



It was 5:30am and the alarms on people's phones in our Hokie Cabin were blowing up. I reached for my Ipod and played Tik Tok by Kesha – a pop song which can't help but come on the radio every 2 seconds. If you have never heard this song before then it is probably a good thing. As the song continued to play I looked at my friends Kati, Jess, Megan and Chrissy as they prepared to get ready for the race. It was the 5 of us girls and Lisa who joined us later that were representing the Virginia Tech girl's team or as one man would call us, "the estrogen train."

After we suited up and digested some fuel, we proceeded to the starting line in the pitch dark, light snow atmosphere. The whole time I was standing there singing the National Anthem I remember thinking, "Oh dang, am I really about to run a freakin' 50K?" After the National Anthem, we Hokies gathered around and preceded into our "Hokie, Hokie, Hokie Hi" cheer. It was then that I got a rush of adrenaline and remember thinking, "Yes, I am running a 50K." The next thing I knew, Horton yelled GO and the race had started.

What exactly was going through my head as we all began running up the little bit and only piece of road leading us to the 32 miles of snowy trails? Well, honestly I thought about a lot of things. I thought about how long it was going to take to finish. I thought about meeting the people around me. I thought about the reason it was snowing that morning. I thought about the terrain that we were about to hit. I thought about the bagel that I had just eaten and whether it wanted to come up or not. But most importantly I thought about how awesome of an adventure I was about to spend with my 5 friends, battling the terrain while running through the snow. We were in it together and that was what was going to get me through those 50 kilometers.

So the 6 of us stuck together through the first aid station. We were a pack constantly talking and checking up on one another. When one person drank water, most likely the other 5 did as well. It was somewhere around the first aid station that a man yelled at us, "you all look like an estrogen train! Keep it up!" For some reason I just fell in love with that name. It wasn't until the second aid station that our "estrogen train" began to split up. After grabbing a peanut butter and jelly slice and taking an orange shot block I looked up and saw Kati and Chrissy heading for the trail. I looked back at Jess, Megan and Lisa and knew I wouldn't see them again until the finish. I continued to go forward but never hesitated to look back hoping they would be close behind. I wanted them there either in front or behind me. One thing I've always been since my cross country and track years in high school is a team runner. When I'm racing I do it for the team rather than for myself. So when they broke off a part of me wanted to go back to them and help pace them through. But I went ahead with Chrissy and Kati.

The next 10-15 miles, Kati, Chrissy and I stuck together. At each aid station Kati would rush in, get what she needed and start back up on the trail. Chrissy would get in, start eating food and taking her time and would find herself watching me and Kati running away in the distance. As I'd walk away with my peanut butter and jelly slice, I looked up in front of me at Kati and back behind me at Chrissy. I remember thinking at one point how much I loved running with these two. The more I thought about them and how hard we were working the more adrenaline that built up inside of me.

The 8.5 miles left to go in the race caused something inside of me to go off. Maybe it was my adrenaline, maybe I was just excited, or maybe I just wanted to pull Chrissy and Kati along with me to the finish. Kati was our "train" leader followed by Chrissy and then me bringing up the rear. As I watched Chrissy's feet in front of me she turned and asked, "Sam, how are you feeling?" I really wanted to say that I was hurting but I wasn't and I couldn't lie about it. I told her, "Honestly, I'm feeling good." After we'd passed the second to last aid station I took the lead. I said, "Come on guys, let's try to pick it up, watch my back." As I went ahead I looked back and Kati and Chrissy were a bit behind me. I slowed down and drifted back and it was then that Kati and Chrissy told me to go ahead. When I had heard that it caught me off guard. I planned in my head weeks before this race

that I would run with them and cross the finish line with them. I couldn't go ahead and I didn't want to. I wanted to finish with them. I wanted to finish with my team. But Kati and Chrissy kept insisting that I go. "Sam you need to go, Sam you NEED to go ahead." After seriously thinking about it, contemplating it over and over in my mind, I drifted back and said, "Ok." And I went and never looked back.

Those last 8.5 miles may have felt like the most adrenaline rushed run in my life. I was booking it in. I just couldn't stop. Even if someone had popped out of the woods and hit me in the head with a board, it wouldn't have fazed me. I can't tell you how many people I passed and how many people commented on my speed when I passed them. I never walked on those last 8.5 miles. The thing that kept me going were my 5 friends that I'd started with. When I crossed the finish line, I ran into David and he said, "Wow, you're the 4th female finisher, you're really fast!" And out of breath, I said, "Hi, my name is Sam DeAlto."

I turned around and looked back, watching and waiting for Kati, Chrissy, Megan, Jess and Lisa to finish. I walked up the hill hoping I would run into them and see them coming down. I wanted to run with them once I saw them but my legs were dead. So I waited and when I saw them I cheered so loud.

Looking back on it now, the whole race felt so surreal. It almost felt like a dream due to the fact that I never felt pain throughout that whole race and the fact that I never really realized what I was doing. I just ran, putting one foot in front of the other. I had a great time and I know for a fact that it was because of the people I spent it with. After the race people told me, "You should do Promise Land, Terrapin or Holiday Lake again next year!" I laughed and thought, "Wow, I just finished one. I think I might need a break." However, if the "estrogen train" is in, then count me in as well!