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More than a game Views from high school sports from photographer Toni L. Sandys

## When the cheered become cheerleaders



(Toni L. Sandys - The Washington Post)  
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The weather last Wednesday was less than ideal for Einstein cross-country runner Griffin Lerner, 16, center. All day it had been windy, rainy and cold. Any hopes for a clearing in the afternoon for the running of the first ever Down County Consortium Championship were as gloomy as the weather.

"It was not a day for a personal best," said Lerner, a junior. "I couldn't feel my arms the entire race. More than anything, I was just trying to beat as many runners from other teams as I could."

Long after his race, Lerner and his teammates -- all still wet, cold and tired -- find themselves out on the course again. They are the only high school team around. Everyone else seems to have left or found some warm shelter until the awards ceremony. But the races are not over. The DCC Championship also featured middle school and elementary school races.

"I personally know it can be a total game changer when you hear someone cheering for you," Lerner said. "Apply that to someone who is 8 years old, and it's even more important."

Lerner didn't start running until he got to high school. He joked he took the typical 8-year-old route with "easy, once-a-week practices where we got to eat lollipops."

The elementary school runners braved the weather for the pure enjoyment of running. "It isn't even for a team or anything," Lerner said. "I give them so much credit for getting out there."

Which is why the Einstein runners stick around. "Parents stay out in the rain to cheer us on, we owe it to other people to return the favor. Most of the kids would smile as soon as we started cheering. I feel like it really meant a lot to them."