

A Letter of Support from Alexi Pappas

The first time I met Vin Lananna was over the phone. I was a senior at Dartmouth College and he was the head coach of the University of Oregon men's and women's track and field program. He was a bit out of breath because, I learned, he was calling me from a stationary bike – I remember thinking how amazing it was that a person could be so dedicated that he'd make recruiting calls while pedaling through a workout.

Vin knew I was on the fence. I had been accepted to a creative writing graduate program and was considering hanging up my running shoes for good. But that didn't stop him from calling me. This is because at the time, Vin believed in me as a runner more than I believed in myself.

About a month later, I met Vin in Eugene over a bowl of pasta. He asked me about Dartmouth but then very quickly progressed the conversation to what my goals were ahead – this is always the case with Vin, where are we going next? This is the first step to becoming a better athlete, and becoming a better anything, I learned. It is wonderful and comfortable to be accomplished but it is scarier, braver, and more exciting to want more. Usually, my most exciting bowls of pastas are had the night before a race, but this pasta dinner with Vin felt as full of potential as ever. I committed to Oregon and became a Duck the following fall.

I am very grateful Vin gave me the chance to contribute to a National Championship winning team, but I am even more grateful that he helped navigate one of the most pivotal crossroads of my life. After my year with the Ducks, I joined Oregon Track Club Elite in Eugene with guidance from Vin and began training professionally for my road to Rio – a path that would have been unimaginable to me just one year earlier. That kind of foresight wasn't in my vocabulary when I was finishing undergrad, but it was in Vin's.

When I did finally make it to Rio, Vin was there, too. And when he told me “good work” after my 10,000-meter race that compliment meant the world to me — he had truly seen me through my entire journey from unsure young graduate to Olympic athlete.

The best gift one person can give to another is the gift of confidence. That is what I strive to do with the thousands of young athletes that follow me on social media. But I never would have gotten here without the confidence that others gave to me. Vin was able to see a future-Alexi that I was not yet able to envision. I am honored to call Vin a coach and mentor, and I am proud to follow him as he continues leading our sport into the future.

I hope you will join me in supporting Vin for USATF president.