



HOLMDEL TOWNSHIP SCHOOL DISTRICT

"A COMMITMENT TO EXCELLENCE"

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HOLMDEL STUDENT ATHLETE AND TEACHERS ARE CROSS COUNTRY RUNNING BUDDIES

Holmdel (November 14, 2016) – Most people think of cross-country running as an individual sport. But if you're a fan of the Satz Middle School Cross Country team in Holmdel, you know that sometimes runners can use a buddy!

Ryan Conlan, a student with Down syndrome, has running in his blood. As Ryan's mom explains, "Ryan has spent years going to his older siblings Holmdel Cross Country and Track meets and has cheered on and met many of the athletes and the coaches too." While his big sister (now a junior at Princeton University) and his big brother (now a freshman at TCNJ) helped to blaze a trail for Ryan both in running and inclusion in general, Ryan's parents always appreciated how supportive and encouraging all their fellow athletes and coaches have been towards Ryan becoming a runner too. "In the end, it was Ryan's decision and motivation to push himself in this regard," added Mrs. Conlon (pictured below with Mr. Conlon, Ryan, teacher Daren Saler and classmate Anastasia Vander Woude).

But for Ryan to participate on the team, he needs an aide to be with him while he runs. Teachers Daren Saler and Stephanie Fox stepped up - or rather, ran up! Both teachers enjoy getting to run with Ryan. Mr. Saler says he's not the only one who's enjoying working with Ryan. "His teammates are also incredibly supportive and enthusiastic," Mr. Saler reports. While this sport is about personal, individual bests, there is often team bonding that occurs as teammates endure pain as they push themselves to run through grass and dirt trails to improve their endurance and speed. The physical strain and suffering is a common thread that brings all the athletes together, and the improvements in fitness and friendships built far outweigh the pain of the running.



The Satz Cross Country team has an extra special link in its bond through a diversity of athletes alongside an Aide and Coach who support and cheer each other on with respect for each individual athlete's personal best.

It probably comes as no surprise to learn that Mr. Saler was the Student Teacher of the Year for New Jersey in 2015. His willingness to go above and beyond is exceptional, and greatly appreciated!

According to Ryan's mother, "We were so delighted that Mr. Saler could be his running partner. Ryan looks forward to each practice and meet with Mr. Saler, the Satz Cross Country team and Coach Mr. Bell.



He enjoys the running, cheering on his teammates and giving them high fives and, of course, enjoys being cheered on too. It's a reciprocal, supportive, and respectful relationship, a win-win for all."

The Holmdel Township Schools was recently selected to receive a three-year, \$15,000 Play Unified grant from Special Olympics New Jersey to support the district's efforts in developing and providing inclusive sports programs.