

Runner Carries Competitor Half a Mile by Anoka-Hennepin School District Release

When Andover High School cross-country runner Josh Ripley heard the screams of Lakeville South runner Mark Paulauskas, Josh knew he needed to help. While other competitors in the Applejack Invite in Lakeville ran by, Josh stopped to see what was wrong.

In the first mile of a 2-mile junior varsity race held Sept. 16, Josh found Mark holding his ankle and bleeding profusely. Worried that Mark had punctured his Achilles heel, Josh carried the wounded runner for a half a mile to get him to his coach and parents. After making sure Mark was in good hands, Josh jumped back into the race.

It turns out Mark had been “spiked,” meaning he was stepped on or came in contact with pointed metal spikes some runners wear on their shoes to get better traction. Mark was taken to a hospital where he received more than 20 stitches and is in a brace/boot to immobilize the area so the stitches do not pop out.

Josh, a junior at Andover High School, said stopping to help the injured runner was “just natural instinct.”

“I didn’t think about my race, I knew I needed to stop and help him,” Josh said. “It was something I would expect my other teammates to do. I’m nothing special; I was just in the right place at the right time.”

Josh, the son of Stacey and Jason Ripley of Andover, will be honored by the Anoka-Hennepin School Board for his actions at the board’s meeting Monday, Sept. 26 at 6:30 p.m. in Coon Rapids.

Mark’s coach and parents are extremely grateful to Josh for his actions.

“I was stunned and so proud of the sportsmanship and kindness he showed to our runner who was injured,” said Jessica Just, the Lakeville South team’s coach. “The family, our Lakeville South coaching staff and our whole team were so thankful and appreciative of Josh’s act of kindness and selflessness to a rival competitor.”

Gene Paulauskas, Mark’s father, learned of Josh’s actions after Mark had been handed off to him.

“While I was running with Mark in my arms [to get medical attention], he told me that it was a runner from another team who had stopped and helped him to an area of the course where he could get some help,” Paulauskas said. “It was horrible to see Mark with such a bad injury, but we were all struck by the selfless act of compassion, kindness and sportsmanship exhibited by Josh Ripely, the Andover runner.”

When someone told Josh’s coach, Scott Clark, that Josh was carrying another runner, Clark said he thought he misheard.

“Then Josh comes jogging into view carrying a runner,” Clark said. “I noticed the blood on the runner’s ankle as Josh handed him off to one of the coaches from Lakeville. Josh was tired and you could tell his focus was off as he started back on the course, clearly he intended to finish, this happening inside the first mile. I got his attention and told him to relax and get his focus back for racing and not worry about his place. Josh continued to run and finished.”

Clark said what Josh did says a lot about him as an individual.

“Clearly Josh is a compassionate and caring person,” Clark said. “We consistently talk about being a team and caring about how each person on the team does. Cross country is filled with quality athletes at each school. It is always gratifying to see it exhibited in such a way as Josh did.”