



#IdahoStrong Volume 3: They Make Me Cry, They Keep Me Sane, and Make Me Whole- How a Cross-Country Coach Finds Inspiration in Her Athletes

In a small town with under 1,000 people, Troy High School has always struggled with fielding enough runners to field an entire cross-country team. Enter: Tera Stoner and Bus 98. In 2018, the Troy Trojans Girls' Cross-Country Team took home the first district championship in school history. A year before that, their boy counterparts took home their first ever first place district trophy by edging out the defending district champions, the Logos Knights. The margin was two points. While these moments were monumental in each of the lives of the athlete's involved and instrumental in creating lifelong memories for these students, perhaps no one felt these moments quite like the coach who helped to make them happen.

Coach Stoner has been the cross-country coach at Troy High School for five years after a 15-year stint coaching the first love of her life: volleyball. When the school ran into problems with a budget for funding athletics, Tera's husband James, the athletic director, asked her to step in and help coach the cross-country team until they could find a permanent solution. It took Tera exactly three days to fall in love with running competitively and the athletes that gave her a venue to do so.

To help create a long lasting and successful program, Stoner has even gone so far as to get her commercial driver's license so that she can drive the school district's bus to take her kids to training runs. "It rattles, it goes slow, but we love it and claim it to be our victory bus," Stoner mentions fondly of Bus 98. This image paints a quintessential picture of adolescence and team camaraderie that only the experience of high school sports can create. The bus serves as a metaphor in and of itself as well. Overcoming the physical obstacles that running long distances can bring an individual likens itself to an old, worn down bus out of commission that runs up to code due to a little love and elbow grease brought on by a coach who wants nothing more than to see her kids succeed. With a little love and elbow grease, Stoner knows that her kids can also run "up to code".

In order to fully grasp the love and compassion that Coach Stoner feels for her athletes, one must look at her response to outbreak of COVID-19 and how it altered the spring of 2020 for student athletes across the nation. She did not skirt the issue on the heartache and loss she felt for her students and athletes and shared the helplessness she felt in navigating through these drastic changes. When the news broke that the IHSAA would not be able to continue its spring sports season, Stoner immediately reached out to her athletes and implemented a "100-mile challenge", where the team can keep in touch via a phone app and challenge each other even when they can't be together. When Stoner speaks of her team and her athletes, her vernacular is not centered around wins and losses, accomplishing physical feats, and working hard. As a coach who wants to see her students succeed, it is obvious she cares about these things, of course, but her perspective runs much deeper than that. Her coaching style seems to be focused on love, acceptance, and togetherness. Her coaching style creates a family.

When the IHSAA called to public action to nominate individuals who demonstrate what it means to be #IdahoStrong, Halee Bohman did not waste any time bringing Coach Stoner to attention. Bohman mentioned that Stoner always goes above and beyond to promote positivity and even runs half-marathons to help show her kids what they can all be capable of. Bohman even had this to say about running for Coach Stoner: “Honestly, the best part of being on that team is Coach Stoner. I’ve shared so many laughs, smiles, tears, hard times, and good ones. I am the runner I am today because of her.” It seems as this feeling of adoration is mutual for Coach Stoner. She calls running with the team her therapy, watching the stress and loudness of her day as music teacher melt away when she can escape with her athletes and find the mental and emotional distraction that she needs to continue to be a source of strength and inspiration.

“The simplicity of human movement” is how Coach Stoner describes the sport, and there is undoubtedly beauty to be found in this sentiment. As we all work to navigate the “new normal” that has been brought on by the global events in the spring of 2020, it may be suggested that we all go back to the basics: “Keep the big picture in mind and celebrate the moments and opportunities that have come before and will come after.” Coach Stoner shares openly that she feels excited and inspired for what the fall will bring, but also anxious and nervous about what could come with it. One thing that is certain, however, is that she will always have the basics. The big picture; the opportunities that she has given her athletes and that they have given her, the memories and triumphs she has shared with her teams, and the students she has inspired with her love, compassion, and determination to make everyone feel like family, none of that will ever be lost. Oh, and Bus 98 probably isn’t going anywhere any time soon, either.



(Above) A Sweet Selfie: Coach Stoner with her Cross-Country family at a Trojan retreat



(Right) Coach Stoner with her #IdahoStrong nominator, Halee Bohman, after winning the district title Halee’s freshman year.