

Tigers' Ryan Watts Cracks 15-Minute Mark, Edwardsville Rolls To Big Day In Belleville West Invite, Look To Positive Future

by Colin Feeney, Contributing Sports Writer
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BELLEVILLE - Ryan Watts is on a hot streak for Edwardsville's boys cross country team with his blazing speed, cracking the 15-minute mark on the Belleville West course.

Watts captured his second straight race, while Edwardsville placed four runners in the top ten, and five in the first 15, as the Tigers won their second straight meet, taking the boys race in the Belleville West Invitational Saturday morning at Belleville West High School.

Watts' win was very impressive, coming in with a time of 14:53.02, and may very well have hit a milestone for the Tigers on the West course.

"Up front, Ryan Watts won again in pretty convincing fashion," Edwardsville head boys cross country coach George Patrylak said, "and to my knowledge, the only Tiger to break 15 minutes on

the Belleville West course. And his time was back-to-back (personal records) for himself. I knew he was fit, but what he's doing for himself is pretty impressive."

The Tigers resume action at 3 p.m. Friday at Swansea Clinton Hills Conservation Park against everyone in the Southwestern Conference except East St. Louis, then travel to Collinsville High School for a Tuesday, Sept. 22, matchup. The Tigers meet O'Fallon High School at 8 a.m. on Saturday, Sept. 26, and the SWC Boys and Girls Meet is Saturday, Oct. 3, at 9 a.m. at Swansea Clinton Hills Conservation Park.

The Tigers won with 37 points, with Mascoutah coming in second with 61, and O'Fallon coming in a close third with 64 points. Collinsville was fourth with 119 points, Belleville East was fifth with 122, the host Maroons placed sixth with 174, Granite City came in seventh with 196, Belleville Althoff Catholic was eighth at 207, Columbia was ninth with 274, and Alton rounded out the top ten with 281 points. East St. Louis was 11th with 328 points, and Valmeyer was 12th with 348 points.

It was a part of a very successful day for both the Tiger boys and girls teams, and head coach Patrylak was a very happy man at the end of the day.

"It was a very successful day for both the boys and the girls," Patrylak said. "The boys had a very solid race, and we put five in the top 15. The race format was two flights of six teams for each race, and we ended up with four runners in the top eight."

The second highlight according to Patrylak was the performance of Drew Stover, who came in eighth with a time of 15:50.95, reaching a personal milestone.

"Drew Stover broke 16 minutes for the first time in his career," Patrylak said. "That's always a big milestone, to break 16, but it's also a big goal for many runners."

The race of the day belonged to Jacob Grandone, who came in 15th with a time of 16:29.77, and many of the runners on the Tigers also had big days as well.

"He wound up being our fifth man," Patrylak said, "and ran over a 30 second PR. I believe six of our seven runners ran personal records, so I knew it was going to be a good day."

Watts was the winner of the race, with Byron Jones of East taking second at 15:36.06, O'Fallon's Nick Edwards third with a time of 15:40.32, Theo Paxton of Collinsville came in fourth at 15:41.12, and Mascoutah's Lance Miller was fifth with a time of 15:42.68. Edwardsville runners claimed sixth through eighth spots, with Geo Patrylak sixth at 15:44.69, Ryan Luitjohan seventh at 15:45.11, and Stover coming in eighth. Ninth place went to the Kahoks' Trey Peterson at 15:53.91, and the Panthers' Dylan Ybarra rounded out the top ten at 16:04.59.

Jack Draper came in at 16:50.96 for the Tigers, while Owen Gruben had a time of 17:03.46. Outside of Paxton and Peterson, Axel Muniz came in at 17:03.35, Brock Cunningham's time was 17:32.99, Kevin Varela was at 17:57.79, Andrew Gonski had a time of 18:40.83, and Evan Heinz's time was 18:56.24.

Randy Gardner again led the Warriors, having a time of 17:11.15, while Thomas Westbrook came in at 17:27.10, Aaron McKeal had a time of 17:39.17, Alex Weaver was timed in 18:36.62, Ethan Beatty was at 18:38.95, Matthew Wilson had a time of 19:33.46, and Jackson Kirk came in at 19:39.59.

Dylan Forsythe led the Redbirds once again, coming in at 17:31.35, with Victor Humphreys having a time of 17:51.27, Trae Corby was timed in 18:42.11, Gerad Bruce was at 21:48.17, John Krafka had a time of 23:28.49, and Nathan Bartlett came in at 24:48.67.

Timothy Cross was the top runner for the Flyers, with a time of 19:39.69, while Tyreese Meeks was timed at 19:43.81, Emanuel Wilson was at 19:44.60, John Redmond had a time of 21:08.44,

Kenneth Buchanan came in at 21:27.51, and Garland Howard had a time of 23:03.51. The Pirates were led by Harrison Miller, with a time of 18:44.27, followed by Trent Hooker at 21:08.84, Matthew Espinoza at 22:00.79, Elijah Miller at 22:30.12, Uli Espinoza at 22:56.81, and Thomas Phillips at 28:14.58.

The Tigers have gotten out to a tremendous start, and now the focus switches to the upcoming Southwestern Conference meet. Patrylak will have his team set to go for the conference championships.

"We sprinted out with these two invites," Patrylak said. "Now our focus is going to be on workouts, and focusing on the conference meet."

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