

## **I sure can't run a half marathon if everyone else is going to walk it.**

Last year when I was brainstorming the idea of hooping a half marathon, to be honest, the vision was of me accomplishing it all on my own. However, one student was so excited to join me that pulling a team together seemed to be the logical next step. There was a part of me, who still wished for more independence in the process; however, I had already agreed to a team and so we quickly recruited 8 others to join us and decided that we would represent Hooping for Hope, a program that provides free hoop fitness classes to women with breast cancer. Most of us trained on our own in various ways and three months later we all met up on race day. I never found out, until months later, that while there were only 10 of us total, a few had never even met until the actual day of the Music City half-marathon.

I must say that being on a team was very new to me. In fact, I have only been on a team once in my life before doing the half-marathon in 2008. And the anxiety that I drew from the fear of letting my teammates down shortened my volleyball career quite quickly at the ripe age of 11. To top that off, I was always left behind in any gym sports throughout elementary and middle school. I remember that paralyzing feeling in class when the leaders were picking mates knowing full well that I was not considered an athletic asset. Needless to say, concluding that I knew absolutely nothing about being on a team, much less *leading* a team is a vast understatement.

With my being so clueless and inexperienced about the importance of team participation, one might have assumed that my attachment to the hooping team in general might have been a bit low. I will even go a step further and agree with that assumption myself. However, on the day of our half-marathon I could not help but feel the overwhelming emotions that were stirred in me when one of our teammates took off from the group and refused to rejoin us for the remainder of the half-marathon. My sadness solidified even further as she never returned to participate in our group photo. Here I was, on my first team since I was 11 and not only was I left behind, but my fellow teammates were affected as well and it was obvious that the commitment level in our team was fractured..

In the end, I felt like I had let my teammates down by not leading the group very well. I had disappointed myself because our mission was quite simple: hoop a half-marathon *together*, as a team, on behalf of breast cancer survivors and I couldn't even help them to do that successfully. In addition to that, the very friend who had encouraged me in the beginning, ended up feeling too overwhelmed by the group trying to keep up with the hooper that took off that she decided not to return to join us again the next year even though her own mother was a breast cancer survivor.

For the months that followed the 2008 half-marathon I refused to think about the event because of the disappointment I held in myself. I was too sad and too angered by the experience so as 2009 rolled around I began to brainstorm the possibility of hooping the half-marathon alone and foregoing the team effort. But as hurt as I had been I couldn't help the nagging feeling that my doing it alone would mean that I was in turn, leaving someone else behind. Ultimately that sort of action would not be true to myself or my

passion which defines Hooping for Hope. So instead I began recruiting and we grew our team to over 50 hoopers.

A dear friend who is a talented coach and team participant once said to me... you may have started something for reasons that are personal, but a team as a whole, can accomplish much more and be so much stronger, so the question is to not only ask what you are bringing in support of yourself, but more importantly, what are you bringing to in support of the others on your team to keep them strong.

Daily, I remind myself that as a woman is in the process of breast cancer, she must be going through surgery or sitting in a chemotherapy chair facing things that she never imagined. She might even be watching all of her loved ones around her growing and moving as she is there, alone, feeling a bit left behind.

With that said, the mission of my Hooping the Half adventure is not about taking a bunch of women as fast as they can across a finish line. It is not about being in the front of the line or the back of the line and it certainly is not about how fast or slow we are going.

It is about being with that woman on our team, and in turn being with the survivor while she is watching us. Yes, the mission of *our* adventure is about taking 50 women *together* across the finish line. It is about making a statement to the world around us. And it is about making a statement to the breast cancer survivors to show that we are taking steps with them and for them in the moment of their lives sharing spirit and hope showing them that we are committed to them and that they are not ever left behind.