



Thomas Quan Ting Ma

There I was, in a city surrounded by the Pacific Ocean, feeling like a fish out of water. A decade ago, I spoke no English, had never run on a track, and had no concept of what it meant to live in a foreign country, surrounded by people who spoke a different language and looked nothing like me. Joining Track & Field proved to be fortuitous as it became the vehicle by which I got to my current state: a proud Canadian, a good friend, and a strong student-athlete.

I still remember the nervous feeling of incredulity in my stomach on the first day of practice. I had gone from being around people who shared my culture and language to a setting where I was the only Asian runner on my team. After a rough adjustment period, my teammates and I discovered that running helped us bond and truly connect with one another. The strenuous and aching physical activity, coupled with the shared goals of the team, created a sense of camaraderie, and before I knew it, I felt integrated into the team. Now, years later, I often laugh at how insecure and afraid I once felt. Running eased my constant fear and made me feel close to so many people, I would have otherwise never met had I not joined my track & field team.

Unequivocally, running on the track team changed my life and gave it meaning. From the first day I put my running shoes on, I began running towards my new life. I became a Canadian national champion runner representing my new country. I now have friends from all cultural groups. Track people became my people. It was in this environment that I truly saw the benefits of working with others and growing as a result of teamwork and collaboration.

As I developed my identity as a student-athlete, I also had opportunities to develop leadership skills and be responsible in and out of the classroom. In hindsight, I see clearly what constant dedication can mean to the rest of my life. Running gave me the strength and inspiration to give my best to the sport. The benefits of running also transcended the track, leading to discipline in other aspects of my life, from academics to how I am at home and how I relate to my peers. An extra-added benefit was learning how to best balance school, sport, and my social life. I cannot help but think that this may just be one of the greatest lessons I learned. I cannot wait to take my athletic and academic abilities to the next level as I pursue my education at Rice where I will be instilled values of hard work, integrity, genuine collaboration, and a pursuit of excellence both on and off the field.

I am no longer a fish out of water. I am excited to head out of familiar Vancouver and spend the next four years on the beautiful Rice campus.