

Runner Comes in First and Last

At a state track and field meet in Columbus, Ohio, in the summer of 2012, Meghan Vogel helped carry a fellow competitor, Arden McMath, to the finish line in the 3,200-meter run.

Vogel had won the 1,600 earlier in the day, surpassing her personal best by 10 seconds, and was in last place in the 3,200 as she entered the final turn at Jessie Owens Memorial Stadium.

“The mile is my focus,” Vogel said. “The 2-mile is a backup if I don’t do well in the mile. The first two laps, I felt good. The third lap came around, and my legs felt heavy. It was hard to catch my breath. I thought, ‘This isn’t going to be pretty.’”

Vogel made eye contact with her mom, Ann, who’s also the track and cross-country coach at West Liberty-Salem High School, where Vogel was a junior. They both laughed at the irony that Vogel would finish first and last at state.

With 100 meters to go, Vogel saw McMath, a sophomore from Arlington High School, ahead of her, and the first-time state qualifier was struggling. Suddenly, McMath collapsed in front of Vogel. When McMath hit the ground, Vogel decided against running past her and avoiding a last-place finish. She stopped, picked McMath up, put McMath’s arms around her shoulders and half-carried, half-dragged her the last 20 meters.

Vogel pushed McMath across the finish line, so McMath finished 14th in 12 minutes, 29.90 seconds, and Vogel took last place in 12:30.24.

Vogel didn’t understand what all the fuss was about. “Any girl on the track would have done the same for me,” she said.

But the opposing team’s coach, Paul Hunter, accurately observed that this type of action doesn’t just happen. “She didn’t have a lot of time to think it through,” he said. “It’s apparently ingrained. It just showed what kind of character the young lady has.”

Vogel has clearly been training for more than a successful track and field career. She has been training for a successful life. In a single act of selfless service, Meghan Vogel managed to be *first* and *last* all at the same time.

And that’s exactly what happens every time the Christian seeks to serve rather than be served. He or she comes in first and last all at the same time.

Jesus said it: *Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all* (Mark 9:35 NIV).

– Beecher Hunter