



pg 52

BECOMING A JOCK DAD

by
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Being a man, there is always that dreaded macho stigma hanging over you that a real man never shows his true emotions. Being a father pretty much puts an end to such a silly notion. I have accepted the fact that I have never been, nor will I ever be, a real man.

I am a fraud of manhood. I should be banned from the brotherhood of male ego. I'm nothing but a softy. A disgrace to everything that manhood stands for.

Actually, I'm just a father. When it comes to my girls, I gave up a long time ago holding in my emotions like a true man. Be it a banquet, recital, athletic competition, or cheerleading, I have long established myself as a blubbing father who is quite generous in shedding a few tears of pride on my girls behalf.

I remember at my oldest daughter's last high school cross country meet, when she broke the school record. She had a room full of trophies, plaques, medals and certificates for her achievements over the past four years, but the one thing she didn't have, that she really wanted the most, was the school record. She wanted to leave her high school with her name up on the gym wall proclaiming her the best distance runner in her school's long history.

Last week, she had a great run, but came up four seconds shy of the school record. Today would be her last chance. There would be no more tomorrows.

I positioned myself away from the crowd, on the final bend where the runners come into view and head for the home stretch. If she wasn't going to break the record, it would break my heart. She had worked so hard and wanted it so bad. It was now or never,

and a parent hates the emotional volcano rumbling inside, as you stand on the sidelines, unable to do anything but watch. Especially in a race that covers a little over three miles. A race that lasts some nineteen minutes or more. A race in which a good part is run out of view of neurotic parents.

As the race began, things were looking fairly good for my daughter. She looked fresh and focused. Conditions were perfect for her. It was cloudy, cold, with snow flurries fluttering about. She always loved running when conditions were bad. She was my mudder.

The toughest part of the race for the parents was when the runners disappeared from our view for about a quarter of a mile, until they rounded the bend on the hill where I stood, and headed for home. It was in this quarter mile where those who had it, made their move, while those who didn't simply faded off.

As I anxiously waited at the bend, a few of the girls made the turn and headed for the finish line. These were the girls that always won, and today would be no different for them.

I continued to pace. I was a nervous wreck. I kept watching my time clock, then the corner. She still had plenty of time. She looked good throughout the race, but I didn't know if she had run out of gas while out of view, or if she was making her move.

Then it happened.

Around the bend came the familiar green and white that I had been following for the past four years. It was her! I frantically looked at my clock and absolutely fell apart. She could pretty much walk the rest of the way and still beat the school record!

I started jumping and running along side of her, screaming and yelling with excitement, as she tried to remain focused on her race and ignoring the fool running along side of her. I'm sure that she told everyone at the finish line that she had no idea who that lunatic was up at the bend, but I'm sure they all knew. Only a father would behave like that in public. And only a father like me would do so without any apologies.

You hope in a race like this that you might be able to beat the record by one or two seconds. Today, my daughter beat the school record by a whopping twelve seconds! Of course, unofficially, I smashed the world's record for the high jump of fatherhood.

As her coach, teammates and friends all celebrated with her down at the finish line, I laid on the ground alone, up by the bend, crying buckets of tears of joy for what my daughter had accomplished. She had worked so hard for this moment, and there was no one more thrilled than her father.

So maybe I'm not a macho, cool and collected kind of real man. Fatherhood has always taken a priority in my heart. If that makes me more a lunatic than a man, so be it. My daughter had just presented her high school with an impressive new record in cross country for young ladies to strive for in years to come. In a few months, she would graduate from her school as the greatest distance runner the school has ever had.

My daughter had become a champion because she applied her God-given talents to a sport that she really enjoyed.

I had become a champion jock dad because I set aside the macho images of manhood that a boy always has to grow up with, and simply learned to enjoy watching my daughter do what she loves to do. My only concern was not in what people were thinking about me, but thinking that the temperature might be cold enough to freeze my face full of proud tears as I lay on the ground up at the bend.