

Roland Prenzler signs with SIUE for cross country, looks ahead to running for Cougars

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November 15 2018 4:14 PM



EDWARDSVILLE – Throughout his four years at Edwardsville High School, senior Roland Prenzler has emerged as one of the St. Louis-area's premier distance runners.

Wednesday afternoon in a ceremony at Edwardsville High, Prenzler signed a letter of intent to run for his hometown Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville cross country team. It's a team that's developed several excellent distance runners in the past.

Prenzler is excited to be able to stay home and take the next step in his running career.

"Yeah, it is. It's a pretty surreal moment," Prenzler said during an interview after the signing. "For me, it just means a lot because I've seen a few guys come here, some of the jumpers from the track team and what they've been able to accomplish here has been incredible, beyond what I could have ever expected. The great athletes that have come through Edwardsville, not only just on the track and field side of things, like Julian Harvey, LaDerrick Ward and Scott Block, who's now the head coach. It's also seen solid distance runners like Blake Marcum and Keith Meyer and Clint Cline, some of those guys are just really an inspiration to see how they come in. Some of them not the best high school times, but the coaches here are really willing to work with people and individualize them to achieve success in their way and take down the competition."

Prenzler becomes the second runner under current Tiger cross country coach George Patrylak to run for the Cougars, the first since Alex Webb, who transferred from SIU-Carbondale, and the first runner to start out at SIUE. Patrylak himself was also a runner for SIUE, and he's excited about seeing Prenzler run for the Cougars.

"It's nice," Patrylak said. "I know Roland is one of the first distance runners to be heavily recruited from this area, and it's nice to see SIU be able to get one of the local talents; I know that the Southwestern Conference has been fantastic with the level of distance runners they've turned out. From a conference standpoint as well, it's nice to see Roland attend SIUE."

Prenzler has been a four-year standout runner for the Tigers, and Patrylak is looking forward to seeing him develop for the Cougars.

"Probably looking at Roland, I think what's most exciting is you've seen an athlete progress for four years," Patrylak said. "Each year, he's improved in some areas, and really has developed into truly one of the elite distance runners in the state of Illinois. He's an athlete that I think is going to continue to blossom, I think, in college; the jump into the 8K, 10K is going to be beneficial to him. But just this year alone, the second Peoria trip, where he ran to the 14:32, third fastest runner in school history, behind only Steven Pifer and Garrett Sweatt, so he's in great company. And to think that was over a 30-second improvement from what he did in his junior year."

Prenzler was also very happy with his results from the past cross country season.

“Coming in, I just wanted to get a 14:20 in the three-mile,” Prenzler said, “and it wasn’t really something I thought I could get, but it was just something I shot for, and I thought ‘you know what, I’ll work towards it, and if I fall short, at least I shot for a good goal and got something that was pretty good too.’ So falling 12 seconds short of a goal, I was still satisfied with it. I think that if I would have trained just maybe a little bit different, I could have gotten there, but that’s behind us; there’s nothing I can do about it. But my time was good enough to the point where I had not even run 14:32 yet by the time I was offered money to go here. And so, a school that recognizes my talent before I could fully show my potential is definitely somewhere that I want to be, because it shows that they could visualize my future success, and what that means to me is that they have my best interests in mind.”

The best thing that Prenzler brings to the table is his leadership ability by setting an example for his teammates.

“I think that the number one thing is that he leads by example,” Patrylak said. “He might not be the most outspoken leader at the moment, but he’s a runner, and that he’s a great teammate who’ll stake out and work with some of the freshmen coming in. He has the ability to work and push some of the upperclassmen there as well. I think he’s going to benefit from the collegiate training in some of the veteran runners that he has. He’s just a runner that I don’t think he’ll be intimidated when he gets to college. I think he’ll get in there, he’ll work hard every day, and he’s proven he can handle high mileage. His body responds well, he’s not had any major injuries in high school. So he’s going to be consistent.”

And Patrylak will be disappointed if Prenzler doesn’t do one thing right off the bat.

“First off, I think he’s going to destroy any of my freshman times,” Patrylak said, tongue firmly planted in cheek. “I’ll be disappointed if that freshman cross country 10K record doesn’t go down because walking in, he was a better athlete than I ever was, and hopefully, by the end of his tenure, he could be challenging some of those incredible records set by Meyer a few years ago.”

Tiger track coach Chad Lakatos was equally proud to see Prenzler sign as well.

“It’s always an exciting opportunity to see student-athletes sign that line,” Lakatos said, “and that’s been their goal since they were little kids, to have an opportunity to compete in college, and his dreams are coming true.”

Prenzler will bring a lot of good qualities to the Cougars, according to Lakatos.

“I think Roland will bring a lot of different qualities and characteristics to SIUE,” Lakatos said. “He’s a great kid, he has a lot of involvement here at the high school, with the different clubs that he’s involved with, and his work ethic, I think, will be an instant notice by the staff members, and obviously, they’ve seen him run, being local, so they know what kind of talent he has, and hopefully, he can fill in and within a couple of years, maybe start making some noise at the collegiate level.”

Prenzler plans to major in business and minor in Spanish at SIUE, and is looking forward to running on the famed Mud Mountain course. It’s a course he’s very familiar with.

“It’s kind of nice that I ran at a place in seventh grade, and I’m going to be running for the next four years,” Prenzler said, “so it’s pretty nice. Along with that, all the other facilities there that I hadn’t seen before, now that I’ve seen, are pretty nice. As beautiful as Mud Mountain is, I mean the site for a lot of high-profile high school meets that we’ve had, and some postseason ones as well as the 1983 U.S. cross country championships that not many people know about. It’s just a great course that really actually wasn’t a factor coming in. I ran on the course when I took my official visit here, and it’s a really great facility that sometimes, I think we take for granted here. But it’s kind of good to step back and realize how special it is.”

Prenzler also thinks that SIUE is a school that local athletes can come and achieve success in any sport.

“I think that SIUE is a good place for local athletes in the area to come,” Prenzler said, “and just because it’s close doesn’t mean that it should be a decision to be ruled out, because I was talking with a lot of other athletes before, and they were saying ‘I’m going to this school far away, and this school,’ and no one made much of a mention of SIUE, but I’ve seen a lot of other athletes in different sports come here and achieve success, and a few distance runners as well. So, I figure I might join that, because SIUE’s a place where I feel most comfortable, and it’s home.”