

FINISH TOGETHER

Crossing the finish line was important to Sean. Crossing it with Blake was even more important.

By Richard M. Romney

Church Magazines

Blake Lewis, 17, was among the leaders at the Utah 6A state high school cross-country championships, and his best friend and teammate, Sean Rausch, 18, was right behind him. “Our team, Riverton, had never won state before, and we were going for it,” Sean says.

The race was intense, but Riverton was doing well. With only 200 meters (220 yards) left in the three-mile race, the first runners were about to leave the hills and grass behind, make a sharp turn, and enter the stadium where they would sprint to the finish.

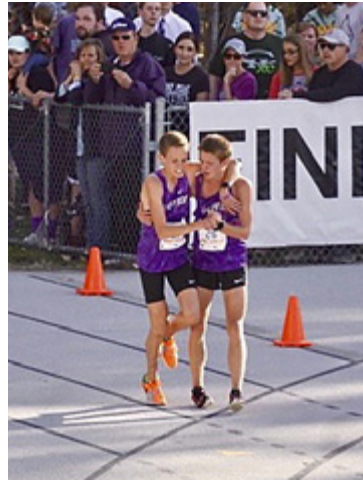
Then, Blake fell. Not from a trip or a stumble. He collapsed. The tibia bone in his lower leg had snapped.

“I came around a corner and saw Blake lying on the ground, holding his leg and screaming in pain,” Sean remembers.





FINISH STRONG



NO HESITATION

Even though Sean was a senior and this was his last chance to race at state, he didn't hesitate. "I had no thought of leaving Blake and just finishing the race," he says. "He wanted to finish and so did I, and I was ready to help him the whole way. So, I put him on my back and carried him to the finish line."

Two hundred meters is a long way to carry somebody that's your same height and weight. "I wanted to comfort him," Sean says. "So, I kept reminding him of the years we'd been running together, of the 1,250 miles (2,012 km) we'd run together over the summer."

In between Blake's groans, Sean kept repeating, "We're a team, and we're a family." An official rushed up to tell them giving assistance to another runner wasn't allowed, but Sean said it didn't matter. "We're in this together," he said, "and we're



"We're a **TEAM,**
and we're a **FAMILY.**"

going to finish it together.” The official disqualified them both, but allowed them to continue.

At the end of their ordeal, Sean gently set Blake down so that he could step—actually, hop—over the finish line. Then Blake, with help, climbed into an ambulance.

TEAM PRAYER

The Riverton men’s team took third place as a team, but they didn’t celebrate. Instead, they knelt and prayed for Blake. And when the women’s team found out about Blake, they did the same.

“I was in the hospital when I heard they had prayed for me,” Blake said. “That was so emotional, that my teammates would do that for me.”

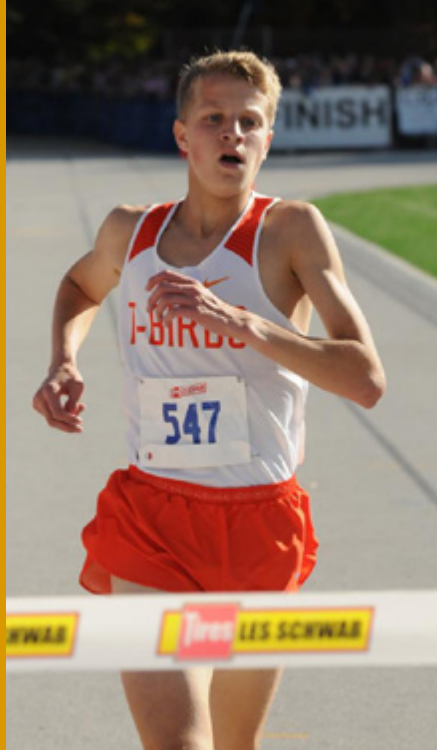
“We prayed that Blake would be all right, and that nothing too serious would result,” Sean says. And he believes the prayer was answered. “The doctor said the injury could have been a lot worse if Blake had tried to finish the race on his own.”



(Above) At the hospital.
(Right) An X-ray shows Blake’s broken tibia.
(Below) Team members visit Blake at home.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF LEWIS FAMILY, BY RICHARD M. ROMNEY, AND DONAL PEARCE



AIDAN'S VICTORY

Ever dream of winning a national championship? So did Aidan Troutner, 18, from Timpview High School in Provo, Utah, USA. But he did more than dream about it. He trained hard and listened to his coach. Just the same, no one figured he really had a chance to win the individual cross-country championship—until it came to the final sprint. Enjoy his inspiring story, “The Final Sprint,” at newera.lds.org.



READY ON ARRIVAL

These three cross-country athletes—Blake, Sean, and Aidan—will all soon be missionaries. But even with all the time they spend on running, school, and other activities, they will arrive in the mission field ready to share the gospel. See how they have learned to strengthen gospel teaching by using personal experiences in the article “How to Teach from Life” at newera.lds.org.

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At a community event, Blake sounds the horn to start the race.



Sean and Blake with family members. Sean is recognized as a “local hero.”

The local community also celebrated Sean’s good deed. At Riverton’s annual Veteran’s Day celebration, which features a 5K and a one-mile run, Sean was recognized as a “local hero,” and Blake was invited to sound the horn to start the race.

In a short speech, Sean said, “I’m not a hero. I was just taking care of my brother.”

ULTIMATE VICTORY

Both young men feel their experience reinforced gospel principles to them.

“We all have hardships in our lives,” Blake says. “But just like Sean was there for me, the Savior is there for us. If we let Him, He’ll pick us up and help us finish.”

“If any one of us on the team went down,” Sean says, “the rest of the team would be there for him.” The same is true for his priesthood quorum. “We’re always there as a team, serving together. For Mutual, Church meetings, sacrament, and any service that anybody needs, we’re always trying to help and support each other.”

“When we run, we always set goals, then train to meet those goals,” Blake said. “If you don’t train, you’re not going to get better. Our ultimate eternal goal is to have eternal life and to return to our Heavenly Father. So, we have spiritual goals, and we train through prayer, scripture study, service, staying worthy, repentance—so that we can make it to the spiritual finish line.” **NE**



Sharing their experience in Sunday School and quorum meetings.



“And the doctor told my mom it was a miracle that it was a clean break, lined up so straight that no surgery was necessary,” Blake says. “Otherwise they would have placed a metal rod in my leg, and running would have become painful.”

AROUND THE WORLD

Websites, TV stations, and newspapers across the USA featured

accounts of Sean carrying Blake to the finish line. A social media video went viral, and the story popped up in Asia, Australia, South America, and Europe.

“I think our story became popular because people like to be reminded there’s still good in the world,” Blake says. Sean agrees: “It’s nice to see that a simple act of kindness can touch so many lives.”