer are really fast and always will be, but you have the potential to be right up there with them. I know it sounds funny when Pat says it, but dude, it's so true. You just have the mindset and the talent, all you have to do is put them together. I don't know what your goals and plans are, but man, if you put together a solid track season and great summer running, I would expect a solid, competitive showing out of you at Nationals, no joke.

But forget all that for now. Saturday you have Regionals, and I know for sure you need no extra motivation for that race. So all I got for you is this:

*Best of luck man, kick some ass.”*

*-- Andy Barnette, Pomona College Class of 2004, excerpts from an email sent two days before the 2003 West Regional*



*SCIAC Championships 2002 (Credit: Ian Shapiro)  
Andy Barnette (in Pomona-Pitzer jersey)*

I stood in the bathroom of our Courtyard Marriott hotel room, a place I had found the privacy to read Barnette's letter. It had been crumpled in my pocket, but had not lost an ounce of value. I finished it, folded it, and placed it back in my pocket. My nightly dreams of the previous months, and the meaning I had given my life would be decided tomorrow morning.

I flushed the toilet as to give my hotel roommate and

teammate Nate DeFelice some reason for why I was in the bathroom for so long. When I re-entered the room with thumping temples to match my pulse, I saw Nate sitting on the edge of his bed watching ESPN. By the look of his face, it was clear he wasn't thinking about what was on TV. He was thinking about the race tomorrow, undergoing precious visualizations to build his mindset and tell his muscles what to do hours before any act of racing.

That night I thought my running career was coming to a climax. Nate's was about to take an interesting turn.

\* \* \*

"Did we do it?" I said breathless to Chris.

"Did we do it? Did we make Nationals?" I was desperate to know.

His eyes darted around. He may have known something after that race at Regionals, but he wasn't telling me.

"It's too close to tell. I don't know," he said. The rain seemed to hit me now.

"Where's Pat?" I asked. Chris didn't know.

## 4: Pat

*"God determines how fast you're going to run; I can only help with the mechanics."*

*--Bill Bowerman*

Coach Kirk Reynolds reminded me of my high school cross country coach, Alan Muenzenmay. Tall, skinny, and caring. Kirk was a former runner who could probably outrun any of those he coached. Someone I felt comfortable talking to about anything. In my mind Kirk was the prototypical cross country coach, but he wasn't ours. He was the Pomona-Pitzer women's cross country coach. Pat Mulcahy was our guy.

"Do you remember the first time you met Pat?" Paul said laughing to Matt. Paul Miser and Matt Frank were Pomona-Pitzer runners giving me, a senior in high school, a tour of their life at Pitzer College. We were walking to the track to meet the legend while they were sharing their thoughts on first meeting him.

At the time of my recruiting visit, 2000, Pat was in his 31st year as head coach of both Pomona-Pitzer running sports: cross country and track and field. His long tenure had allowed him to develop a reliable program for developing talent in running and field events. He had coached nine

national champions and 39 athletes to 68 All-American honors. His resume aside, Pat looked and acted nothing like a prototypical cross country coach.

With a large gut, thick glasses, and a surgically repaired hip that gave him an unusual one-leg-dominant gait, Pat was nearly the opposite of what you would expect. My hippie college taught me though: it isn't appearances or even words that matter, but worth. And Pat's worth was off the charts.

Like his hero Bill Bowerman, Nike co-founder and former legendary cross country and track and field coach at The University of Oregon, Pat used his house to bond with his teams. Located a few hundred feet from campus, the house of Pat and his wife Barbara was open to us at any time. It was where we met for special meals, end-of-season banquets, and Super Bowls. The old bungalow was cluttered with posters and programs from major running events in the past 30 years, awards stacked in corners, and bookshelves overflowing with running and exercise physiology literature.

Few understood exercise physiology like Pat did. His unique and well-timed workouts always physically and mentally prepared the entire team for the cross country season and he succeeded where most coaches failed—they made the best runners even better.

\* \* \*

I left Chris and marched past Kirk in search of Pat. About 60 meters later, I found him. He was sitting on a set of metal bleachers sharing them only with another coach that he was conversing with. I didn't care. I interrupted because I wanted to know: "Did we do it? Are we going to Nationals?"

The other coach responded first, "It's too close to tell." I had heard those words already. I ignored him, keeping my eyes fixed on Pat.

Pat adjusted his fogged glasses and gave me the fatal words, "I don't think so."

I looked down and I didn't even see grass, just darkness. "Fuck!" I ripped off my number and the safety pins attached to it nearly tore four holes in my jersey. I walked away from the two coaches, any other runner or fan, and found myself a bench to sit on, still in my uniform and spikes with the rain pouring down on me.

The top three teams from West Regionals that year qualified for Nationals. We finished fourth.

## 5: Failure

*“Hope, it is the quintessential human delusion, simultaneously the source of your greatest strength, and your greatest weakness.”*

*-- The Architect, The Matrix Reloaded*

In a purely utilitarian sense, the trip to Portland wasn't a complete failure. Pomona-Pitzer runners Crosby Freeman and Will Leer individually qualified for Nationals, and Nate DeFelice and I earned All-West Regional status.

From this viewpoint even the season wasn't a failure. I personally had finished fifth in our conference, set a new PR (personal record), and our team had beaten long-time rival and long-time conference winners Claremont-Mudd-Scripps. It was the first time since the 1980s we had taken SCIAC (Southern California Intercollegiate Athletic Conference). To this day we celebrate as we reflect upon our conference domination that year, but the trip to Portland put a sour note on it all for me.

I was crushed. I smiled and told everyone everything was fine, but inside I had lost all purpose. My mission had not only ended, but ended horribly. I stopped running for a couple of weeks in an attempt to forget about the sport.



SCIAC Multi-Duels 2003 (Credit: Ian Shapiro)  
Crosby Freeman (58), Nate DeFelice (55), and Will Leer (61)

I had failed.

I even tried to pick up a girlfriend to console me. Sure, she talked to me about it, but she didn't understand. I once asked her what she thought about before she slept. It wasn't a long-term goal like mine; it was what she needed to do the next day. Maybe I should've picked a better girl. One that dreams.

No one seemed to understand though. It probably wasn't even possible. For six months I had thought about a specific day, a specific place, and a specific achievement every night. Then that dream didn't come true.

## 6: Nate

*“Babe: I’m a marathon runner. When you race 26 miles you don’t give into pain. It hurts, but I, I don’t pay any attention.*

*Elsa: And you have won in these?*

*Babe: Yeah, I mean I haven’t run a whole marathon yet, but I had hoped...”*

*-- Marathon Man (Movie)*

August 24, 2004. A beautiful Sacramento day. Nate DeFelice drove into the baggage claim and picked me up from the city's airport. We headed out our eventual route to Claremont and the start of the 2004 Cross Country season—my senior year, my final season.

Nate DeFelice, despite having type I diabetes, was undoubtedly a talented runner. His younger brother was a top runner on the UCLA cross country squad, and about 40 miles east, Nate consistently performed well on the runs at Pomona-Pitzer. Nate was one class ahead of me, so 2003 had spelled his senior year. Though failure of long-term hope in my junior year had clouded my mind with emotional stress for months, the story of Nate DeFelice is much more depressing.

When Nate passed by me that previous fall at Regionals, he found himself racing a freshman on our team, Will Leer. Somewhere in that last half Leer overtook Nate and the two finished the race one after the other. I don't blame Leer for passing Nate. In any race situation, every runner is going to do whatever possible to achieve the fastest time.

But on that particular day a senior being surpassed by a freshman teammate had more significance. The top five individuals not part of a qualifying team individually qualified for Nationals. Leer finished as the fifth individual, Nate the sixth.

## **PART II: BIRTH**

### **HIGH SCHOOL (1997-2001)**

*West Des Moines, Iowa*

DAY	DATE	MEET	LOCATION
Thu	10/21/1999	Class 3A Districts	Indianola, IA
Sat	10/30/1999	State of Iowa XC Championships	Fort Dodge, IA
Thu	10/19/2000	Class 3A Districts	Indianola, IA
Sat	10/28/2000	State of Iowa XC Championships	Fort Dodge, IA

## 7: Success

*“To give anything less than your best is to sacrifice the Gift.”*  
-- Steve Prefontaine

Danny Shickich and I were in disbelief. It was 2002, our sophomore fall at Pomona-Pitzer, and the team was showing incredible promise at our first meet of the season in Riverside, California. The two new freshmen, Crosby Freeman and Chris Dubois, were godsend. Our team now had talent. It felt like high school to both of us.

For Danny, high school was a story of domination. In his senior year, his team won the Washington High School Cross Country Championship. Danny was a captain on the squad, one of four seniors in his team’s top seven. His high school had won because of depth, and the addition of Crosby and Chris was giving our college team just that.

For me, cross country was a hidden treasure. My eldest brother Alvin had run cross country in high school, so my freshman year, fall 1997, I did too. At the time, Alvin, my other elder brother Dean, and I had often been unsuccessful in athletics. For me that meant 10 years of baseball, six years of basketball, four years of soccer, and one year of tackle football before high school without ever being outstanding and sometimes—especially in my younger



*SCIAC Championships 2002 (Credit: Ian Shapiro)*  
*Chris Dubois (foreground) and Nate DeFelice (background)*

years—being the worst on the team. I even took ice skating lessons to try ice hockey, but I couldn't fit it in between soccer and baseball practices. I loved sports, but they were often cruel to me.

Alvin and Dean were both done with high school when I entered. I had always been a dreamer and told them I would find athletic success where they thought I wouldn't. We set a wager: \$20 if I became a varsity athlete in any sport. They aren't evil brothers, but they laughed at me. At the largest public high school in Iowa with a history of athletic dominance, there was no chance.

I went out for cross country the fall of my freshman year in high school and one thing was true: I sucked. But outside all those who thought I was bad because of the undeniable empirical evidence of my slow times, one person told me I would not only get better, but become the best: senior Nick Strickland. I wrote my college entrance essay, "Who has had the most impact on your life?" about him.

He was a captain on the team, and I was his favorite freshman. His chosen one. While at a cross country meet that year, some of the leaders came across the finish line with a 17-minute time.

"I wish I could run an 18-minute race."

"You will," Nick declared.

"In fact, forget 18...forget 17...you'll run 16."

I had no reason to believe him. At that point, after five meets, I had only broken 21 minutes once and my PR was 20:36 on our 5,000 meter courses. I was 13-years-old, a freshman in high school, and I believed him.

Like every other sport I had played, I worked hard, but this time something was different. Someone with talent believed in me. He may have been the only one, but that only motivated me further. Workouts became chances to prove myself worthy of Nick's praise. Races were run chasing his predictions. The summer that followed, I took training seriously running on the belief that if I did, Nick's words would come true.

The next year, I ran a 17:43 at a meet in Ankeny, Iowa. Just one year earlier, on the identical course, I had run 23:52. No one except Nick, then a freshman in college, could believe what was happening.

My junior year pushed the pace. A few days before our district meet, the meet that takes the top teams and individuals to the prized Iowa High School State Cross Country meet, our number-one but injured runner Russ Leino and I were in our high school library. We were both there for a class, researching paper topics on the library's computers. Russ came over to my computer to talk running.

“You can qualify for state,” Russ told me. I hadn’t even thought about it. Unlike Nick, Russ was more logic oriented. Cutting my times for the second consecutive season had placed me in the range for contention. I had to finish in the top seven to qualify individually.

\* \* \*

“You’re in ninth!” our coach Alan Muenzenmay yelled at me. There was one mile left at the district meet my junior year in high school. I had blossomed under Muenzenmay’s program, and now in his third year of coaching, I had a shot at becoming his second individual state qualifier. I let my legs roll on a downhill, sprinted the curve afterwards, and passed by another runner to put myself in eighth.

Ten meters to go. I could see the seventh man just ahead of me and I ripped into an incredible sprint. Somehow, the seventh man lost his balance. I passed him with a few meters left, individually qualifying for the 1999 State meet. 17:03 was my time on that day; 16:42 is what I pulled out at State. Nick’s predictions had come true.

Running at State my junior year, I felt purposeless without my teammates by my side. My high school had finished one place out of team qualification at Districts, but something significant had happened that season—a stellar freshman class had entered in 1999. With depth, entering my senior year in high school the goal was clear: make state as a team

for the first time in six years.

With a top seven made up of four seniors, one junior, and two sophomores, that’s exactly what we did. I came through the last 200 meters at the 2000 State of Iowa High School Cross Country Championships with the team behind me, sprinting for the sake of sprinting. These were the last 200 meters of my high school cross country career. My lungs had been filling with mucus because of Iowa’s late-October cold, and sprinting to the finish line, I stopped taking in oxygen.

I crossed the finish line and things were beginning to black out. An emergency worker grabbed me. My vision began to fail. I thought I was dying. At this point I had accomplished so many of my goals. I had succeeded in high school athletics, I had succeeded in cross country, and I had led the team to its first state appearance in years. My life up to this point felt complete.

The worker told me to exhale as if I were inflating a balloon. His voice seemed to echo in my head and my blinks were getting slower and slower. As I followed his directions, I thought about playing sports with my friends, the first girl I had ever liked, and my family.

At the moment of near blackout, I began coughing up the mucus. Oxygen began to flow in again. I took a few deep breaths. He asked me if I was all right, I nodded, and he let

me go. I walked five meters away and a large thud hit my weak chest.

It was Coach Muenzenmay. His body slapped onto mine leading to the biggest hug I had ever received. “Thank you,” he said to me. I was a captain on his most successful team yet. My achievements and development in my four years had validated the techniques he used in his first four years of coaching. Muenzenmay and I had become good friends. We were so close, he called my house when his first child was born.

My high school career ended successfully, and I saw no reason to ever run again. I would merely enjoy track and field in the spring and then end my running career.

## 8: Basketball

*“Getting thrown out of baseball was like having part of me amputated. I’ve heard that old men wake up and scratch itchy legs that been dust for over fifty years. That was me. I’d wake up at night with the smell of the ball park in my nose, the cool of the grass on my feet... The thrill of the grass.”*

-- *Shoeless Joe Jackson, Field of Dreams*

“Just one game.” There were five minutes left in PE class my senior spring in high school, and I was being coaxed into playing a game of pickup basketball. “Fine. One game.”

It was the second week of the spring track season and we had just ended the winter basketball unit in PE class. My brother Dean had sprained his ankle early that winter playing intramural basketball in college. It was sprained to such a degree that the doctor told him it would’ve been less painful if he would’ve broken his ankle instead. He was on crutches for weeks afterwards.

I saw Dean’s injury as possible foreshadowing. For Dean, an ankle sprain meant inconveniences. For me, an ankle sprain would ruin my final high school track season. So to avoid the disasters of an ankle sprain, every day I brought in a special pair of basketball shoes and laced them well for the PE basketball unit. Some days I forgot my PE clothes,

but I never forgot my basketball shoes. When it ended, I was relieved, yet on this first day after the two-month unit ended, with five minutes left in class I was coaxed into playing basketball wearing a pair of old running shoes.

With the ball in my hand I faked a defender right and made a quick shift left when the three sounds of doom emitted from within: pop, pop, pop. I dropped the ball, fell over, grabbed my ankle, and let out a silent scream. I had done what I spent each day avoiding for the last two months. I had sprained my ankle.

It was February and the doctors told me I wouldn't be able to run again until late April. I was out for the season. My blood was boiling.

My ankle had stolen my joy. I didn't realize how life without running would be. Because of the frustrations of the injury, the possibilities of not running in college were erased. There was no doubt about it—I would run in college, and I would give it nothing less than my best.

I refused to play pickup basketball for the next three years.

## **PART III: THE LAST SEASON**

### **FALL 2004**

*Senior Season, Pomona-Pitzer*

DAY	DATE	MEET	LOCATION
Thu	9/5/2004	Alumni Meet	Claremont, CA
Sat	9/18/2004	Hawaii Big Wave Invite	Honolulu, HI
Sat	10/2/2004	UC Riverside Cross Country Invitational	Riverside, CA
Fri	10/15/2004	SCIAC Multi-Duals	La Mirada, CA
Sat	10/30/2004	SCIAC Championships	Chino, CA
Sat	11/13/2004	NCAA Div. III West Regional	Chino, CA
Sat	11/20/2004	NCAA Div. III National Championships	Colfax, WI

## 9: Fatburger

*“Our customers define fierce loyalty. They’d rather not have a burger at all if they can’t have a Fatburger. They cross many demographic lines, yet they combine to create a unique group of fanatics.”*

*-- Fatburger*

Paul Snape and I sat inside the Santa Monica Promenade’s Fatburger in May 2004. Paul had been craving one of their burgers. He had just ended the day teaching at The Archer School For Girls, and I was staying at his apartment at the beginning of a 15-day journey.

Unlike my mentally construed journey to make Nationals the previous fall, this didn’t consist of constant day-dreaming and emotional commitment. Instead it was a journey with a goal of relaxation. My junior year had ended at Pitzer College on May 15th, and my older brother Dean was to graduate from San Jose State on May 30th. I had 15 days to get to San Jose. I slept in nine different places in 14 nights, and of course I made a stop at Paul Snape’s place in Santa Monica along the way.

When I was a freshman on the cross country team at Pomona-Pitzer in 2001, I bonded with then-senior Paul Snape. We organized tuesday night dinners during which

Paul and I would sit in the dining hall for hours talking about whatever came to mind. Often a rotation of different people joined us, ate their meals, shared their thoughts, and then left us for some personal time and open seats for another social clique.

Now it was the summer of 2004, and Paul and I were eating dinner at Fatburger on a Tuesday night.

“We’ve got a program now,” I said.

The team had changed. In his early years Paul couldn’t bow out to injury. A team needs at least five people to score in a cross country meet and they only had five. If Paul had broken a bone and sat out, the team wouldn’t have counted.

Now, just a few years later, we had a team of over 20 and the times were drastically faster. Plus, there was a lot to look forward to—a team trip to Hawaii, a possible repeat of winning our conference, and several interesting personal stories:

*Hans Hassell.* Hans should have been a senior on the team in the 2004 cross country season. Instead, after his freshman year, he went on a two-year Mormon mission. Now he was returning as a 21 year-old “super sophomore.”

*Braden Boice.* In my sophomore year, at the 2002 Stanford Invitational Cross Country Meet, I had a breakthrough

race. Despite running out of my right shoe near mile three, I surpassed the then highly pressured sophomore Braden. He once admitted, after I made that pass, he was never again the same. I was our fifth man, and he was to be our second. He had been dominant his freshman year, and the pressures of surpassing that feat in his sophomore year along with academic pressures of school pushed Braden beyond his control.

But by collecting his thoughts studying abroad in South Africa during the spring semester of 2004, Braden had tried to find his lost spirit. The separation from Claremont life had given him time to relax and remember why he ran. He was determined once again to succeed, trying a new approach and outlook.

*Richard Cannon.* In the fall of 2004 he was to enter his fourth year on the Pomona-Pitzer soccer team and play an instrumental part in helping them shoot for their goal of taking the conference title. But Rich didn't play soccer that fall. Instead, he was going to forego his senior soccer season to run cross country.

It could be argued that Rich joined since we were Pomona-Pitzer's most dominant team, or that with all of our top runners returning, we would have an even greater shot of making Nationals, but Rich's decision was one of passion. Studying abroad the spring of 2004, Rich missed out on his junior track and field season. His passion for running

needed to be fulfilled, so he left his final season of soccer for cross country.\*

*Nate DeFelice.* Most interestingly, the trip to Portland wasn't the end of Nate DeFelice's career. He was returning. Though he was able to graduate in the spring of 2004, he didn't. Nate's season-ending injury his freshman year gave him one unused year of NCAA Cross Country eligibility. Nate saw reason to use that eligibility.

So in the fall of 2004 he signed up for one class to be an official student, paid rent to live in Pat's garage for housing, and lived for the sole purpose of cross country. One extra semester of school, and one additional thing to accomplish.

We had entered a new era with a unique group of fanatics.

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\* In 2004, the Pomona-Pitzer men's soccer team without Richard Cannon tied for the conference title to The University of Redlands, who—after a scoreless regulation and two scoreless sudden death overtime periods—they lost to by missing the 7th penalty kick for a bid to the NCAA national soccer tournament.

## 10: Alumni Race

“...*When all the smoke has cleared, and everyone’s through chanting your name, there’s only going to be us...*”

-- *Adrian, Rocky III*

We could not have been more excited about the idea—a team trip to Hawaii. A four-day paradise vacation in the midst of a stressful school year. To be fair and handle the costs of the trip, only the top seven runners at the Alumni Race, our preseason time trial, would qualify. Plane tickets, meals, and hotel rooms paid by the schools.

I had just assumed I would finish in the top seven at the Alumni Race and run in Hawaii, but the assumption was illogical. From the time Nate picked me up at the airport, I had been crushed on nearly every training run. Nate, Dubois, Leer, Crosby, Rich...they would destroy me.

The Alumni Race is a chance for alums to return, bond, and strut their stuff. For the current team it’s a chance to show off summer training in the season’s first race situation. The two sides race each other over a distance of four miles, and in recent years the current team had held the edge over the Alumni.

That morning alums and mentors Andy Barnette and Paul

Snape showed up for the race, but my running potential did not. Our team beat the Alumni, but I finished 10th on it—three places from Hawaii qualification. I had no race plan. I questioned every pass and every move. I wasn’t crushed, but disappointed in myself.

The summer of 2004 had given me time to recover from the depressing end of the 2003 season. No longer was I watching *The Matrix Reloaded*, thinking I was on a pre-destined voyage to Nationals. I had the free time to evaluate my career.

I’ve always measured my success by the success of the team and how I contributed to it. That summer, I was reminding myself that though a team victory is more rewarding than an individual one, I couldn’t forget to do it for myself. For my love of the sport. Sean McCarron reminded me of that.

In 2003, Sean was a freshman at Pomona-Pitzer. The addict of *Once a Runner* joined our team alongside two other talented freshmen, Elliot Peterson and Will Leer. All three held high school times that shattered my own. Their talent didn’t radically shift the team’s outlook like the entrance of Crosby and Chris, but had provided us with crucial back-to-back solid recruiting classes.

Sean and I are from the same state—Iowa. It’s a place where athletic virtues like “hard-working” and “die-hard spirit” can mean more than talent. I had driven an hour

and half east from my hometown of Des Moines to his of Iowa City to see him the summer of 2004.

The fall of 2003 was also a disappointment for Sean. After a successful first race, his season went downhill and his spirit faded. The two of us bonded on our previous season failures. Our talks in person motivated us both, but it was his words on *Instant Messenger*, of all things, that got to me most:

“Don’t forget yourself man. Do it for yourself as well. I guess that’s what I learned this year. Because I felt I had nothing to offer. And I did, I kept running for myself.”

As a result of my new-found motivation, I ended up running about 200 miles more than any previous summer. 100°F, 90% humid Iowa summer days weren’t going to stop 12-mile runs. Sure, Nationals was on my mind, but no longer was it the only goal. I wanted my final season to be one I could look upon with pride in the years after my career was over.

Nevertheless, when the school year started I was somehow sidetracked from the greatly motivating summer. I came back to Pitzer and started to celebrate the first of my last college months. I needed to be focused on the season, and I wasn’t.

Pat, however, knew I had more in me.

## 11: Hawaiian Clarity

*“Flow is being completely involved in an activity for its own sake. The ego falls away. Time flies. Every action, movement, and thought follows inevitably from the previous one, like playing jazz.”*

*--Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Professor of Psychology and Management, Claremont Graduate University*

I ran down to the normal practice meeting spot by our track a few days after the Alumni Race. My belief that I can do more than time allows for led me to be late as usual. Out of breath, I joined the team, which was standing in a circle prepped for a speech from Pat.

“I have something to say,” Pat announced reading from a piece of paper in his right hand, “This is going to make some people very happy.”

He didn’t mention the finances at the moment, but Pat was taking three additional runners out of his own pocket. I was going to Hawaii. I didn’t even smile after the announcement as to not upset those around me who weren’t going; I just looked down and gracefully accepted as my body filled with inner joy.

It was very encouraging that an experienced coach like Pat

believed so much in me as to pay my way to Hawaii, but the race at Hawaii was not. I finished eighth on our squad, which was an improvement from 10th at the time trial, but was not very satisfying. It appeared I was in a worse situation than 2003.

I had gone from fifth best in our conference in 2003 to eighth best on the team in 2004. Not only was I worried that I didn't have the talent to help us make Nationals, but that I didn't even have the talent to be a part of our top seven, the varsity team, the only members of the team that would fly to and run at Regionals and Nationals. My last season wasn't looking so great.

The night after the race in Hawaii, I sat by Pat at dinner. I thanked him for taking me to Hawaii and we talked about the season ahead. Simply expressing my feelings to him about the upcoming season and hearing his thoughts on our chances of success threw me into deep thought about the upcoming months for the remainder of the night.

The next morning we went on our typical post-race long run, and I was exhausted. I fell behind the team and in the distance saw Rich and Sean pull over at a park. Andrew "McDiesel" McDavid joined them, and when I caught up I did as well. I'm not sure why they pulled away from the rest of the team, but whatever the reason, it led to a re-awakening of my spirits.

We took off from that park up a road by the beautiful shores of Hawaii and I focused on staying directly behind the neck-and-neck Rich and Sean. Somehow something clicked. Maybe it was the clean Hawaiian air, the beautiful site below, or merely fixing myself to the pace of Rich and Sean. Whatever the reason, suddenly there were no questions in my head. No asking if I should slow down or pick it up. I had achieved mental peace. Csikszentimikalyi's flow. I knew what pace to run and I was going to run it.

Hawaiian clarity.

## 12: Goldhammer

*“I sense something. A presence I’ve not felt since...”*

-- *Darth Vader, Star Wars IV*

The Claremont Colleges are five neighboring small liberal arts schools in Southern California mostly separated by a few dozen feet in the small town of Claremont, California: Scripps College, Pomona College, Harvey Mudd College, Pitzer College, and Claremont McKenna College. For athletics, the schools combine their athletes 2-3: Pomona-Pitzer (PP), and Claremont-Mudd-Scripps (CMS).

John Goldhammer coached at CMS, our natural rivals by location. It seems logical that we would portray him as Darth Vader for purely that reason, but the comparison goes much further.

Year after year, Goldhammer’s militant coaching style drove CMS to conference title after conference title—seven straight as of 2003. He would recruit aggressively. He had All-Americans. But he was crazy.

There were rumors of Goldhammer’s obsessive passion leading to psychotic treatment of his athletes. There were coaches who didn’t talk to Goldhammer for years. And there were athletes like us who portrayed him as the dark

lord.

So when we decisively took the SCIAC title in 2003 and CMS placed second, the taste of victory was indescribable. In our minds, we had removed evil from its long-standing reign of terror.

### 13: SCIAC Multi-Duals 2004

*“We’re dealing with primal forces of nature here. When primal forces of nature tell you to do something, the prudent thing is not to quibble over details.”*

*-- Ray, Field of Dreams*

John Goldhammer reached his arm out to me.

“Hey!” he yelled.

I walked past him.

“Hey!” he yelled again.

It had been almost four weeks since I had briefly felt Hawaiian clarity. My season hadn’t been going as I wanted it to. It was a mixture of really good and really bad workouts, and a mediocre second race two weeks after Hawaii at UC-Riverside that placed me seventh on the team.

I’m typically a late-season bloomer, but things didn’t seem to be getting much better. However, every time I brought it up to another teammate there wasn’t a reaction of sympathy or attempt to raise my spirits. They simply said, “You’ll be fine.” The confidence in me was encouraging.

There are two common ways to score a cross country meet, hence our conference championships were done in two parts. The first meet was scored one way, Multi-Dual, and the second meet the other, Championship. The winning team overall wins the conference, SCIAC.

Teammate Elliot Peterson showed the most confidence in my ability to turn my season around. He told me the day before the Multi-Duals race that this was my time and he knew it.

At the Multi-Duals race I passed by Goldhammer after crossing the finish line.

“Hey!” he yelled.

I walked past him.

“Hey!” he yelled again.

I turned around, and there was Goldhammer extending his arm out to me. I don’t believe Pat and Goldhammer had exchanged a word in five years, but here was Goldhammer, talking to me.

“Nice race,” he said.

Dazed and confused, I shook his hand. People tell me he hates being called Goldhammer.

“Thanks, Goldhammer,” I said.

Elliot was right. I took the race out fast that day and instead of dying out, I again found that Hawaiian clarity. I finished third on our team and eighth overall. I didn’t hesitate on anything. If I wanted to push, I pushed—and pushing was the only option I gave myself. I did not ask myself why I felt good or if I should run fast; I just followed those primal forces of nature within me.

“You called it,” I said to Elliot later than night.

“You ran it,” he replied.

Though the race had revitalized me, it had done just the opposite for Chris Dubois. After my brief exchange with Goldhammer, I grabbed some water and walking back to our camp, I found Chris. Two others were helping him stand, and it was clear he was in pain. His injuries had been severely aggravated.

At our second meet at UC-Riverside Chris had pulled out due to the pain from his injuries, but since this was conference, he felt he had to run. But finishing the race had exacerbated his injuries, marking the end of his season and putting a question mark on the remainder of his cross country career.

## 14: Wonder Boy

*“You’ve got a gift Roy, but it’s not enough” -- The Natural*

It was the fall of 2002. I came down to the track, not for a workout to help me get better, but for a workout to help Crosby Freeman get better. My sophomore cross country season had just ended, but our freshman phenom, Crosby’s, was still going. He had just individually qualified for NCAA Cross Country Nationals in his freshman year.

Several of us were at the track that day to help pace Crosby through his workout. I did every other lap and could barely keep up. Crosby destroyed the workout.

Nate DeFelice and I stood on the track in awe of Crosby’s talent as he did his cool-down. Nate turned to me and declared with utmost confidence, “Crosby is going to be an All-American.”

Nate was right. That fall Crosby became the first ever Pomona-Pitzer freshman cross country athlete to become an All-American. I had hoped he would again achieve that status his freshman spring in the track and field season.

On the Friday of his freshman spring break, March 21, 2003, Crosby was to qualify for NCAA Track and Field

Nationals in the 10,000 meter race. Our spring break was shortened due to practice, so instead of going home that year, some of my friends from Iowa came to California. In those few days my friends and I had the most fun four humans in Los Angeles could ever have. However, the break wasn't the same for Crosby.

He had gone to Mexico for those few days that year, and it was there in which he had met disaster. Crosby had sleepwalked off a roof. In the morning, he awoke to find himself in severe pain and iced his ankle, thinking he had injured only that. It was much worse. He had broken his leg.

I had never seen someone so crushed. Crosby isn't one to spill his emotions to me, but his faced showed it all when he came back: a loss of purpose and a questioning if he could ever return.

Our coach Pat once told me that he had never met someone who could endure as much pain as Crosby. If anyone could rebound, it would be him.

By the time we had reached the 2003 Regionals course in Oregon my junior fall, his sophomore fall, Crosby appeared to be back in shape. Once again he individually qualified for Nationals. However, he wasn't able to repeat All-American honors at Nationals.

Without Crosby Freeman, we were nothing. He was our unquestioned Number One. He gave everyone a target to shoot for in workouts and raised the talent level of our team from average to good. As unpredictable as a bolt of lightning he came to us, and as reliably as the Wonder Boy bat in *The Natural*, he delivered for us.

## 15: SCIAC Championships 2004

*“You know, we just don’t recognize the most significant moments while they’re happening.”*

*-- Moonlight Graham, Field of Dreams*

At the awards ceremony, my name was called. 10th place overall (fourth on the team), First Team All-Conference. They were counting down the top 20 runners, and I congratulated each as I found my spot at the end of the row of runners being recognized. Then Nate, Leer, and Crosby were called up, who had finished ninth, third, and first respectively. Our team had once again won SCIACs.

Even if I would’ve finished fifth in Conference, as I did the year before, I don’t think I would have felt the same standing in front of the crowd as I did in 2003. I didn’t have much pride or joy within me this time around. We had defeated CMS already, and I felt my performance that day was only slightly better than mediocre. We needed incredible times at Regionals, and my time at SCIACs just wouldn’t do. Nate understood this.

“We’ve got to step it up at Regionals,” he said to me on our cool-down.

“I know,” I replied. “I know.”

SCIAC Championships 2004 (Credit: Ian Shapiro)  
Sean McCarron (271), Rich Cannon (259), and Braden Boice (258)





*Team Photo after SCLAC Championships 2004*

*Back row, left-to-right: Elliot Peterson, me, Andrew McDavid, Michael Bergeron, Rocco Addante, Lucas Allen-Williams, Adam Henry, Will Swanson, David Marshall, Mike Heaton, Perris Straughter, Pat Williams*  
*Front row, left-to-right: Crosby Freeman, Brad Markle, Will Leer, Sean McCarron, Braden Boice, Hans Hassell, Rich Cannon, Nate DeFelice*

For the first time in 22 years, Pomona-Pitzer won back-to-back cross country conference titles, but that wasn't on my mind that day. Regionals was.

## 16: Clutch

*“Some people want it to happen, some wish it would happen, others make it happen.”*

-- Michael Jordan

The team was in high spirits. We had clinched our conference victory after winning the SCIAC Championship meet earlier in the day. I walked into Pat’s house and found him chatting with, among others, Michael “Skinny” Bergeron.

When Pat had read off his list of those going to Hawaii, I wasn’t the only non-qualifier he was inviting. Skinny was also coming. He, too, performed poorly at the Alumni Race, but we couldn’t have gone to Hawaii without Skinny. He was—as Pat had said—part of “the soul of the team” and had received the Coach’s Award in the fall of 2003 for that reason.

\* \* \*

In the fall of 2001, my freshman year, I was given the Coach’s Award (that year titled the “8th Man Award”). I was our eighth man so I wasn’t flying to the out-of-state Regional meet with the top seven runners. Instead then-senior Michael Rostkowski let me, two Pomona-Pitzer cross country girls, and one Pitzer student borrow his car and go

on a classic college roadtrip: 15 hours to the Regional meet location in Oregon on a Friday, a sleepover at a University of Oregon Rec Room that night, and 15 hours back after the meet on Saturday. Pat and the team liked it so much, I was given the award.

In the fall of 2002, I had received it again. That fall I had co-started a newsmagazine, and all the time consumed by running and the publication led me to be overworked and facing academic failure. When I was given the Coach’s Award, I cried on the walk back to Pitzer because someone who understood had shown his appreciation.

In the fall of 2003, Skinny had earned the Coach’s Award. He was organizing the acquisition of team apparel, throwing around his common sense, and showing a love for the sport.

\* \* \*

That night after the 2004 SCIAC Championships, Skinny fueled me with confidence. “Every crucial race, every workout, Golden steps it up...he is prime time,” he was telling Pat. I couldn’t have walked into a more pleasing conversation.

I’ve always admired those athletes that were clutch. When I was ten years old, I witnessed one of the most memorable clutch performances in professional baseball by

my favorite baseball player on my favorite baseball team. It was game six of the 1993 World Series and the Toronto Blue Jays were down one run in the bottom of the ninth with two outs against the Philadelphia Phillies. One Joe Carter swing later, the Blue Jays were World Series Champions. Joe Carter's clutch swing had sent a 2-2 pitch over the left-field fence and had sent himself leaping up and down rounding the bases.

Watching the game in my Iowa home sporting my Blue Jays hat, I was absolutely breathless.

“What's the worst thing that can happen when you dream?” Steve Rushin wrote in the next issue of *Sports Illustrated*—comparing Carter's historic homerun to the often childhood fantasy of winning The World Series with a homerun—“You can become a hero.”

That's exactly what Joe Carter had become to me. I became one to adore clutch performers, and eleven years later Skinny was telling me I was exactly that. I was capable of Joe Carter material in collegiate cross country.

\* \* \*

I walked out of Pat's house and into his detached garage—Nate's domain. There, most of the team had gathered, and I was able to briefly chat with Crosby.

For the most of the team the season was over. SCIAC Championships marked the end for the runners not in the top seven. Crosby walked from the crowd of yelling teammates and joined me on Nate's couch. It was obvious what we were thinking.

“Regionals is the most important race of my career,” Crosby said.

I couldn't have agreed more.

## 17: Blood

*“The blood was boiling into his eyes along with the tears, and under his heart were red-hot coals. Loose bird-shot filled his throat and the faces of the crowd floated by like painted faces in a dream.”*

*-- George Harmon Coxe, See How They Run*

I stood in the bathroom of our athletic facility, staring at the urinal in horror. I was peeing blood. It was 12 days before the 2004 West Regional.

That day, the Monday following our SCIAC victory, I was fired up. Regionals was coming. If I failed again, it would be my last race and another emotional dungeon. If I succeeded, we would fly to the Midwest to participate in perhaps the greatest showing of athletic heart at any event in any sport at any level—NCAA Division III Cross Country Nationals.

At DIII Nationals there aren't athletes on scholarship with special dining halls, tutors, or academic leeway; there are athletes who run for the love of the sport. Athletes who will never advance to the Olympics, a professional level, or receive an endorsement, but athletes who run hard each day for their love of running.

We ran a classic route on Monday, did an abdominal workout, and I went over to our athletic facility's bathroom to pee. My urine was dark red. It was blood. I panicked.

I had heard of this happening to marathon runners after marathons, but I hadn't run a marathon. I hadn't even done anything unusual or moderately difficult. Even after consuming sufficient liquids and a meal, I peed blood again later that night. After the second bloody urination, my body had never seen so much water and Gatorade.

I peed at 1:00a.m., I peed at 1:30a.m., I peed at 8:00a.m.,....I peed five times before my doctor's appointment on Tuesday from the excessive fluid intake, and every time the urine looked normal to me.

I was expecting the best of news after the urine test at the doctor's office on Tuesday. “You are mutating into a superhuman,” or “You may hold the cure to AIDS.” But I got the worst. “Your urine isn't normal,” she told me. My urine may have looked fine, but the doctor's lab said otherwise. There was a “high amount of microscope blood.” I didn't know how to react.

I talked to runners. I talked to coaches. I didn't sleep well. It turned out this was fairly common among serious athletes after intense workouts, but I hadn't done a serious workout.

Thursday, another visit to the doctor. My blood tests had

come back and they took another urine sample.

“Everything’s normal,” she said to me.

I was clean.

No one knew what caused it, but when I walked out of the doctor’s office, it was as if I had been given a magical wish. The doctor deemed it a “freak occurrence,” and my focus returned to Regionals.

Maybe the incident was best put by Coach Kirk Reynolds: “Who knows what our bodies do every now and then...I’d stay hydrated and hope that it was a one-time occurrence—maybe one of your body cleaning itself out and getting ready for a big push next Saturday.”

Next Saturday was Regionals.

## 18: Prado

*“Every passion has its destiny.”*

--*Billy Mills*

I crossed the finish line. An Occidental College trainer helped me stand up, but I didn’t ask him if we were going to Nationals. I knew.

The tail-gating commenced. The body paint was applied. The non-top seven runners and fans from all around were ready to cheer us on at Prado Park in Chino, California. My father, mother, and brother Alvin flew in from Des Moines. Today was the 2004 NCAA Cross Country West Regional.

If anyone understood failure of personal journeys, it was Alvin. In 1995, when Alvin was 16, he got a new car and was ready to apply it to a four-year dream. He and his friend Matt Edwards had been planning to display their love for baseball in a way no one had ever done before. The idea was simple: 28 days, 28 games, 28 stadiums. Only Alvin would drive and the two would sleep in hotels, their car, or wherever else they could find. They weren’t seeking press, but they made it on the local news, and *Sports Illustrated* was interested in a story.

After criss-crossing the country and going through Canada,

the two reached Alvin's favorite team and stadium: the Chicago Cubs and Wrigley Field. Alvin wasn't just some fan of the Cubs; the Cubs were his life. If the Cubs won Alvin had a good day; and if the Cubs lost, Alvin had a bad one. The rain may not have stopped me at Regionals in 2003, but it did end the journey of Alvin and Matt. After completing more than half their journey, the game at Wrigley Field rained out, ending their 28 day, 28 game, 28 stadium dream. Alvin came home depressed.

I was stuck in a pack of runners. This time, I knew what to do. I went with them. Nate DeFelice was running hard somewhere behind and nothing was going to stop me. We had only two team bids to Nationals this year, and our talent was damn-near the talent of the University of Puget Sound (UPS). It was clear before the race that Willamette University would get the first bid, and it was between us and UPS for the second.

We had studied UPS. We knew their names, their times, and their history. To beat them would mean going to Nationals, and we understood that.

I had to go out with the leaders, but maybe I went out too fast.

Video footage from a DVD—compiled by Will Leer using his dad's recordings of our season—showed me fading away from the lead pack. Spectators Andy Barnette and Alvin

feared the worst.

With a mile remaining, my body pleaded, “no more.” I tried pounding up a hill, but was dying out. A Willamette University runner passed by. I was, as runners say, “hitting the wall.” My muscles were beginning to tighten from a lack of oxygen causing lactic acid to build within them, restricting my leg movement. Our Nationals bid was in jeopardy.

## 19: Two Seconds

*“A life is not important except in the impact it has on other lives.”*

*-- Jackie Robinson*

Before Regionals, Pat had taken us out for a spaghetti dinner and explained to us how much he had enjoyed this season. To him, the repeated Conference title and the effort we had shown built our season into a delicious cake. But there was certainly more we could do to this cake. “Making Nationals would just be icing on the cake,” he explained.

He pointed to me and Nate. “You two are going to make the difference.” Pat had broken down the numbers and assuming everyone else runs as expected, Nate and I would be the keys to success. Our times compared closely to UPS runners that needed to be beaten.

I had so much of my life riding on the upcoming race that the pressure from Pat only seemed fitting to me.

For Nate it couldn't have been much different. It was for only this race that Nate had returned to school—paying rent to live in Pat's unairconditioned and unheated garage, where it was said a family of raccoons would make frequent

visits. After nearly 12 months of focusing on a single race, Pat's added pressure likely didn't phase him.

When we approached the starting line at Regionals, the announcer read off some facts about our team on the loudspeaker: Two-time Individual Conference Champion Crosby Freeman; back-to-back SCIAC Team Champions; undefeated against Division III teams in 2004.

As I got into set position, the ground rules were clear to me. Succeed today or go home forever.

The gun went off, I ran a fast four miles (our 8,000 meter courses are approximately five miles), and reached the hill where it was clear I was dying out. The Willamette runner passed by me.

“Golden Krishna!” teammate Braden Boice shouted. Body paint colored his chest, arms, back, and face blue. “You see this guy up here?” He pointed to the Willamette runner passing me on the hill. “I know you want this more than anyone else out here! I know you do!”

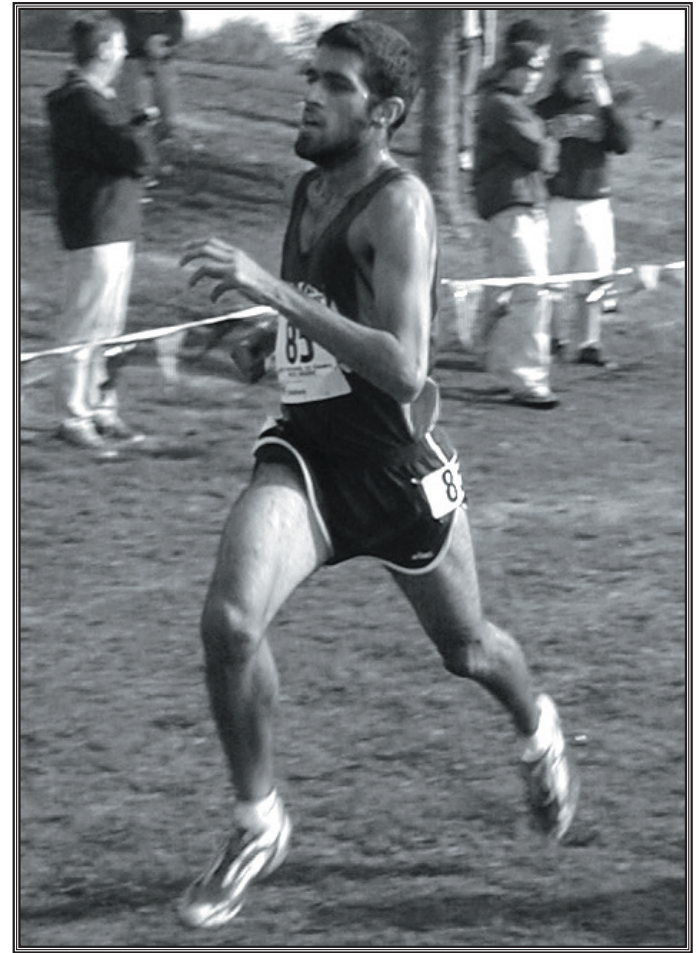
Braden was right. The horrible end of high school, the summer desire, the failures of Portland, ...it was all accumulating inside of me. I surged. There was no voice in my head with a status report on whether I could do it or not, I just did it. Hawaiian clarity. I stuck onto that runner and as much as I tried to dust him, we battled to the

finish.

I crossed the finish line in 13th place among 96. I was All-West Region. I had run the best race of my life.

Our average team time only surpassed UPS's by two seconds, but it surpassed them. We were going to Nationals.

“What are you going to do now?” Skinny asked me on the van ride back. “Your life is complete.”



*NCAA West Regional 2004 (Credit: Ian Shapiro)*  
*Me*

## 20: North Central

*“[This year] I think...only one person was an All-American.”  
-- Jim Miller, North Central Class of 1986 on North Central’s  
2003 performance*

It was as though fate had played its cards perfectly. In the team van in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, the site of the university hosting 2004 NCAA Cross Country Nationals, Pat told us that among the 250 runners and the 20-some assigned boxes on the starting line, we would line up next to North Central College.

No one on the team could believe the coincidence.

Just outside Chicago in the suburb of Naperville, is North Central College. To most people, that name means nothing.

“Has anyone heard of North Central College?” I asked.

I was asking the question over a year earlier, the night before 2003 West Regionals. The team had convened in one of our hotel rooms to discuss the race the next day and to receive NCAA informational pamphlets. I was looking through one with NCAA Division III Cross Country Nationals history when I saw their name.

North Central historically has had the most dominant Division III cross country program. At that point they had not only won more championships than any other team in NCAA Division III Cross Country history, they had also finished in the Runner-Up position more times than anyone else. North Central dominated DIII Cross Country.

Kevin Licht, North Central’s third fastest finisher at Nationals in 2003, had graduated from North Central in the spring of 2004 and chosen to attend graduate school in Claremont at Claremont Graduate University (CGU) that fall. He had emailed CMS coach John Goldhammer about being a volunteer coach and training with their team. After graduating from a storied program and fulfilling an important role in a third-place team finish the year before at Nationals, Kevin could have offered CMS advice and guidance.

Goldhammer refused. He told Kevin he didn’t want to break up potential team unity with outside runners. So Kevin came to us.

We embraced him like he was one of our own. For Halloween the team built a pirate ship of wood and boxes, dressed up as pirates with earrings and eye patches, and marched through campus chanting: “P! P! X! C! Ar! Ar! Ar-Ar-Ar!” Of course Kevin was there. He was in the ship.

Kevin loved telling stories about North Central.

About Pat Rizzo their number one runner. Often he told stories about how Rizzo was a goof ball, but sometimes not. He boasted to us on numerous occasions that Rizzo would finish as the top runner in the nation that season and lead North Central to a National Championship.

About how much his racing stripes meant to him. “The Stripes”—ugly barbershop candycane patterns of white and red—cover the team’s proudly worn post-season uniform. They only appear during the team’s most crucial races, having earned their fame at the meet that determines the success of North Central’s season—Nationals.

About the jar of dirt in his room. It was taken from the park his team would do its workouts in, and it meant more to him than anything else he owned.

We had Kevin, North Central’s animated story-telling alum.

We didn’t personally know anyone besides Kevin who had attended North Central, but we had heard enough about how great it was. The night of Regionals, in the excitement after we had qualified for Nationals, we decided to start a fun little rivalry.

“North Central sucks.” “NCC Sucks.” “Fuck Rizzo.”

Of all the insults thrown around after that night, the one that lasted was “Fuckin’ Rizzo.” Every time someone was

late or something bad happened, we’d simply blame North Central’s number one. “Fuckin’ Rizzo...” Kevin communicated some of these messages to North Central, and the groundwork for a rivalry was laid.

When we got to Wisconsin, we were deeply in thought about the race ahead, but we were always on the lookout for North Central. No one could wait to meet Rizzo and the team we had mocked for the past week.

So when Pat announced that of the 24 teams that had qualified for Nationals we’d be lining up next to North Central on the starting line, there was a burst of laughter, happiness, and excitement. All the more reason that Saturday, November 20, 2004, was going to be the most memorable race of our lives.

## 21: Fifth

*“Gray! The world is gray, Jack!”*

*-- A Clear and Present Danger (Movie)*

Finally. Here. Nationals.

It was 30 degrees, I had on my Pomona-Pitzer jersey, my short shorts, and “Nov 20” written mirrored in permanent marker on the center of my forehead.

I had asked Sean McCarron to write it there a week earlier because nothing meant more. School work, appearances,... nothing mattered but November 20th and every time I looked in the mirror that is what I saw. In class, at meals, and in the library people asked me what was on my forehead. I responded with a single word, “Nationals.” What I didn’t tell them was that I was going to the very meet I had been dreaming for years to attend. That being at Nationals was being in heaven. And that November 20th was the day I would go.

I stood on the starting line. We stood on the starting line. The team was here, not just because I wanted to be here so badly, but because the team wanted to be here so badly. We had fought so hard to get here together, and I was going to run my very last race with some of the best friends I’ve ever

had.

If Nate DeFelice had not returned, we would not have scored the points necessary at Regionals to make it. If Rich Cannon had not left soccer for cross country, our spirit would not have been the same. If Crosby Freeman had folded after his leg broke, we wouldn’t have made it. If Will Leer, Sean McCarron, and Michael Bergeron didn’t provide us with the depth a National-caliber team has, we wouldn’t have made it. We were a team with four of our top seven as seniors, and we were here because we had all fought to be here.

Even those that weren’t here, pushed us here. Braden Boice’s rejuvenated spirit may not have secured himself a spot on the top seven, but there is no doubt his spirit rubbed off on me. In our most difficult workout of the season, each time I tried to pass Braden, he wouldn’t let me. Each time I would surge, he would surge with me. He may not have raced well enough to be with us that day, but he had reminded me of the most important thing in running—heart.

“Golden!” I heard a familiar voice from behind me. “Golden!” It was Andrew Edwards. He had driven from Iowa with another friend from home, Jake Bowman. My family was there, too. My dad, my brother Dean, my mom, and two of my cousins. They had come to see the paradise I had described in dream form so many times before.

I took a stride out to keep my legs warm before the race started and ran into Leer. “Look around,” he said. Fans had lined up three or four rows deep as far as I could see on the gradual uphill start.

The starter quieted us at the line and all 250 runners crouched into ready position. Finally I was here, and there was something I had to do.

“Fuckin’ Rizzo,” I announced. The gun went off, and a rivalry and a race officially began.

I got into great position in the first mile. I had expected a train of packs. Since the race would be likely run at a pace faster than what I am accustomed to, the intent was to gather a pace from the packs, try to advance as much as possible from pack to pack, and to consequently set a new PR. Nonetheless, at about one and a half miles, things fell apart.

My emotions couldn’t be controlled any longer. Tears were forming and I was practically crying while racing. My adrenal flow must have reached a maximum as I lifted my right knee and froze in position. Every part of my body, head-to-toe, went numb. If this was going to be a good race, I had to snap out of it—and I did—but other things didn’t go as planned.

The train of packs I had imagined didn’t exist. Instead

the race was more of a dog-eat-dog style where the runners around me during the race weren’t running in large packs. Each was running his own race. I tried to gather some sort of pace by running nearby others around me, but I got lost in all the commotion. I couldn’t concentrate.

The yelling was non-stop. Never for a moment did I escape the fans, typically lined up in rows on both sides of the course, screaming as loud as they could. I couldn’t hear anything else. Cross Country races aren’t usually like that. They aren’t spectator events. But Division III Nationals is. Dean later estimated at least 2,000 fans for the 250 athletes.

With my strategy dissolved, I sat back into my own pace and gave the remainder of the race everything I had built in my legs during the past eight years. Everything I had built from that hill run where I dreamed of Nationals, to that lake run where I dreamed of Nationals, or even that run through the residential streets where I dreamed of Nationals. I had built my body to get here, and I was going to enjoy every moment.

I sprinted across the finish line and into the arms of Kevin, who wasn’t sporting his typical North Central gear, but a Pomona-Pitzer sweatshirt. I gave Kevin a hug and Andrew Edwards rushed over. He came with news. Crosby had individually finished fifth in the nation.

Neither Andrew nor I could believe it. From a broken leg

in the spring of 2003 to fifth best in the nation in the fall of 2004, his junior year. The team hadn't fared so well, but Crosby was unbelievable.

That afternoon Crosby was honored along with the other All-Americans, the top 35 finishers, at an awards ceremony in the University of Wisconsin Eau Claire's gymnasium. When Crosby received his award with grace, it was clear we were merely witnessing Crosby in his playground. This is the third time Crosby was running at Nationals, and he had discovered the key to dominating it.

It was a few hours after the race, but I was still mentally overwhelmed by it, and my ears were still ringing from the shouting. I was a little sad at first. The team hadn't done so well overall, and though I had run my second fastest time ever, I hadn't set a new PR in my last race. But then I saw North Central.

They were calling up the top team finishers. Calvin College placed first, North Central finished second. I didn't talk to them, but their faces showed emotions of sadness. They were so close to a national title, and they hadn't been beaten by much. Any athlete would be proud to be part of the second best time in the nation, but to some of them, their dreams of National Championship had been shattered.

But my dreams hadn't been shattered. I realized that success was relative, not black and white. My straight face



*Team Photo at NCAA Qualifier's Banquet  
Left-to-right: Sean McCarron, Will Leer, Rich Cannon, Crosby Freeman, Pat Mulcahy (holding Coach of the Year award), Nate Defelice, me, Michael Bergeron*

became a smile. This was my dream. To be here. To race amongst the some the greatest athletes in the nation. We may not have raced well, but we had done it. We were at Nationals.

And we were walking away with pride. At the National Qualifiers' banquet the night before, Pat had received Coach of the Year for the West Region. Never in his 34 previous years of coaching had Pat received the honor. Typically the award is given to the coach of the team that finishes first in the region, but we had finished second. It was a surprise to us all, but surprise is exactly why he had received it. No one had expected a pathetic Pomona-Pitzer team to go so far in four years—winning back-to-back Conference titles and a bid to Nationals.

Crosby's fifth place finish also had a little extra spice to it. Rizzo had finished 10th.



*NCAA Qualifier's Banquet (Credit: Mark Foos, foosfotos.com)  
Pat Mulcahy receives Coach of the Year award*



NCAA Cross Country Nationals (Credit: Mark Foos, foosfotos.com)  
Pat Rizzo (209) and Crosby Freeman (214)

## 22: For South America

*“What do we do now?”*

-- *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*

I don't drink alcohol. It's a choice I made before high school. In fact—until spring 2004—my junior year at Pitzer College, I hadn't tasted it.

That spring Andy Barnette was graduating, and I felt the need to toast him before he left. Andy was a friend and a mentor who liked to bend the rules. So at our track banquet in the spring of 2004, I decided to deliver a speech in honor of his disobedience by breaking a few of my own while explaining the often embarrassing stories behind them.

First, I grabbed a can of Coca-Cola. My high school's girl's cross country coach had strongly believed that regular intakes of caffeine can dehydrate your muscles and hinder your running performance. I would do anything legal in high school to give myself an advantage. So I stopped drinking caffeinated sodapop. But in recognition of Andy Barnette, I ripped open a can and took a few gulps. One rule was broken.

Next, I pulled out a bag of mini donuts. In eighth grade I had lifted weights somewhat regularly in the mornings

before school. That upper body muscle was probably lost shortly after I began running, but I made a promise to myself then. Some of my lifting partners would eat donuts after we lifted, but with role models as superstar athletes, I began shifting my diet to more healthy alternatives. I decided one morning in eighth grade to never again eat donuts. In the spring of 2004, I broke that rule. I ate a donut and washed it down with the Coke.

Lastly, I opened a can of Coors. Everyone on the team knew I didn't drink. That day, though, I wanted to convey the significance of Andy's departure. I took a few gulps of the beer and puckered my lips at its horrible flavor. It was the first time I had tasted alcohol.

After our meet at Nationals in the fall of 2004, I once again had reason to drink. The night of Nationals, Will Leer's family was gracious enough to host the team and our fans to dinner and celebration at their Minnetonka, Minnesota home, about two hours from the race site in Colfax, Wisconsin. When most of the parents had left, I gathered with the team and did some drinking and celebrating. Around 2:00a.m. I found myself a couch to rest my tired body. By this point, most of the team was gathering in beds to get some sleep for our early flight the next morning.

I was lying on the couch wrapped in blankets, and while staring at the ceiling, I raised my voice and asked Nate who was in a neighboring room, "Why are we even alive

anymore? We should be dead now."

Everything I had wanted to accomplish, everything I had day-dreamed about for the past two years had been achieved. We had made it to Nationals, Pat had won Coach of the Year, and Crosby was a star. My cross country career was over, and it had ended more gloriously than I could have ever imagined.

I remember walking to class that following Monday looking around and wondering why I was even there. Why I was alive anymore. I considered each step, each thing I experienced, as a sort of free extension of life. I wasn't ignoring the world to focus on my dreams, but for the first time since my childhood, I embraced what I saw around me and smiled at its perfection. I had no more reason to be alive except to appreciate the world around me and do whatever good deeds were necessary to help it maintain that beauty.

Nate did have an answer for me that cold night at Will Leer's house. "Hey," he shouted back from the other room, huddled with Sean McCarron and Rich Cannon, "I've got a buddy. He's going to take over Africa. I need you. I need you to take over South America."

I agreed. "Okay," I responded. I closed my eyes and smiled myself to sleep. Maybe we had both celebrated a little too hard that night and had absolutely no idea what we were

talking about. Or maybe after having the careers we did, there was simply nothing greater to accomplish except to conquer a continent.

## 23: Never Again

*On the meaning of life: "That's easy: Be happy, try not to hurt anyone, and hope to fall in love."*

*-- Mallory Keaton, Family Ties*

Earlier that night at Will Leer's house I had found myself on one side of their dining table with Pat and Dean sitting across from me, and my two parents to my left. Somehow the other fans, athletes, and parents had found themselves talking elsewhere in the house, and the conversation was between Pat and The Krishnas. Dean was talking to Pat; I was silent, eating my food.

Dean pointed at me and looked at Pat like a schoolboy asking his teacher a question. "All this kid thinks about is running," he began to explain.

Pat didn't look surprised. By this point he had understood that the Indian boy from Iowa was obsessed with the sport. He had read an early version of this journal, in fact.

Before Dean's comment to Pat, I had been discussing my unclear future. I was going to graduate in the spring, and like many others, I was unclear about the road ahead. So Dean's next line only made perfect transitional sense.

“What is he going to do now?” he asked Pat.

No longer could I run, talk, dream cross country.

I had released an early version of this journal after SCIAC Championships, and the team read it and passed it on to others at The Claremont Colleges. Dean had oddly grown just as close to this story as my teammates. He forwarded it to his friends, and it played a part in his daily reading. I wasn't surprised to see him asking Pat such questions.

“All this kid thinks about is running. What is he going to do now?”

Pat's long coaching tenure had given him confidence. He answered that evening without giving a moment of thought. “Wait until he gets a girlfriend,” he said jokingly.

My family burst into laughter and I gave a smile.

Soon after, Pat gave his real answer as if he had already seen my life unfold. “It'll pass onto something else. The obsessive behavior will.”

I went on to party that night, and the next morning we left Will Leer's house to fly home from Minneapolis. We came back to Claremont around 11:00a.m., but in the 12.5 hours afterwards, I found myself doing nothing but listening to music and reflecting upon the season while looking through

online photo albums of it.

That night I told Crosby what Pat and Dean had discussed. “I think so, too,” Crosby said in response to Pat's conclusion.

“But you know what?” I replied, “If they are right, if I do obsess over something else, I can tell you this: nothing will ever be like cross country.”

Perhaps one day I'll believe in a cause so much that it consumes my thought and drives me towards a focused goal, but never again will there be something like cross country.

“I think you just wrote the conclusion to your book,” Crosby answered.