

This is the longer description of the RW article I've taken extreme exception to. It angers me greatly, and I had to voice my concerns.

In a nutshell, the story describes Timmons as a demanding coach who asked too much of his runners, causing injury and illness, driving them to quit the team in droves. The author uses quotes from former athletes to paint a picture of practices like "boot camp," of athletes buckling under impossible pressure and of "mutiny" on the team because of Timmons' training philosophies. He cites statistics from an Ottawa University thesis claiming that only 36% of freshman made it to their senior year on the squad.

This number may look bad, and the author uses it to sensationalize his story. However, turnover in collegiate athletics isn't a phenomena unique to KU or Timmons. For example, let's take a peek at my experience. In 2001, I was one of five freshmen girls on my DII school's cross country team. In 2004, I was the only returning senior. My teammates left for a variety of reasons: two decided the time commitment was too much, one became pregnant, and one quit only after battling injury for two and a half seasons. Of these, the last is the only one that could possibly fall on the training style of our coach. In the article, Coach Timmons is blamed for ALL turnover. **It's blatantly unfair, and the author completely misses the point.**

The author also focuses on dissatisfied student-athletes. He completely misses the point here as well. With the exception of one contributor, the others appear to be answering questions about the training of their day...not venting about dissatisfaction with Coach Timmons. Acknowledging that the workouts were tough is not necessarily condemnation. I'm sure some of the contributors get a sense of pride from their stories. When I tell you that in college I once ran 16x400 at an 82 second average with 45 seconds rest, I'm not complaining. I'm reliving an incredible moment. It amazes me that I was able to do this in the course of an afternoon. From the comments on the *RW* website, those interviewed believed the article was going to be a tribute to Timmons' tremendous contributions to the sport and they're displeased by the way their quotes were used. No one ever said Coach Timmons **wasn't** demanding...but that's not necessarily a bad thing! A demanding coach isn't automatically a heartless or uncaring one. Granted, everyone has different experiences, and 30 years of coaching is bound to have its share of successes and shortcomings. What is displayed here, however, is a persistently negative slant that borders on libel.

Over and over, the author presents even positive things in a negative light.

- Example #1: Jim Ryun provides a quote in defense of Coach Timmons, and the author precedes it by explaining that Jim is a politician...implying that his words can't be trusted.
- Example #2: The author claims that Coach Timmons' missionary work, volunteerism, and work on Rim Rock are motivated by regret. To me, these acts speak of a caring heart interested in giving back—to God, to community, to running—once retirement provided him the time to give.
- Example #3: In a story about Coach Timmons helping a girl who collapsed during a race at Rim Rock, the author attempts to portray him as a hardened man who offers "no words of comfort." However, his kind act speaks louder than words, and besides there's nothing that can be said to a runner coping with the idea of a dreaded DNF. Coach Timmons knows running—the author obviously doesn't.

Finally, in a gross display of insensitivity, the author refers to Coach Timmons as "the old man," makes light of ongoing medical problems for no possible purpose, and publishes quotes from a sadly bitter former athlete that I'm not going to repeat. Some of the quotes have already been retracted by this individual by a comment on the *RW* website.

I've already written a letter to the editor that covered many of these points...which is probably why I'm able to discuss them now with relative calm. On the inside, however, I'm ticked. The article was clearly written by someone with little to no knowledge of running hoping to publish a dramatic story. It degrades and disrespects a great man and an ardent supporter of running. How it got published in *RW* is a complete mystery to me.