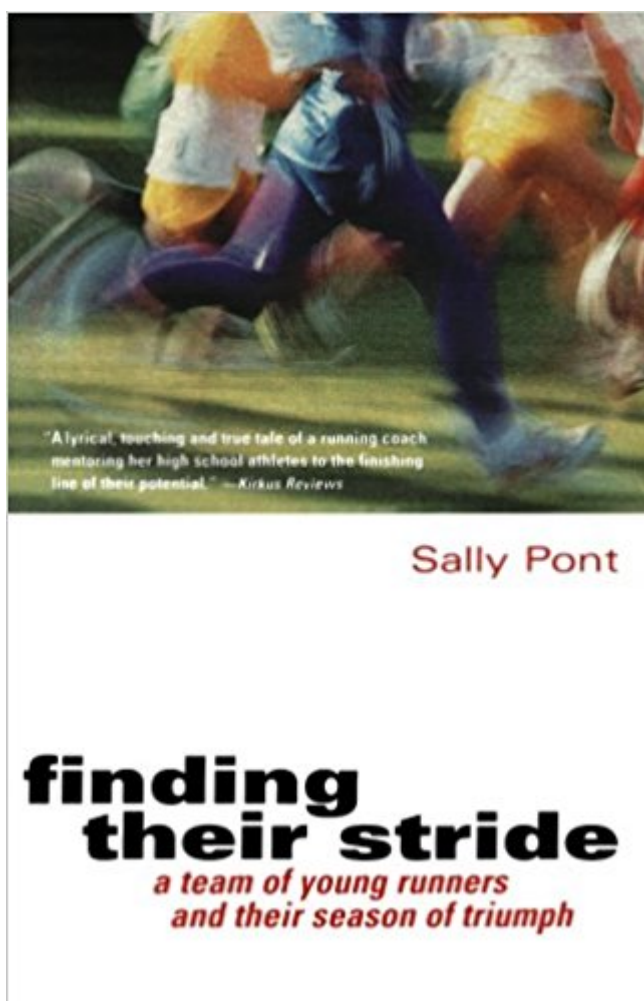


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Finding Their Stride: A Team Of Young Runners And Their Season Of Triumph



Synopsis

In *Finding Their Stride*, Sally Pont, a runner, teacher, and second-generation coach, tells of her first year coaching a co-ed cross country team to victory, both on and off the course. A surprising story of triumph, as well as an endearing tale of driven athletes, Pont shares the highlights and heartbreak of her young runners at Moravian Academy, a small, independent school near Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Every page is infused with Pont's affection and respect for her runners, and as the season unfolds, we see the team beginning to find a new stride. While the boys struggle, the girls soar to new heights, going from last place to first. "Uplifting and engaging, *Finding Their Stride* is "about attaining and teaching excellence, whose metaphor happens to be a high school running team" (Kirkus Reviews).

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Customer Reviews

There are certain staples in the canon of sports literature, and they're staples because they continue to work. One of the biggies is the tale of the disparate group molded into a winning team by a dedicated coach. In *Finding Their Stride*, the theme again hits its own. Pont teaches English at a small, co-ed private school in Pennsylvania, where she also coaches the co-ed cross-country team. It's a quirky squad--Moravian Academy's strength is its brains, not its brawn--and the eclectic group that Pont takes on would just as soon burn the midnight oil, paint a picture, or perform on stage as cover a distance of ground. Naturally, they're the league doormats, wandering egos in search of cohesion. Over the course of one magnificent season, Pont finds ways to wake within them a dormant love of sport and competition, and they bloom, racing as a unit toward a Hollywood ending.

After the season is over, after the accolades and prizes have been dispensed, after a long run of her own, Pont manages to supply an almost mystical meaning to what she--and they--have done: "I stop in front of my door, bend over, hands on knees, and breathe deep. My run over, I wonder, what does the Hindu desire after she has plunged into the Ganges? Hope to do it again." In the end, it's that simple. The humor, beauty, and depth that Pont puts into her stirring chronicle make the journey as rousing as its conclusion and its inevitability more renewing than trite. --Jeff Silverman
--This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

As the cross-country coach, an English teacher and dean of students at Moravian Academy, a small independent high school in eastern Pennsylvania, Pont should be eminently qualified to tell the true-grit story of her team of young, determined distance runners pushing themselves toward a winning season. But Pont has trouble finding her own stride in this overwritten personal narrative. Her attempts to describe the physical and emotional challenges she and her students face too often falter on awkward metaphors: "The cartilage in her knees under the taut skin appears to be smiling with bright molars." Pont expresses deep affection and admiration for her students, and readers will believe they are worthy of it. But her efforts to paint these young athletes as interesting individuals never quite succeed, as their stories and personalities blend together. Keeping them straight is much like watching the very races Pont depicts: readers get occasional glimpses of runners as they emerge from the pack or drop behind, but they're too far away, and the course is too spread out, to appreciate any one performance. Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I had high hopes for this book, but the author got caught up in flowery adjectives about irrelevant tangents.

Five sentences into this book, I thought, "Uh-oh - she must have gotten an MFA." Sure enough. Graduates of writing programs too often over-write; Pont conceals her subjects behind a storm of poetic imagery. In trying to make everything and everyone seem Remarkable and Important, she prevents her ideas or subjects from standing out on their own. Her affection for kids, and her love for running, are evident. Her pure passion and frustration and delight merit three stars. But the over-preciousness of her prose kept this book from earning more. A couple of examples: "Pain is clever, though. From the first stride, it spelunks through the body, mining deep. It begins in the cavern of the head with a hammered ringing, shimmies down the larynx, scuffs the stomach, swings

from hamstrings, digs its spiked heels into ankles, then catapults back up to the melting knees, the roasting heart, and the head again, where the ringing has become the howl of the dog." "And poets like Dave are the keepers of secrets: they swiftly perambulate the meaning of things, counting the pulse by avoiding the heart." Pont and I have much in common. In addition to being a runner, I am currently an English teacher and have just finished coaching a season of sports at my private school. I really wanted to empathize with her struggles and successes and insights. If I were to write about my own team, though, I'd make the story (and the kids) less mystical, less in the service of forced poetry, more down-to-earth real.

What a wonderful book! Sally Pont truly captures the pain and glory of running in this elegant portrait of the Moravian Academy co-ed cross-country team. If you've confronted and embraced the daunting task of running at any time in your life--especially on a competitive level--you will love Sally Pont. As an extremely involved coach and teacher, Pont takes us on a journey through the fall cross-country season, showing us the changes in the leaves and the obstacles her athletes encounter as they continually ask themselves: Why run? Surprisingly, this book is not just about or for the runners. Reaching into her bag of literary treats, the English teacher in Pont emerges as she looks lovingly at her athletes and compares them to Shakespearean characters or analyses the team in terms of Greek mythology. Her writing is lyrical and beautiful; even for those who have never run a mile, this book is inspirational in the pure feeling that Pont puts into her prose. In glorious detail, she describes the ins and outs of training for a 5 kilometer race (3.1 miles), the struggle for improving a personal time, and the team effort that is its own ultimate reward at the end of the day. Through Pont, the reader shares in this experience as we find ourselves cheering through each winning race and empathizing with the disappointment of defeat. An inspiring read for both runner and non-runner alike--I highly recommend Sally Pont's book for all readers!

As others have said it's a good story but she ruins it by trying too hard to sound like a literary giant. Every description is so awash in flowery details and she often infers things that she couldn't have known. Very disappointing.

The story lines that make up this book are interesting, and the development of the team and individual student-athletes during the season makes the book a worthwhile read. Still, I found the author's relentless overuse of adverbs and adjectives almost unbearable at times. There is almost no event too trivial to be overdescribed. I would encourage the author to "think Hemingway" in the

future, because sometimes less is more. I do not mean this criticism to be overly harsh, and perhaps for younger readers -- and by that I mean students, not middle-aged former runners like me -- the stylistic elements that annoyed me wouldn't be a concern. I have a son who's an aspiring runner, and he enjoyed the book, so maybe it's best suited for readers close to the age of the students the author teaches and coaches.

This author's take on the sport of cross country is exactly right as a cross country runner myself. The story of this team to be not unlike my own. It reminded of some moments every runner has. The struggle to finish when your legs don't think they can take another step, fighting through injuries, and using your mind to try to take steps you never thought possible. Even if your not a runner this book will make you want to be one and hopefully give you a new-found perspective on our sport. I read this in June when I wasn't to motivated to train for the season. When I finished this book I jumped up and ran a couple of miles in pouring rain. In short this an inspiring, motivating, and excellant story that everybody should read

First of all I enjoyed reading Ms. Pont's book. I too am also a runner and Cross Country Coach. Her description of a season's worth of experiences is not all that unusual when it comes to the typical High School team. The one real problem I had with the book was the omission of some type of forward or afterword. The rear cover talks about this as being her first season of coaching but I did not gather that from the narrative. Did she change the names of her athletes? A little more backround info would have been nice. She hints at that but does not say for sure. I will definitely recommend this to my athletes as a work that they could perhaps find something of themselves in.

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