

## BLOCK PATTERN

## STUDENT ESSAY: COMING IN LAST

Annette P. Crossman

Thesis: The huge contrast between the runners at the beginning and end of the Chicago Marathon taught me a lot about what it means to be a sports hero.

- I. Runners at the head of the marathon
  - A. Look like runners
  - B. Dress like runners
  - C. Focus intensely
- II. Runners at the back of the marathon
  - A. Don't look like runners
  - B. Don't dress like runners
  - C. Have poor focus but more fun

Conclusion: The real sports heroes are the second set, who look nothing like real runners but who run marathons anyway.

I am not an athlete. So when a couple of my more active friends asked me to get up at 7 A.M. with them and go cheer for the runners in this year's Chicago Marathon I almost refused. I'm still not sure what convinced me to go, but I went. I stood on the sidewalk for about six hours, passing out cups of water, or banging on a pot with a wooden spoon, or just yelling my head off to cheer on complete strangers. In between the cheering and the banging and the jumping about, though, I had a chance to do something I'd never done before: Watch a marathon. It was fascinating. I'd always thought that all runners were pretty much the same, but as I watched the 29,000 people who ran this year, I realized that there are huge differences between the runners at the beginning of the race and the runners at the end. This contrast even taught me a little bit about what it means to be a sports hero.

The runners at the head of the pack in a marathon look like runners. Their bodies are built for running and little else. These are people who have carefully trained for peak performance. They're lean, with corded muscles in places that I never knew could have muscles. Their legs are long and hard with strength enough to run more than 26 miles in a day but not slow them down with extra bulk.

The runners at the front of the marathon dress like runners too. They wear t-shirts they've gotten for participating in previous marathons. They wear clothes made from materials invented for the space program—materials with names like Neotex and Gore-prone. They wear really short shorts, and really tight tights. These frontrunners carry impressive accessories as well. They start with gloves and hats and extra layers, but they shed them as the race heats up and their bodies get warm. By the end of the race, their only accessories are watches, sports goo, and shoes. The watches are marvels of modern

sports technology that let them track their heart rate and their pace for every quarter mile as well as letting them figure a projected finish time, all of this while running, of course. The goo is contained in small foil packets of a jelly-like mess that's all carbohydrates and caffeine. They suck on these packets for energy as the race wears on. They wear shoes that cost half a month's rent. Everything about their running gear is serious.

The runners at the front of the pack have one more special quality: focus. They run with an intensity that blocks out everything. When we passed these people cups of water they didn't speak, smile, or glance our way. They didn't even slow down. The cups just went from our hands to theirs, mid-stride. These runners don't seem to hear the cheering or see the signs and people lining the streets. Their running takes them away from the outside world to someplace deep inside themselves that's made of work, determination, strength, and will. They don't need cheering to help them along.

Back at the end of the race, trailing about five hours behind the people at the front, are the other runners. These people don't look like runners. They look like lawyers, and plumbers, and administrative assistants, and people who never pass up a dessert or a french fry. They look as if running is an extremely rare activity for them, as if they'd feel much more natural in a recliner, watching a football game. They limp a lot.

The runners at the end of the race don't dress like runners either. They wear old gym shorts and baggy t-shirts with funny sayings on them. They carry signs that say things like, "59 years old, first marathon. Cheer for me!" and "I'm running in memory of my mother." They wear clown wigs and pigs' noses and antennae with stars on them. They don't wear watches because they don't really care how much time this is taking. They carry sports goo, too, but they want a ham sandwich. They wear expensive shoes, like the runners at the front of the race, but you can tell that their feet hurt anyway.

The real difference, though, is that the runners at the back don't have the focus that the others do. They need the music and the pot banging and the enthusiastic cheering more than the real runners because they're doing something that's hard for them. It's hard for everyone, of course, but it simply has to be harder for an overweight accountant to finish his first marathon than it is for a dedicated runner to finish her tenth, even with a personal best time. These runners at the end of the race need the cheering sections, and they show their appreciation. They wave back and give exhausted "thumbs up" signs. Once in a while, one will slow down for long enough to say "Thanks," and one man who must have been at least 75 actually stopped to dance with me for a minute or two before he turned and ran off to finish the final stretch of the course. These runners have at least as much determination as the runners at the front of the race, but they need to know that somebody cares about them, too, and not just about the people who can run the marathon in under three hours.

Everyone I saw that day impressed me, all 29,000 complete lunatics who finished the race. The athletic skill of the front runners, their devotion to their sport, was humbling. Even more humbling was hearing that the winner of the race set a world's record, running the marathon in 2:05. The newspapers called him a sports hero. For

me, though, the real sports heroes were the people at the end of the race, the ones who didn't look or dress or act a thing like "real runners," but who ran anyway. I cheered for them the loudest.

## ALTERNATING PATTERN

### STUDENT ESSAY: DADS AND DADS

*Reid Morris*

Thesis: There are a few things that set my dad apart from my friends' dads.

- I. Cooking
  - A. Other dads
  - B. My dad
- II. Style
  - A. Other dads
  - B. My dad
- III. Money
  - A. Other dads
  - B. My dad

Conclusion: My dad might be a little different, but he taught me an important lesson.

There has always been something just a little bit different about my father. He isn't like any of the other dads on the block. He is friendly like the other dads are, and he will fix my car when something is wrong like the other dads do for their kids, but there are a few very special things that set my dad apart from the others.

Most of my friends' dads don't do a lot of cooking. Some of them specialize in scrambled eggs and anything that can be grilled outdoors. Others mostly stick to sandwiches. The dads that do cook often take it very seriously indeed, creating gourmet meals that require special appliances and pots, several trips to gourmet groceries, and use every dish in the kitchen.

If my Dad makes dinner it is of one variety and one variety only: fried fish. He perfected his recipe when he was in his twenties, and I suppose he never saw any reason to change. When I was five years old, I completely agreed. I thought my dad was the greatest cook on the face of the earth. It was a real treat when my mom went out of town and we could enjoy the heavily battered, deep fried, golden brown, fish dinner. Every night. Monday through Sunday. Until Mom came home. As a teenager, I started inviting myself over to friends' homes whenever my mom went out of town for extended periods of time.

Most of my friends' dads dress for work with a certain care and attention. The dads who work in offices look great in suits and interesting ties. The dads who get to wear jeans to work take pride in finding ways to look casual, yet professional. Even the dads who are stuck wearing company uniforms wear them with a certain style and panache.

For my dad, though, style is not a strong point. As a football coach, if he isn't walking around with a whistle around his neck, warm-up pants and jogging shoes I would scarcely recognize him. I counted recently, and he owns more than thirty t-shirts and sweatshirts with his team's name, mascot, and victories on the front. It's a signature look, certainly, but I'm a little worried about what he might wear to my graduation.

My friends have told me tales, though I'm still not sure I believe them, about dads who hand out gas money, or who find a way to slip their kids a little extra money when there's an important date or dance coming up. I've even heard about kids who are paid to do standard household chores or who get an allowance, "just because."

The money my dad gives out is what he likes to call "walkin' around money." Using a standard for prices that I think must have been set in the 1960s the sum is limited, at best, to four dollars. At an early age I learned to stop asking for anything more since it would inevitably lead into the old familiar "when I was your age" sermon. Even without my begging for spare change, my dad is more than willing to let us know how much he had spent on us already that week. "Do you know how much it costs me just to light this house?" He actually tried to train my siblings and myself to use specified numbers of squares of toilet paper for specified bodily functions.

Last week instead of purchasing a tire pump from the store for fifteen dollars, I chose to walk my bike almost 2 miles to the gas station to fill the tires. It was somewhere in the middle of my walk when I realized I had turned into my father. I was cutting costs while wearing jogging pants, and I was filling up my bike tires so I could go to the local fish fry for dinner. And it occurred to me that, while I might wish for a dad with a better cooking repertoire and a snappier fashion sense, I'd never find one who knew more about how to live on a tight budget, or who loved me enough to teach me.