

Pifer Finishes First, Walter Sixth As Tigers Team Finishes Second at Granite City Invitational

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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GRANITE CITY – Edwardsville senior runner Jack Pifer was the individual winner of the Granite City Invitational cross-country race, while teammate Zach Walters came in sixth as the Tigers finished second as a team in the season's first big event on Saturday morning at Wilson Park in Granite City.

Pifer won the race with a time of 15:17.03, while Walters time was 15:27.83 as the Tigers came in second behind team champion St. Louis University High.

The Junior Billikens won the event with 45 points, with the Tigers scoring 67 points to come in second. O'Fallon was third with 165 points, Triad came in fourth with 182, fifth place went to Ft. Zumwalt West of St. Charles County, Mo., with 184 points, Chatham Glenwood was sixth with 210, Belleville East seventh at 230, Mascoutah eighth at 256, Freeburg was ninth with 307 points, and Columbia came in 10th with 310 points.

Among area teams, the Warriors were 13th with 343 points, Collinsville 14th with 368, Civic Memorial 20th at 488, Alton 21st with 516, Roxana was 22nd with 520, and East St. Louis was 25th with 693. Piasa Southwestern didn't record a team score.

A change in strategy that the Edwardsville coaching staff had discussed previously, and has also implemented, paid off dividends in the race.

"We spend a lot of time as coaches on what we did wrong as a staff, and what we can do to help the team," said Tiger coach George Patrylak, "and one of the mistakes we've made is being too aggressive and putting too much emphasis on the first mile. And this year, our true focus is on the second half of the race. It's been successful early on, and all seven of our runners ran faster than last year, and some ran two minutes faster."

The change in strategy paid off handsomely in the Granite Invitational, and Patrylak and his staff will take a wait-and-see approach on how to apply it in future races.

"We'll have to see how it works as we get into the bigger races," Patrylak said.

Both Pifer and Walters ran very good races for the Tigers, and Patrylak is very pleased with how things turned out, especially for Pifer.

"Both Jack and Zach ran very intelligent and excellent early-season races," Patrylak said. "And for Jack, I think it's his first official cross country win in an invitational. It's nice to see him get rewarded for all of his hard work."

After Pifer, Byron Jones of Belleville East came in second with a time of 15:19.48, with a pair of SLUH runners, Lucas Rackers and Noah Scott, coming in third and fourth respectively, with Rackers having a time of 15:19.73, and Scott coming in at 15:21.94.

Graham Turk of Glenwood was fifth at 15:26.56, the Walters, Zachariah Panek of the Lancers seventh with a time of 15:30.96, Eli Ward of Waterloo eighth with a time of 15:34.15, the Redbirds' Cassius Havis was ninth at 15:36.11, and rounding out the ten was O'Fallon's Nick Edwards at 15:36.43.

Among the other Tigers, Ryan Watts had a time of 16:01.98. Geordan Patrylak came in at 16:05.03, Drew Stover's time was 16:19.34, Xander Valdez had a time of 16:30.77, and Ryan Liutjohan was at 16:41.02.

The top three runners for the Knights were Drake Bleier, with a time of 16:09.30, Ben Walter at 16:11.79, and Luke Perry was at 16:28.75. Jeremiah Perry led the Warriors with a time of 15:45.99, followed by Randy Gardner at 17:30.31, and Mason Drake at 17:41.71.

Theo Paxton led the Kahoks with a time of 16:34.68, with Kevin Varela having a time of 17:25.69, and Axel Muniz was at 17:44.78. Mark Eldridge was the Eagles' best runner with a time of 16:48.41, followed by Bryce McMurray at 17:57.55, and Aslan Henderson came in at 18:12.48.

The Redbirds' top three runners were Havis, Gerald Bruce, with a time of 18:11.88, and Jay'ion Harrison, at 18:51.78. Carlos Ruvacalba led the Shells with a time of 17:00.06, with Kaleb St. Cyr coming in at 17:57.52, and Douglas Johnson, with a time of 18:23.00.

Jahkeese King led the Flyers with a time of 18:24.69, Darrion Williams was next at 19:30.80, and Tyreese Meeks came in at 19:34.98. Derek Watson was the Piasa Birds' only runner, and he had a time of 18:40.07.

The most impressive thing about the Tigers is that they're a very close-knit group, and both the boys and girls teams, along with the junior varsity and underclass teams, had a lot of good things happen to and for them in the race.

"Truly, on the boys side, this is probably the best depth that I've ever had," Patrylak said, "and probably the closest team I've ever had in terms of friendship, especially this early. And you've got to keep in mind that today, we raced three seniors, one junior and three sophomores. Overall, it's a really good performance by everyone, and I was equally impressed with the JV and open teams, and our freshman and sophomore teams, so it was definitely a lot of positives."





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