

Friday Night Lights Track Meet attracts biggest turnout ever

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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EDWARDSVILLE – Future track and field runners gathered together on Friday night at Edwardsville High's Winston Brown Track and Field Complex for part one of the sixth annual Friday Night Lights track meet, designed to introduce younger people to the sport.

And the turnout was the highest ever for the meet, which featured events designed mainly for the kids, and also included a family relay race.

It was a very successful opening night for the meet, said Edwardsville boys track coach Chad Lakatos.

“Yeah, it was,” Lakatos said. “In compared to the previous years, I think we were double the number of entries. Great to see that, and I think everyone had fun.”

The event has grown since the meet's inaugural running in 2013, and Lakatos feels that it shows a lot of interest in the sport.

“You know, it's been pretty steady, around the 30 to 40 mark the last several years,” Lakatos said. “This year, we did put it out; we had some signs made, and we put out on Facebook. So I just think putting it out there a little bit drew more numbers for us. And definitely was a good event. Like I said, I think everyone had a good time, everybody's leaving with a smile on their face, and that's what the main thing is.”

Tigers' girls coach Camilla Eberlin also felt the participants had a good time during the event.

“It's a lot of fun,” Eberlin said. “We see this is one of our best turnouts that we've had. I think Chad was talking that he started it; this is the about the sixth year, and this is one our best turnouts, and the kids, you see them smiling from ear to ear the whole time.”

Eberlin believes that events such as Friday Night Lights play an important role in introducing children to track and field, a sport that doesn't get much television exposure except during the Summer Olympics every four years.

“People don't get a lot of exposure to track,” Eberlin said. “It's not as televised on the prime time TV, and so things like this really get kids interested and intrigued early on at a good age.

“Sometimes, you'll see the NCAA on once in a while, too,” Eberlin continued, “It's fun to run under the lights, the kids think it's a really neat experience, so it's good.”

Participants were divided into two age groups – eight-and-under and nine-and over-- and one group participated in field events such as the high jump, shot put and softball throw, while the other group ran three races – the 40-meter dash, 200-meter dash and 800-meter run.

In the eight-and-under races, heat winners in the 40-meter dash included five-year-old Kamya Robinson of Alton and seven-year-old Jonathan Brown of Edwardsville. In the 200, heat winners included three-and-a-half year old Jakhi Jones of Edwardsville, Eli Voss, five, also of Edwardsville, eight-year-old Mason McLeland of Edwardsville, Brown and eight-year-old Cruz Lakatos of Edwardsville. The 800 meters was won by Lakatos, with three-year-old Teagan Walsh of Edwardsville finishing second.

In the nine-and-over division, heat winners in the 40-meters were nine-year-old Will Whittaker of Edwardsville, Tony Eberlin, 10, also of Edwardsville, Edwardsville's Clayton Lakatos, 11, and 14-year-old Caleb Guebert of Red Bud. Whitaker, Clayton Lakatos, Guebert, Grace Oertle, 12, of Edwardsville and Allison Weller, 12, of Staunton won heats in the 200-meters. And in the 800-meters, Nick Fehr, 14, of Red Bud took the race, with Scott Baxter, 13, of Edwardsville second and Clayton Lakatos in third.

And in the 4x100-meter family relay, members of the Edwardsville track team finished first, followed by the Whittaker family of Edwardsville, with the Dinero family, also of Edwardsville, finishing third.

Another important goal of the meet is to encourage kids to stay with track, and possibly run for the Tigers' teams in the future.

“We always talk to them, hoping that they'll stay interested in our programs,” Eberlin said.

But the main goal of the meet is for the kids to have fun and learn about the sport.

“Just for kids to have fun,” Eberlin said. “That's the only goal that I have, is for kids to have fun and to learn to see what track and field is like.”

The high turnout bodes very well for the future of track, not just in Edwardsville, but the entire Metro-East area.

“Of the 50 kids we have running, if we can get even 10 percent of those kids to come over and maybe try track and field in middle school, or maybe even run in high school, then that helps with out numbers,” Lakatos said. “Track and field is a numbers game, and if it does that, that's great, and that's definitely an advantage to us.”

The second part of the meets takes place next Friday night with the softball throw and shot put, but with the long jump replacing the high jump, and four different running events – the 100 meters, 400 meters, 1600 meters and a 4x25 family relay. Lakatos hopes for the same turnout as before.

“We'll run next Friday; it'll be different events," Coach Lakatos said. "Similar format, just different events, so hopefully, we'll have a good turnout then.”











[Brent Feeney also contributed to this story.](#)