

ON YOUR MARK GET SET

BY CHRISTA SKOUSEN

Our coach was counting on us to break the school record, and we had done all we could to prepare. Or had we?

This was a big meet. A look of fear plastered across my face was the style I sported every race day, but today I was also shaking. Our coach was banking on my long-distance team to break the school record for the 4 x 800 meter relay.

I spent the earlier part of the meet taking all the necessary precautions: warming up, stretching, staying hydrated, and saying silent prayers over and over again in my head. As I sat in a quiet, shady spot stretching my calves (and calming my nerves), my teammate Kyra approached me.

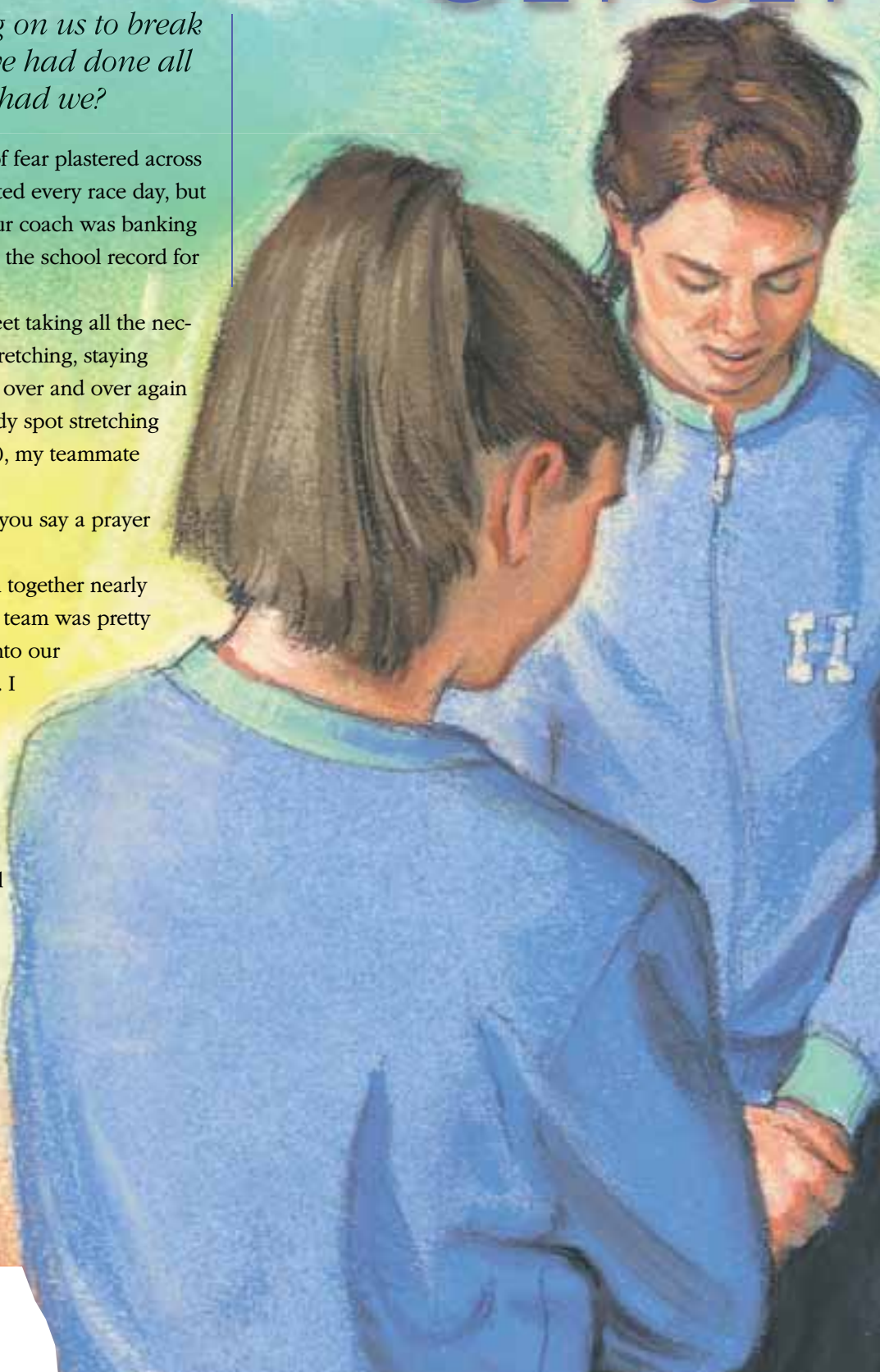
“Christa, I have a question. Will you say a prayer with us?”

Rachel, Kyra, Meridith, and I ran together nearly every day. Even though our school team was pretty big, we four girls usually split off into our own group to run longer distances. I was the first Latter-day Saint these girls had ever met, so Kyra’s question surprised me.

Grinning, she said, “I was thinking that each of us could each say a prayer because today we need all the help we can get!”

So I stood up and followed the other girls away from the rest of the team. We huddled together and proceeded to take turns saying our individual prayers. Rachel went first and sang a beautiful prayer she had learned in Hebrew school. Then Kyra recited a prayer she had learned as a child.

When it was my turn I closed



Pray!



my eyes, folded my arms, and said a prayer in my own words.

“Dear Heavenly Father, we are grateful to be on this team together. Please help each of us to be strong and to run to the best of our abilities. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.”

Once I finished I felt a quiet stillness that replaced the feelings of awkwardness I had felt just moments before.

At first I was worried about saying a prayer in front of my friends, but afterward I felt an overwhelming sense of gratitude.

When we had finished, we all ran one last warm-up lap together. Everyone started talking nervously about the race, but my mind kept traveling back to the prayers we had shared just a few minutes before. I was impressed with my friends’ sincerity and faithfulness in their own religions. They had been raised to think of prayer in one way, and I in another. Until that moment I had never really thought deeply about the way Latter-day Saints pray.

How grateful I am for the knowledge I have that I can communicate with my Father in Heaven like I would with a friend. When I am feeling sad or frustrated or even nervous before a race, I can always ask Him for help, and He is always there to listen. From that day on, prayer became a regular part of our preparation before every meet. We did end up breaking the school record that day. But what I remember most is the newfound appreciation I gained for the direct line of communication we can all have with our Heavenly Father. **NE**