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| |  |  | | --- | --- | |  | | |  | | | **The Hill**  **By Naveen Y.** New Jersey, Age 15 http://teacher.scholastic.com/writeit/images/popprintable_10.jpg The moment I reached the hill, my legs told me to stop. The smell of the gun remained in my nostrils. My jersey swished from my chest as if it was about to leave me. The stale, hot air hit my face like a thick blanket. The sun attacked my back like an iron pressing a shirt. Thoughts ran through my head like a race car--my question: 'Should I stop and give up?' was answered by own quick response, 'Not an option. I have to go on.'  All of this circled me at once during my first cross-country race of the season. My first race was a time that will stay with me and affect me for the rest of my life. This was the day that developed my characteristics and improved me as a person.  When I arrived at the top of the hill, my lungs were like an air pump, heavily beating in and out, pounding my chest with each breath; the pain soared through my chest. My heart thumped until I no longer felt it. I just threw my feet out to get to the top.  I then spotted a blue shirt towards the bottom of the hill that seemed to be coming closer. My legs suddenly began pumping in a circular motion in an effort to reach the blue color that I saw â€” it was another participant that I knew I had to beat.  The trees looked like giant green blurs as I sped past them. The blue shirt that once seemed to be coming closer to me only seemed to shrink away in the distance as the race went on. A voice echoed in my head: 'What's the point? He's going to beat me anyway.'  I could suddenly feel my heart again, as my legs slowed dramatically to a jog. I was the only person left at the bottom of the hill. Everyone else had already finished the race. Mental anguish pained me: 'What did I get myself into? Was it even worth taking my time to run?' These thoughts constantly ran through my head.  I started running to numerous green trees through which I could see a small path winding inside. 'No,' I said. 'Not the forest.' My legs suddenly started sinking into the dirt as I entered the forest and my shoes suddenly filled with sand. My ankles twisted like twigs and felt as though they might snap in any direction due to the rough terrain.  I saw a little light come closer and closer; I finally made it out. It was like coming out of a swimming pool because I could breathe again. The air immediately rushed to my face. I heard the crowd and my coach: 'Come on Naveen! You're almost done, sprint it up!' His yelling made me dash to the finish line.  ''I don't want to run ever again! This was horrible!'' I screamed. ''My time, the way I run, I'll never improve.''  A tall senior with very straight shoulders came over to me. ''Is there something wrong?'' he asked.  ''I am so slow; I finished so far behind in the race,'' I said.<br ''Hey, I'm Dan F. I used to finish in the back like you in my freshman year. But I realized that running was not about being slow or fast, but about determination and courage. Cross-country is an individual sport and all that matters is setting your own goals and trying to reach them,'' said Dan.  Out of breath, I simply nodded as he walked away and thought about what he said: Dan was right and maybe I should try and keep running.  This comment made me realize that I am competing against myself and I could improve as long as I didn't give up.  In the next race, my timing improved by a full minute. I truly did learn that determination was needed in running, but courage and perseverance towards my goal played a big part too. This new mind-set continued to influence the rest of my season, with each race I felt more positive. I kept going on in the races even though my legs were hurting very much. I knew I had to fight through the pain; I would not let the burning in my legs stop me.  However, it impacted me well beyond running; this day also changed my life. Whenever I did any homework or chores around the house, I had more strength and mental stamina to do them. My first race and Dan's voice never left me. To this day, I still look at the characteristics I developed-- courage, determination and perseverance; I will never forget the hill that got me there.  </br | |  | | --- | | **Naveen Y. on Writing**  Running cross-country, honestly inspired my work. | | |  | | | http://teacher.scholastic.com/writeit/images/spacer.gif |

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