

Sam Palka, St. Louis Priory Junior High School

There's something about the beginning of a cross country race that takes your mind off everything else. The crack of the starting gun, the frantic scramble to get to the front, the push to keep your pace throughout, it is truly an exhilarating and tiring experience. Never did I think that I would need that feeling of focus, the simplicity of focusing on your body and getting to the finish, but in this past year, it has become incredibly important. The pandemic that shut down the world for the past year has inhibited our ability to gather, form a community, and even step outside for some. Now that some restrictions have been relaxed we can get back to life with a semblance of normalcy, including some sports programs.

At my school, we were fortunate enough to have the ability to run many cross country races and practice as a team. Just being in practice with friends and working with each other to push our limits was a method of recovery for the time we spent in lockdown. The competition between the members of my team to push higher up in team rankings and to make it to the state championships was constructive and friendly, with the additional effect of it working. We won as a team, lost as a team, celebrated together, and took a small break from the stress of the protocols of the pandemic. That, in my opinion, is the reason we do school athletics, both to push ourselves and to build an idea of community and teamwork. The teamwork and community we build in sports have become so important during the pandemic. It has now become apparent to me that tough times are like a race in many ways. There are twists and turns, obstacles, and times when your confidence will falter, but we keep pushing ourselves and supporting others to reach the finish line together