

Establishing Ties

KNEW HIGH SCHOOL CROSS COUNTRY WOULD PROVIDE SOME BENEFITS – a healthier lifestyle, a close group of friends, and a competitive environment. But acquiring a sense of fashion was the last thing I expected. Yet, somehow I did.

My fashion sense was not sparked by the sleeveless singlets or shorts that don't fit, often sported at cross country practice, but rather a team rule that wasn't negotiable.

"You will be wearing a tie on days when we have meets," said head coach Ty Gorman at the start of every week, "and there is no arguing that one."

It was a demand met with groans and sighs—more complaints were rooted in this instruction than any amount of mileage our coaches demanded. So for that first meet freshman year, I did the same thing every one of my freshman teammates did...dust off the shirt, tie, pants, and shoes that I had not worn since the eighth grade formal.

And of course, my father knotted my tie.

So here we all were, during freshman year which for most of us was the most awkward time in our lives, doing everything we can to fit in—and we are all dressed as if we lost a bet. At least that's what we thought.

"The unwritten rules of men's fashion" certainly did not apply to our group. Every "don't" in dressing nice became a "do" for the freshman cross country boys. The foundation for my fashion sense came from observations of what not to do:

- * Don't wear sandals with khakis, a shirt and tie.
- * Don't knot your tie as if it is a shoelace.
- * Don't take your tie off for lunch...you will never figure out how to put it back on.

But as the season progressed, not only did our race times get better, so did our collective sense of fashion. Belts began to match shoes and shirts began to match ties. Not only did we change, but the perceptions of the people around us changed. Students and teachers no longer asked, "What's with the tie?" or "Your parents let you leave dressed like that?" The assumption became that we had business to take care of. Perceptions evolved.

It was this evolution that began to drive my style when it came to the days we had meets. When I first began dressing nice once a week in the fall, my biggest struggle was finding a tie that went with the shirt, and a shirt that



PHOTO: TYLER MITCHELL

Kevin Griffin (left) completed his freshman year at Marquette University, and is an intern this summer with QB. He is pictured with Peter Yankala of Phillip's Men's Wear.

went with the pants. However, I also soon found out no matter what matched or didn't, my tie said one thing: take me seriously.

Meet day attire was something that I had resisted my whole freshman year, and it was not until near our last meet my sophomore year that I learned to embrace it.

Naturally, I learned how to knot my own tie and soon found myself no longer struggling with what to wear on meet days, but now struggling with what to wear any other day.

That's when I took the leap of faith.

I decided it was time to step into an arena that a normal high school student would not normally touch. Ties were about to become a regular part of my wardrobe; and I was ready for the heckling classmates that would come along with it.

And of course this expectation of "heckling classmates" was one more false perception produced by my imagination. It was my senior year that I began to average three ties a week during a five-day week. Some weeks more and some weeks less, but it became a statement I was happy to be associated with.

The tie is a fashion article that still remains counterculture for a younger generation. In a culture where a tie is required for many occasions it is strange to see it not only absent but resisted with younger men.

Peter Yankala of Phillip's Men's Wear in Barrington said they often feel "out of touch" with the typical high school dresser.

"Dressing nice follows a line of respect and authority," said Yankala. "But with the younger generation, there's a line of rebellion as well. They want to be separated from what their Dad looks like everyday."

Yankala also went on to say that rebellious perception is something that will not be so favorable once these young men reach the business world.

"The high school grunge look doesn't open any doors," said Yankala.

Yet regardless of what it will do for your future, the value of a tie starts the moment it is knotted. It's a statement about work ethic, a testament to fashion sense, and a magnet of respect.

It's all about establishing ties. 



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