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ERAU cross country runner saves opposing runner's life

Embry-Riddle runner Adrian Castillo was injured and didn't race at a home meet Oct. 4. But Castillo was there - at the right place and the right time - to save an opposing runner's life.

PRESCOTT, Arizona - On the morning of Oct. 4, Embry-Riddle cross-country runner Adrian Castillo volunteered to direct the inaugural ERAU Arizona Invitational on the university's Prescott campus.

He had suffered a knee injury at an Air Force boot camp and wasn't able to compete. Castillo, a real go-getter, had to do something. So Eagles coach Chris Bray asked him to funnel the men's and women's runners through a junction on the course.

A bit of a ho-hum task... until the unexpected happened.

"Some of the male team members were with me (on the course). They were just talking to me," Castillo said this past week in reflection. "And I noticed someone go down out of the corner of my eye, so I sent them over first."

A women's team runner from Mesa Community College, whom we won't name in this story for her privacy, had fallen toward the end of the race. Castillo didn't know what happened to her initially.

And he wasn't sure if the guys that he told to help the runner knew first aid.

But Castillo did.

So he handed his race-day direction flag to his girlfriend standing beside him and headed over to check the fallen athlete.



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"At first she was responsive. She was talking," Castillo recalled. "She was breathing really rough, though, and she was saying that her chest was hurting. So, I was like, 'OK, well it's probably some sort of running-induced asthma, or maybe she does have asthma.' That happens sometimes."

Doug Cook/The Daily Courier
Embry-Riddle cross country runner Adrian Castillo, shown this past Thursday preparing for an Air Force ROTC run on campus in Prescott, used CPR to resuscitate a Mesa Community College runner who had collapsed during the inaugural ERAU Invitational Oct. 4.

Castillo remained beside her for a little while.

Then she stopped breathing - completely. She was unconscious.

Castillo, an Eagle Scout, remembered his CPR training well from being a professional officer course cadet/deputy flight commander in the Air Force ROTC detachment at Embry-Riddle as well as from his days as a Boy Scout.

"That helped a lot," Castillo said. "It was just that moment of panic you get when they go unconscious and then you're like, 'OK, alright. Calm down. Gotta go.' "

Adrenaline pumping through his veins, Castillo told one of his teammates, Trent Marlow, to call 9-1-1 while he followed the CPR steps from memory - without thinking much about it.

"You realize something's wrong, and then everything kicks into gear," he said. "The training I got just went automatically."

First, Castillo checked for a pulse. He found it after a while, but it was faint.

He saw that she wasn't breathing. So he opened her airway by pushing her neck back and administering rescue breaths.

It worked. She began to breathe again. But was she out of the woods?

"She was still unconscious, but at least she was going to live," Castillo said. "I treated her for shock until the athletic trainer and the paramedics came by, and I just told them what happened, and that was that."

Paramedics carried her off the dirt course and transported her to Yavapai Regional Medical Center in Prescott, where she was cleared.

Bray found out later from MCC's cross country coach that the runner suffers from atrial fibrillation, an irregular and often rapid heart rate that typically causes poor blood flow to the body.

Mayo Clinic doctors say episodes of atrial fibrillation can come and go. And although the condition isn't usually life threatening, it's a serious one that sometimes requires emergency treatment.

Bray said the MCC coach told him within the past two weeks that his runner was faring better.

Marlow was the one who called Bray after the runner fell. Bray then notified ERAU's athletic training staff, which jumped in immediately.

Bray said he's proud of Castillo, adding that he's a "goofball," but someone "you want on your team."

"If he wasn't there taking action, like with Trent calling me and getting the ball rolling, you don't know what could've happened to her," he added. "Because, who would've stepped up?"

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Today, some three weeks after the incident, Castillo occasionally still thinks about the runner he helped.

The ERAU team sent her a letter, asking her how she was faring. Castillo said he hasn't heard anything back, but he's not concerned about receiving any gratitude.

This past Thursday, Castillo was running an exercise on the Embry-Riddle track with the Air Force ROTC. He keeps moving on in life, and he hopes the young lady he saved does too.

"I'm pretty busy nowadays," Castillo said. "I did my job, and she's fine, and that's all I care about."

And yet while Castillo shies away from praise, he does have an important message for everyone: If you don't know CPR, learn how.

"In general, it'd be a good idea if most of our athletic teams got first-aid training in general, just because you never know when one of your teammates is going to go down," he added. "And if that had been an Embry-Riddle student, somewhere on the other side of the course where I hadn't been, what would've happened?"

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