

A.J. Epenesa leads sectional pack to state in shot, discus, several Tigers, Llewellyn from Alton qualify

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
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COLLINSVILLE – Edwardsville's A.J. Epenesa had a good day at Friday's IHSA Class 3A Collinsville Sectional track and field meet at Kahok Stadium.

Epenesa, who still has a year left as a Tiger, qualified for next weekend's state track meet at Eastern Illinois' O'Brien Stadium in Charleston with a second-place finish in the shot put and a first-place finish in the discus throw; Epenesa had a 196-9 toss in the discus to outdistance **Alton's Zach Llewellyn** in the event, with Llewellyn qualifying for state with a second-place finish at 160-3 (the top two finishers in each event advanced to the state meet, with all competitors meeting the state qualifying standard also moving on to Charleston).

Epenesa had a throw of 58-3 in the shot put, finishing second behind Moline's Darius King, who won with a toss of 58-8.5; the Tigers' Desmond Chappel also moved on to the state meet with a throw of 54-7, besting the state qualifying mark of 52-8 for a fourth-place finish behind Llewellyn's 55-3.

Epenesa's day helped the Tigers score 71 points on the day, good for second place behind East St. Louis, who won the team title with 93 points. O'Fallon took third with 57, Belleville West fourth at 50 and Rock Island rounded out the top five with 35. Granite City finished 11th with 23 and Alton 16th with 17.

“My legs got kind of a little sore towards the end of the discus, but other than that, it was a pretty good day,” Epenesa said. “My last two throws went out right (side of the landing area), but it's not really much technique; I let it go a little too early, so we'll work on that in practice (leading up to the state meet) and get ready for state this next weekend.

“Obviously, I'm going to try to win (the discus); I feel like anything but a first-place finish would be disappointing for me personally. In shot put, it's pretty good this year; it's pretty loaded. There's some guys over 60 (feet) and some in the high 50s, so I'm going to go out there and just do my best, try to place and get us some points.”

“This day is about qualifying (for state),” said **EHS throws coach Matt Martin**, “and we qualified in both, and Desmond Chappel qualified in the shot at 54-7.5, so that's a positive.”

If there was one disappointment for the Tigers, Bruce Wachowski just missed out on qualifying for state in the discus with Epenesa; he wound up fourth with a toss of 150-4, just short of the state qualifying mark of 157-11. “I was hoping Bruce (would qualify); I knew Bruce was going to have to put it all together, put everything together on one throw to get to 158.

“There (was) no wind, so you have to carry all the horsepower; I knew it would be close for him. He didn't have a bad day, he just didn't qualify.”

Llewellyn also qualified in both the discus and shot. “It was an awesome day,” Llewellyn said. “I definitely didn't expect to come out here and qualify in both; it was a very pleasant surprise. In the first half of the season, I had hit 155-10 (in the discus) and since then, I've been trying to chase that (state qualifying) mark.

“I've come close, but I haven't there. (The 160-3 discus) set a PR that took me to state. It's exciting (advancing to the state meet in two events); it's a lot to take in at once and I'm looking forward to it. It's something I've been working for since my freshman year; it's really good.”

Others moving into the state meet for the Tigers were DeVonte' Tincher in the long jump (22-6.25), Justin White in the high jump (6-3), Travis Anderson in the 110 hurdles (13.90) and 300 hurdles (38.01) and the 4x100 relay (41.75) and 4x200 relay (1:28.73) teams.

Granite City's Will O'Keefe in the 800 meters (1:56.02), Andrew O'Keefe in the 1,600 meters (4:27.53) and 4x800 relay team (7:55.48) all moved on to the state meet for the Warriors; Llewellyn was the only Redbird to move on.

Here are all the state qualifiers for next weekend's state meet:

STATE MEET QUALIFYERS, AREA ATHLETES

IHSA CLASS 3A COLLINSVILLE SECTIONAL

TOP TWO IN EACH EVENT ADVANCE PLUS THOSE MEETING

STATE QUALIFYING STANDARD

HIGH JUMP: Justin White, Edwardsville, third (6-3)

LONG JUMP: DeVonte' Tincher, Edwardsville, fifth (22-6.25)

SHOT PUT: A.J. Epenesa, Edwardsville, second (58-3); Zach Llewellyn, Alton, third (55-3); Desmond Chappel, Edwardsville, fourth (54-7.5)

DISCUS THROW: A.J. Epenesa, Edwardsville, first (196-9); Zach Llewellyn, Alton, second (160-3)

4X800 RELAY: Granite City, first (7:55.48)

4x100 RELAY: Edwardsville, second (41.76)

110 HURDLES: Travis Anderson, Edwardsville, third (13.90)

800 METERS: Will O'Keefe, Granite City, fourth (1:56.02)

4X200 RELAY: Edwardsville, fifth (1:28.73)

300 HURDLES: Travis Anderson, Edwardsville, first (38.01)

1,600 METERS: Andrew O'Keefe, Granite City, second (4:27.53)