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Coach Rozea

“Why? Turn back now before it’s too late!” Those were the words one of my closest friends, Kevin, upon telling him that I planned to try out for middle distance on the Chaminade High School track team in the winter of my sophomore year. Prospective runners tended to stay away from Coach Rozea’s mid-distance group for many reasons: largely because the workouts he made for his athletes were harder than the other groups’, and in general, the distances were far more tiring. Being the naïve rookie I was, I ignored Kevin’s advice and quickly learned why people were so hesitant to join mid-distance. Within days, I found myself kneeling on the ground, gasping for breathe in the middle of a workout, wondering why I ever chose to subject myself to this brutality. However, after time I learned that those people wise enough to choose mid-distance and stick with it were the luckiest of all, getting to train under the best and most memorable coach I’ve ever had, Coach Rozea.

None of my teammates wanted to join Coach Rozea’s group because they had heard stories about his ruthlessness during practice. For instance, one practice in the winter of my senior year, Coach Rozea used his evil imagination to think up one of the toughest workouts any of us runners had ever done. We needed to run five 200m sprints per set, and in between each 200m, the amount of rest we received dropped incrementally from a full minute to a mere fifteen seconds. One set alone had me and the other top runners heaving, but that wasn’t enough for Coach Rozea. He didn’t make us do just one, or two, or three, but he made us do four sets. By

the time the third set was over, exhausted does not even begin to describe what we were feeling. Stumbling around on weak legs, I found my way over to a grass area a short ways away from the track and threw up my lunch from earlier in the day. Crouched over, staring at my vomit, I felt a hand placed on my back and heard the words, “You done yet, you nancy? You still have a fourth set to do.” Inspired by the endearing words of my coach, I forced myself back onto the track to finish one of Coach Rozea’s most brutal workouts.

Although his ruthlessness at the time always seemed unfair, Coach Rozea was only this way because he demanded the best of his runners in order for us to reach our fullest potential. Never would he let one of the members of his group settle for less than his best, and if he ever thought that we became complacent with where we were, he had no reservations letting me or my teammates know that he wouldn’t allow it. For example, one race in the spring of my sophomore year, I was determined to accomplish my goal of running an 800m in under 2:10. Stepping onto the line, I knew today would be the day that I’d break that time barrier. Two long laps later, I fell across the line in fourth place of my heat in a time of 2:08. Thrilled, I collapsed on the infield with a beaming smile on my face, only to see the stern look of Coach Rozea staring down at me. “What in God’s name are you smiling about? Did you think that was fast? Tommy ran four seconds faster than you today, and I didn’t see him collapsing! Not to mention the other two kids who beat you.” Angry and frustrated, I got as far away from that man as I could. But soon after, I realized that he was right. He knew I had the ability to run faster, so he refused to let me be content with anything slower than that. While many runners cower away from criticism like that, I took it to heart just as he wanted me to and made it my goal week after week to keep improving myself. Coach Rozea demanded a lot of me, and consequently, he taught me to demand a lot of myself as well.

The only reason Coach Rozea demanded so much from us was because he was so dedicated to us as runners. Many days my teammates and I sat in the corner of the track, darting our eyes between our watches and the tunnel leading onto the track. Being the lazy runners that we were, we unofficially declared that if Coach Rozea didn't walk through that tunnel by 3:30 we were all allowed to leave practice. Much to our dismay, we never got to put this "3:30 rule" into effect. Seldom did we not see our stout coach walk across the field by 3:30 with a devious look on his face before reading the cruel workout he had created for us. However, one day during my senior year, I knew that Coach Rozea would not show up. He had told me that his daughter-in-law was pregnant with his grandson, and I made sure to mark the due date, happily anticipating that day we would all be free from one of his dreadful workouts. Nonetheless, when the day came, Coach Rozea sent me a text message, evidently while waiting for his first grandchild to be born, enclosing the workout he wanted us to do. Most coaches would have forgotten about their teams in the presence of their newborn grandchild, but we, as a team, were always in the back of Coach Rozea's mind. I've never had a coach as committed to a team as he was.

In addition to being dedicated to us as runners, Coach Rozea was also dedicated to me and my teammates as young men. As an example, there were many points during my senior year that Coach Rozea took time either before, during or after practice to make sure everything was okay with me. One time in particular, he spent close to an hour with me after practice helping me with a stressful college decision. I had the ability to run at most schools but others not. I vividly recall him telling me that he would love for me to run in college, and he thought that I'd miss it more than anything if I didn't, but also that college is for academics first. In his characteristic bluntness, he told me, "You're never going to the Olympics, so none of this actually matters

when it's all done with." He advised me to choose a school where I felt like I would truly be happy, not one necessarily with the best academic reputation or track team. Likewise, in no way were Coach Rozea's actions particular to me alone; he acted in this manner with all of his runners. It always meant a lot to me as a high school student how dedicated he was to us both on and off the track.

Although Coach Rozea could be extremely harsh at times, he had a fun, jovial side like everybody else. With only few weeks left in our final season, my teammates and I began reminiscing about all the funny times we had over the previous few years. Standing right there with us, Coach Rozea chimed in and recounted the time when we were shoveling the track one day, and Kevin got hit in the face with a shovel and fell face first into a mound of snow. Nobody laughed harder than Coach Rozea reliving that memory. Though to many he seemed like a coach purely focused on running, those of us who knew him best knew that he loved to laugh as much as anyone on the team, making the whole atmosphere at practice so much lighter and more enjoyable.

Because Coach Rozea was so invested into track and his runners, he was very proud of us and our accomplishments. By way of example, after our second biggest race of the winter season, I really saw how proud he was of us. The Millrose Games was the biggest race of our season only behind Nationals. Being the anchor of the 4x800m team that day, a lot of pressure was on me to break the tape across the finish line in first place and win the Millrose Games for my team for the first time in 15 years. After my teammates gave me a small lead over the second place team, I quickly lost it and fell further and further behind each successive lap. With 200m of the 800m left, I was behind by 25m, a distance that seemed insurmountable to my other coaches besides Coach Rozea. Somehow in the final few steps of the race, I managed to close the

distance and beat my opponent. After the race, Coach Rozea pushed his way through all the other people, found me, and gave me a hug saying, “I’m so proud of you. I haven’t seen a runner with that much guts since my own son. I never lost faith in you.” In that one moment, Coach Rozea’s pride in me instantly made all of the grueling workouts and verbal abuse worth it.

Coach Rozea was the most memorable coach I’ve ever had. I’ve been playing sports since I was three years old, and I haven’t stopped since then. Out of all of the coaches that have come and gone, only a few have left an impact on me, but none as lasting as that of Coach Rozea. He taught me a work ethic that I’ll never lose and to always work to achieve my fullest potential. He also showed me that even though working hard is important, having fun along the way is just as essential. I’m glad that my friend Kevin didn’t talk me out of joining mid-distance that cold, winter day sophomore year. I don’t think I could’ve ever forgiven him if he convinced me not to train under the greatest coach I’ve ever had. I can’t wait to go back for a practice over winter break and watch Coach Rozea deviously smile and hand out one of the brutal workouts I used to love and hate so much.