

## Pass It On®...

### **Doubling Back for a Friend.**

*Two teammates paused their 5K race to help a fellow competitor.*

Running cross-country track is not a casual sport. Training takes a lot of dedication, and come race day, you push yourself to your body's limits. Most races are roughly 5 kilometers or 3.2 miles. The course is over rough ground, grass, gravel, dirt and mud. Maintaining cadence and pace can be challenging. The first race of the season is the most difficult. Runners who are not quite race-ready often push themselves too hard. It is, after all, a competition.

On a bright fall day, when sunlit afternoons can be deceivingly brisk, Cooper Erickson and Ethan Olds were striding toward the finish line. A runner from a different team had passed them earlier in the race, bolting toward the finish. But about 10 meters from the line, the runner collapsed. His muscles were overcome with lactic acid, a chemical that builds up in muscles during a run.

At first, Cooper went by him, focused on finishing the race in fourth place. And then something clicked. Runners talk about gliding along in the zone, unaware of anything but their own breath and the rhythm of their stride. It takes a lot to break that kind of concentration. Seeing a fellow runner on the ground caused Cooper to step out of the zone and go back to help. He was aided quickly by his teammate Ethan Olds. Together, they helped their fellow competitor across the finish line.

"I know our team has great respect for people that give their best efforts, and that's what we did," Cooper said.

A 5K race is a run, not a sprint like the 100 meters. It requires pacing and patience. It's easy to let your mind dwell on pains in your feet or legs, or the burning in your lungs. Like life, there are obstacles along the way. It rains. Your shoes get wet. There's the jostling at the beginning and around corners and the distraction of the crowd.

Trusting in your training is what pulls the best athletes to the front of the pack. Every phase of the race has been visualized and trained for, each second accounted for. And then the unexpected

happens: Somebody needs help. At this point, there is a decision to be made. Is the race more important than the human being beside me?

Neither Cooper nor Ethan hesitated to stop. "When you start to take running very seriously, you build a community, and that community is so wide, and you just have a respect because they are giving it their all," Cooper said. "That was more important than finishing in second or third place."

Running through life is a joy. But sometimes, taking the time to help someone out is the real victory.

**Respect...**[PassItOn.com](https://www.passiton.com)

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