

They were strangers at the starting line.

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Required Annotations		Student-Created Annotations		Summary / Questions / Reflection	
Comprehension					Comments

They were strangers at the starting line, a 24-year-old Dartmouth graduate who barely qualified for these Olympics and an English-born runner who transplanted to New Zealand seven years ago. Less than 20 minutes later, they found themselves eternally linked — by circumstance, by action, by **benevolence**. “That girl is the Olympic spirit right there,” New Zealand runner Nikki Hamblin said later.

Hamblin and Abbey D’Agostino, a runner from Topsfield, Mass., collided on the track during the women’s 5,000-meter race. The two seemingly sacrificed any chance at an Olympic medal to help each other reach the finish line, picking each other up, urging each other to continue, pushing each other to the finish.

“I’m never going to forget that moment,” Hamblin said. “When someone asks me what happened in Rio in 20 years’ time, that’s my story.”

The 5,000-meter race is a grueling slog, requiring runners to make 12½ laps around the track. About two-thirds of the way through Tuesday morning’s round one heat, Hamblin and D’Agostino found themselves crammed together with more than a dozen other runners, the entire group moving as one around the track.

The New Zealand runner didn’t see what happened and wasn’t sure who was at fault, but she crashed onto the blue track and lay there still on her side for a couple of seconds. She thought right away, “What’s hit me? Why am I on the ground?” “And then suddenly there’s this hand on my shoulder,” she explained later, “like, ‘Get up, get up! We have to finish this!’ ”

The hand and the voice belonged to D’Agostino. She’d been right on Hamblin’s heels and tumbled over the Kiwi runner, badly twisting her right knee in the process. But D’Agostino popped right up, urging Hamblin to do the same.

“I was like, ‘Yep, you’re right. It’s the Olympic Games. We have to finish this,’ ” Hamblin said.

D’Agostino, no doubt, was just grateful to be in the field. With seven NCAA titles, she’s the most decorated long distance and cross-country runner the **Ivy League** has ever seen. But at the U.S. Olympic trials, she finished fifth in the 5,000 meters. Only the top three earned a

ticket to the Rio de Janeiro, but when two other runners — Molly Huddle and Emily Infeld — decided to skip the 5,000 to focus on other Olympic events, a spot opened for D’Agostino.

Finally on the track at Olympic Stadium, D’Agostino wasn’t about to stay down. Both runners were on their feet and continuing in the race, but the American was clearly hurting. She didn’t make it far before collapsing again. This time Hamblin was there to lend a hand.

While the leaders raced ahead, both D’Agostino and Hamblin sacrificed valuable seconds to help a competitor. It was instinct, a natural act and something that doesn’t usually earn medals or recognition.

“Everyone wants to win and everyone wants a medal. But as disappointing as this experience is for myself and for Abbey, there’s so much more to this than a medal,” Hamblin said immediately after the race when her hopes of advancing in the Olympics appeared to be **dashed**.

Both runners staggered their way through the remaining laps, each step drawing them closer to the finish. With no hopes of posting a time fast enough to qualify, D’Agostino was compelled, putting one foot in front of the other until she’d completed the remaining 4 1/2 laps.

Hamblin was well ahead of her and crossed the line in 16:43.61. She was exhausted, in pain and about to experience a touch of shock. She turned around and was surprised to see that D’Agostino had not given up, that the young American was still trudging down the track. “Wow,” she thought. “I’m so impressed and inspired that she did that,” Hamblin said.

D’Agostino finally crossed the line with a time of 17:10.02, last place, more than two minutes slower than her personal best and more than two minutes after the race’s winner, Almaz Ayana of Ethiopia.

Both countries filed a protest on behalf of the runners, contending that the unintentional **mishap** impacted their result. Race officials agreed. D’Agostino and Hamblin found out after the race that despite being the last two competitors across the finish line, they had advanced and would be allowed to compete in the 5,000-meter final Friday.

“Regardless of the race and the result on the board, it’s a moment that you’ll never, ever forget for the rest of your life,” Hamblin said. “There’s going to be that girl shaking my shoulder, saying, ‘Come on, get up.’”