

To The Mileage Men of 2011 –

I recently came across a quote from John McDonnell, the legendary coach from the University of Arkansas. He was asked about the finest moment of his career and he said this:

I thought I was one of those guys that was snake bit - that couldn't win the big one. I have an old saying, 'Once we kicked the door down in '84, it seemed like it was open to us all the time.' We learned how to win. It's very hard to learn how to win, and after we got that habit, we won meets we shouldn't have. The highlight of my career was winning that first national championship. That's all I ever wished for - to win one. I never thought it would mushroom the way it did - not in my wildest dreams.

After winning that first one, McDonnell's Razorbacks went on to win a total of 42 national championships in NCAA Division I cross country, indoor track, and outdoor track. From 1984 until his retirement, Arkansas won more national titles than all other teams combined. It's rather interesting that a man who spent his entire career winning titles would have ever thought he did not have the ability to even win one. Until you win a big title, it must seem impossible to do so.

Think of all the other MSL schools. We have won every MSL title since 2003 consecutively. We have won nine consecutive MSL West titles – 55 dual meets in a row. We are the Arkansas of the Mid-Suburban League. We know how to win MSL titles. Winning them is a habit at Palatine. Every man on our team knows that we can win. Once we kicked down that door (and it had been shut since 1971), we knew how to win.

Well, this season we have a much bigger door to kick down, and we're going to have to throw aside the greatest cross country program in national history to do it. Five times we have placed second to York at the IHSA state meet. We have never beaten them in the state meet. That is going to change this season. **We are going to win the IHSA State Championship.**

To tell the truth, I have wanted to win one ever since I was in high school. Twice my class had the opportunity to win a state championship for my father. Twice we came up short and finished fifth. I remember sitting in the gym at Peoria High School and watching York accept the 1993 state title trophy. My teammates and I sat there with tears in our eyes knowing that we had fallen short. We all wanted to win one so badly for my dad. I always hated watching York get those trophies each year. They made it seem so impossible for the rest of us.

Last season during the state meet, I experienced the greatest ten minutes of my coaching career. The first ten minutes proved to me – for the first time ever – that a team I was part of could actually win. We have harbored aspirations for years of winning a state title, but to see a group of Palatine men doing it, seizing it, running so close to their dream was the most inspiring experience I have had in my entire life. We kicked and we kicked and we kicked at that door. We threw all of our force and passion into it, but we still couldn't kick it down. But that door was hanging on by a thread after we got done with it.

Five of the best runners on last season's varsity are back this year, and they have the talent to lead us to a state championship. But winning takes much more than talent – it takes will and discipline and poise and hard work. Talented or not, every guy on the team can possess those qualities, and we will need the concerted effort of every single man – fastest to slowest – to accomplish our goals in 2011. Five men cannot pull the entire team. It takes everyone.

I am asking now for the full commitment of every man in this room.

To beat York we are going to have to outwork them. No Palatine team has ever done that. We must possess the audacity to try, to meet mileage with more mileage, strength with more strength, will with more will. If we succeed in climbing the mountain to our first title, we will not just win. We will institutionalize our ability to win. It will become a habit.

I told you last January that we would dedicate everything we did this year to the memory of Coach Joe Johnson. One of the reasons we ran with such fury in last year's state meet is that we called on the tradition of Palatine cross country. Remember that every man who has ever worn the uniform will be behind you this summer and next fall.

Next fall we are going to bundle up all of the hopes and dreams that young Palatine men have ever felt into one final tidal wave of power, guts, and desire. We will take the will of Joe Johnson, the toughness of Glenn Morris, the enthusiasm of Fred Miller, the courage of Mark Magnussen, the belief of Bob Watson and Steve Finley. And when we get to that final moment of truth in the state meet – somewhere around 800 meters to go – we are going to kick down that door not just with the force of seven men, but with the force of thousands.

Every man who has ever run for Palatine is behind us. Every man who has ever run for Palatine will have his boot on the door. Last year, I experienced the best ten minutes of my coaching career. We were five minutes away from winning it all. Everything we do this summer and fall is going to get us **five more minutes**. Everything we work for will be worth it because we are going to win. I'm asking for 1000s of hours of investment for the opportunity to live the greatest fifteen minutes of our lives. Let's kick down that door.

IHSA State Cross Country Champions 2011

Coach Quick

Coach Sheehan

Coach Hajik