



# **Alton Road Runners Club Summer Track Series Opens 2019 Season, Program Introduces Young People to Sport**

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer  
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WOOD RIVER – The Alton Road Runners Club got its 2019 Summer Track Series season off to a great start at East Alton-Wood River High School’s Memorial Stadium

Thursday evening, as participants from all ages gathered to compete in various events throughout the evening.



East Alton-Wood River state discus champion Jayden Ulrich captured the discus throw with a distance of 138' 4" and was there to encourage the young and up-and-coming future track and field athletes.

The series is sponsored by Alton Memorial Hospital, Alton Pepsi-Cola Bottling Company, Hit-N-Run Food Stores, the Alton Parks, and Recreation Department and the Godfrey Parks and Recreation Department, and is mainly designed to introduce young people to the sport of track and field.

During the five-week series, participants in the 10-and-under age range will race in the 100 meters, 50 meters, long jump and softball throw, while those in the 11-and-over range will have weekly events in the 100 meters, 1,600-meter walk, and the long jump, while in alternate weeks, will have races in the 3,000 meters, 1,500 meters, 1,600 meters, 200 meters, 400 meters, 800 meters, discus throw, shot put, 4x100-meter relay and 4x200-meter relay.

The weather for the opening night was ideal, with temperatures in the low 70s, and a good wind blowing across the area, making for ideal conditions in the often-unpredictable St. Louis-area weather.



“Yeah, the weather’s given us a break,” said Road Runners Club president and EAWR head track coach Russ Colona. “Usually, I come out here, 90 degrees, the sun’s baking me out. But it’s going to be a nice day, a little cool breeze. It’s going to be a fun evening.”

With conditions such as they were, some good times for the races might be in the offering.

“At least to get it started,” Colona said. “Some of these kids, it’ll be their first time doing track and field. They’re just learning, and that’s one of the reasons we’re here too, for high school kids and little kids to get started.”

The purpose of the Summer Track Series is mainly to introduce the sport to young people, and it also serves as good training to the high school athletes, who’s season just concluded in the past couple of weeks.

“Well, it’s a training program, too,” Colona said. “The high school kids just got done with their long season, and if they want to come out, they can come out and do a little bit of excess training. But it’s time for the little guys to come out here, and see what they’ve got, and learn what track and field is, because it’s not a sport that’s widely recognized, and it does need some practice. And I can get some high school kids out here, and help the little guys do what they’re supposed to do.”

Many of the athletes from the EAWR track teams came out to help with the events and helped introduce the younger runners and participants to the sport, who usually are just getting started in track.

“Just getting started, and learning what track and field is,” Colona said, “and how to do it, and have some fun with it, so they’ll come back and do it.”

The goals of the Summer Track Season series are very simple and also appeal to all ages as well.

“Just to pique an interest in track and field,” Colona said. “And we do have some older adults that come out here and, you know, there’s very few track meets around. There used to be a lot more 20 years ago; now, it’s very rare. But it gives everybody a chance to get on the track, and do a different type of running, that running on the road gets tiresome all summer. And just like I said, have some fun, and compete. We compete with kids from three to 73 out here.”

And one of the most important goals of the program is to have fun with the sport itself and build an interest that will encourage more people to become active participants.



“Right, just get excited about it,” Colona said. “And want to do it in the future.”

The series’ long-term goals are hopefully to develop runners for the EAWR track program, along with runners from other area high schools, among others.

“Yeah, that’s a goal for us, to get kids here,” Colona said. “But we get kids here, basically, from all over the place, And I don’t mind helping kids out from other schools, and I enjoy seeing them compete well at the high school level. Kids that have competed here, they’re running in sectionals and state meets from other schools, and of course, I’d want them from my school, but I don’t mind. It’s fun to see them compete and do well.”

And down the road, perhaps competing on the collegiate level, and perhaps, maybe even in the Olympic Games.

“Oh, yeah. We’ve had some kids do very well in high school,” Colona said, “and I know a few of them went on to college and competed in college. And that’s great to see. This is a lifelong sport; you can do this until they’re setting records in the 90- to 95 to 100-year range,” Colona said with a laugh and smile. “So this is a good sport for people to get into.”

In the opening night boys’ results, Chase Wallendorf was a double winner in the sprints, taking the 100 meters with a time of 12.6 seconds, and the 200 meters, coming in at 24.5 seconds. Brendan Springman won the 1,500 meters with a time of 4:33, while the 3,000 meters went to Zach Meszaros at 11:02. Del Brashares won the 1,600-meter walk with a time of 9:57, Nicholas Helton won the long jump, going 13’ 11”, and Evan Merritt won the discus throw with a toss of 123’ 10”.

In the girls events, Adrianna Ulrich won a pair of events, taking the 100 meters with a time of 14.1 seconds, and the long jump with a leap of 13’ 2”. Taylor Miner won the 200 meters, coming in at 32.1 seconds, Nicole Meszaros won the 1,500 meters with a time of 7:30, Becqui Marshall took the 3,000 meters with a time of 15:48, Christy Schaper won the 1,600-meter walk with a time of 11:43.

The series will be run on Thursday evenings, weather permitting, with events starting at 6:30 p.m. through June 27. And Colona gets tremendous help from his family in helping to put on the series as well.

“Just got great volunteers,” Colona said. “My wife, Kathy, and my son, Nicholas, I couldn’t do without those two, so just want to make sure, and give a shout out to them. It takes a little manpower to do this, in time, and they help a ton with this.”









[Dan Brannan also contributed to this story.](#)