

"To give anything less than your best is to sacrifice the gift."

Steve Prefontaine

There has never been a runner quite like Steve Prefontaine. He was a brilliant, charismatic athlete who, in the 1970s, actually got the general population excited about distance running.

No small feat.

Pre, as he was known, is still, unquestionably, the most dominant distance runner in US History. At one point, he held every American record from the 2K to the 10K. He was aggressive, confident . . . even a bit cocky. Before one major championship, Pre was quoted as saying: "I'm going to work it out so that it's a pure guts race at the end, and if it is, I am the only one who can win it." **That** is confidence. With Pre, this was not false bravado. He backed up his talk. He gave it his best . . . in practice, and in races, day in and day out. He was uncompromising.

Pre had an insight that few of us are ever privileged to discover. He understood that every challenge we face in life is an opportunity. We can either confront it with confidence and determination – give it our best – or we can sacrifice the gift.

As we entered the 2017 season, we – the athletes and coaches of the Cherokee cross country team – faced a challenge. We had some holes to fill. We graduated four of our top nine from last year's championship squad, including our top two. It would be a rebuilding year. We would be counting on some young runners to step up.

Every challenge is an opportunity.

The young runners stepped up: The team skipped the rebuilding process and, instead, reloaded! With three sophomores in the top five the team went on quite a run, winning a 4th consecutive County Championship, a 3rd straight Olympic Conference Championship and a 2nd consecutive American Division Championship! A 2nd place finish at the Group 4 Sectional marked the 5th year in a row that the team advanced to the Group 4 State Championship. Unfortunately, the running gods did not smile on us at the Group Meet. The team missed qualifying for the Meet of Champions by three points. However, sophomore, **Chris Spisak**, made it on his own and represented us admirably at the State's biggest competition. A week later, **Justin Kelly** competed in the Footlocker Northeast Regional Championship, finishing 16th among the top runners from Maine down to Maryland. Justin was named to the 2nd Team All-Northeast Region.

All of this would not have been possible without a commitment from many of you to give nothing less than your best. For that you have the respect and admiration of your coaches. We hope that you will look back with pride at this season and what you accomplished.

"The quality of a leader is reflected in the standards they set for themselves"

Ray Kroc

Seniors: You set some high standards. Your leadership was a big part of our success this year. Ten of you – **Justin Kelly, Brandon Marks, Jon Conn, Matt Smith, Mike Iannotta, Joe Falk, Matt Morgan, Naledge Brown, Nik Kadirisani** and **Matt Zeitz** – were part of that great freshman team in 2014 that won the South Jersey Championship, and you've been with us ever since. **Taha Rana** joined the squad as a sophomore and **Zac Miller** ran his first cross country season as a senior. Four year runner or first year runner . . . sectional champion or middle of the pack athlete . . . each of you has had an impact on the program in your own way and we are forever grateful.

Captains: - **Justin, Brandon, Mike I** and **Matt S** – We thank you for leadership. Your words helped keep the team focused. Your actions provided a great example of what it means to be committed to a goal . . . what it means to give nothing less than your best. Thank you.

To all of our seniors, thank you for your contributions to the Cherokee Cross Country Program. Please know that whatever we accomplish in the coming years, you are, and will always be, a part of it . . .

For those returning: The future will be here before you know it! Be ready to seize the day.

"Setting goals is the first step in turning the invisible into the visible."

Tony Robbins

In the fall of 2018, we will, once again, have some holes to fill. We are losing twelve athletes to graduation, six of whom were among the top eight on the team at some point in the season. That is significant.

Every challenge is an opportunity.

Rarely, in all my years at Cherokee, have I seen a future with so much promise. We return 7 of our top 11 runners from this year's Olympic Conference Meet along with

several other young runners capable of contending for a spot in the top 7 by next year! What will the fall of 2018 bring? Will we be just another good Cherokee team or will we be one of the best teams in school history? The choice is yours!

To be *the best* will require giving nothing less than *our best*. Set your goals high and be prepared to do what it takes.

... run ... stretch ... roll-out ... run ... do core work ... lift ... run ... eat right
... get enough rest ... run ... do your drills correctly ... fill out your training log ...
..run ... do your striders perfectly ... keep your eye on the goal ... run ... encourage your teammates ...
run ... run fast ... run far ...

Thank you ...

Thank you, **Matt Monteleone**, for being our manager. We appreciated your help at workouts and at races!

Thank you members of the **Booster Club** for your support of our program!

Thank you, **parents**, for raising such outstanding young men and allowing us to work with them. Thank you also for your support for all that we do!

Thank you **Mrs. Charlesworth** and **Mr. Agnew!** We truly appreciate our administration's support!

Thank you **Cal** for being our trip administrator and for all you do for the sport in South Jersey!

Thank you **Mr.Smyth** and **Mr. Falk** for all of the great photos! Additional thanks, **Mr. Smyth**, for keeping our website updated and for all the banquet photos!

Thank you, **Mr. Shea**. Your work with the Marlton Rec Program has made a huge difference for us. We would not be where we are without your help.

Most of all, thank you athletes! Your commitment – your refusal to give anything less than your best – is what makes this program so special. It was a great season. Thanks for bringing us along for the ride! We are incredibly proud of you.

- *Coach Shak & Coach Thompson*