



# Alton, Edwardsville bowlers do well in opening day of Southwestern Conference Tourney

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ALTON – The boys bowling teams at Alton and Edwardsville High Schools got their seasons underway by performing well in the first day of the Southwestern Conference tournament at Bowl Haven Lanes.

The Redbirds had a team total of 2,478 after the first three games of the meet, while the Tigers had scored a 2,834. Belleville East had a team score of 3,277, Belleville West bowled a 2,642, Collinsville had a score of 2,897. and O'Fallon had a pinfall of 3,040.

A senior-laden Redbird lineup had a good first day, which pleased head coach Dave Meyer.

“It was a good start,” Meyer said. “I was happy with the boys, proud of them. We have some things to work on now, now we know what we have to build on this season. But they did good, otherwise, they stayed focused. That’s what seniors are supposed to do, so now we can build on it.”

There are seven seniors in Alton’s lineup, and any one of them can step up to be the team’s leader.

“That’s the one thing it should be,” Meyer said. “Gavin Taylor, I’m hoping to have him as my captain, sort of try to be a leader. But it doesn’t matter, whichever boy wants to stand out of the seven of them. There’s plenty of them that can stand there and be a captain and work hard. Hopefully, they’ll show what they need to do to the JV team also.”

By contrast, the Tigers have a very young team, with many of the bowlers just starting out in the sport. That can make things difficult in building a team.

“One of the challenges that I have in the boys’ program is anytime I would grab a new bowler, they would be a junior in school,” said Edwardsville coach Kimber Moscardelli, “and so, I would only have them for two years, and then they would graduate. So, one thing that’s good about this year is most of the new bowlers are freshmen; there are five freshmen and one sophomore. So, this will actually give me a chance to actually build the program for a little while.

“And so I think that we’ll see something similar to what we’re seeing in the girls’ program,” Moscardelli continued, “because of the girls program, the girls I’ve had for the last three years. And they’ve gotten pretty successful. Even last year, they were successful the second year around. So, I think now that we have that time to actually develop the bowlers, instead of just having a one-year turnaround, having the three years to turn around, I think that definitely, we’ll see the change going forward with this group. They’re definitely a little more motivated after today.”

The Tigers were without three bowlers – Michael Jenkins, who's ineligible this week, Hayden Meyer, who can't bowl until January, and Eian Sims, who was cast in a school play.

“Hayden is ineligible until January,” Moscardelli said, “and then Michael is ineligible this week, Eian is in a play this weekend. Eian is the top bowler I have returning from last year. Eian just missed going to sectionals by a couple of pins last year, but Eian should be the one to carry the team this year; he's a junior, he's just in the play, and had some other commitments. And we're not used to starting this early.”

The conference tournament is a new addition to the schedule, and while Moscardelli thinks it's a good way to kick off the season, it also produces its share of problems.

“I really think that it's a great way to get things started,” Moscardelli said, “but it's a little harder on my programs, just because my kids don't have the experience that some of these bowlers have. So, for my kids, this is their second week bowling. They're brand new bowlers, and then, they come out here, and then they see bowlers that have been bowling for five, six years, and it can be kind of intimidating. And so, I think it's a lot to take in right off the bat. But I think for my kids, it's going to be the inspiration they need to start working in practice and get things turned around. But I can see where it could discourage some programs right off the bat, and just kind of put on the brakes for what they've been doing. I think my kids are going to turn it around.”

The Tigers' leading bowler on the first day was Jackson Budwell, who rolled games of 164, 168 and 131, followed by Steven Leiitschuh, who had a series of 145, 142 and 98. Brendan Warren had games of 111, 113 and 95, while Derrick Newsome had a series of 105, 121 and 111. James Zugmeier had a series of 100, 102 and 134.

Chris Duke led the Redbirds with a 633 series, rolling games of 195, 233 and 225, followed by Matt Engdale's 614 series, with games of 259, 176 and 181. Taylor had a 580 series, bowling 199, 201 and 180, while Trevor Vallow had a two-game set of 215 and 207, Jacob Cochran threw games of 170 and 161, and Lance Perkey had games of 219 and 179.

The second day of the tournament will be Thursday at Bel-Air Bowl in Belleville, and Meyer knows what kind of adjustments that the Redbirds will need to make.

“Just to get stronger,” Meyer said. “Really look at spares, look at the easy spares that we're missing, and then, how can we as a team stay together and get stronger. I want them to have that team feeling.”

The goals for the Redbirds are varied, and Meyer is liking his team's chances this season.

"Having the seniors, the one thing we want to do, the one big goal that we have is state," Meyer said. "The next big goal is to be a three-peat for regional champions, because we have done that the last two years, and we want to make it a three-time event."

The state finals will be held in January at St. Clair Bowl in Fairview Heights, the only IHSA state tournament held in southern Illinois. And Meyer is confident that the Redbirds can make it.

"Get to St. Clair, and the goal with that is to make the second day, not just the first day," Meyer said with a smile.

For the Tigers, Moscardelli has a full complement of bowlers on her roster, and it's important that they have the proper equipment.

"The one thing I'm excited about is I have a full varsity and JV, once the two ineligibles are bowling, and once Eian comes, so I have a full program," Moscardelli said. "But the goals for this year is to simply to get the kids fitted for equipment and get into their own comfort zone with it. It's really a challenge when you're bowling with a house ball and a house shoe because they don't fit. And that's a whole other level of comfort. My goal this year is just to get the kids into their own equipment, kind of figure out what kind of game play do they actually have, and then start honing their skills there.

"So we're really starting from the basics," Moscardelli also said, "but that's an advantage too, because I don't have to correct mistakes, or correct maybe flaws in their mechanics that they've developed over years. We can start fresh, and just teach them the basics and go from there."