

Ryan Watts Wins Individual Title, Edwardsville Places Four Of Top Five Spots In SWC Boys Cross Country Triumph

by Chris Rhodes, Reporter
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SWANSEA - Ryan Watts was the individual winner as Edwardsville finished in four of the top five places in the field in going on to win the boys championship in the Southwestern Conference cross country meet Saturday morning at the Clinton Hills Conservation Park in Swansea.

The Tigers won the team championship with 24 points, with O'Fallon coming in second with 53 points, Collinsville taking third with 92 points, host school Belleville East fourth with 95 points, Belleville West was fifth with 96 points, and Alton placed sixth with 145 points. East St. Louis did not have enough runners to field a complete team, thus no score was kept for the Flyers.

Edwardsville head coach George Patrylak was very happy with how the team performed, sticking to their race plan exceptionally well.

"The boys did really well, and the top four had really solid days," Patrylak said. "They did a great job of following our plan. Ryan helped pace Geo (Patrylak) for the first 2.25 miles, helping him get a big enough cushion on (Byron) Jones (of Belleville East) before taking off for the individual title, and then (Ryan) Luitjohan did a really good job of keeping up with Jones for as long as he could, and then (Drew) Stover was steady and moved up throughout the race to get the fifth-place finish."

In addition, Jacob Grandone, Jackson Draper and Drew Law all had solid runs in helping the Tigers go on to the title.

"Grandone had a strong race for us, and finished 12th," Patrylak said, "and both Draper and Law finished well and got their places, did well and competed for us. A couple of things fell in our favor, but the boys did really well."

Watts won the race with a time of 15:19.03, while Patrylak was second at 15:46.49, and Jones came in third at 15:52.52. Luitjohan was fourth, coming in at 16:03.41, with Stover fifth at 16:10.74, Dylan Ybarra of O'Fallon sixth with a time of 16:14.23, placing seventh was Collinsville's Trey Peterson at 16:19.82, the Panthers' Nick Edwards was eighth at 16:40.22, the Kahoks' Theo Paxton right behind in ninth at 16:40.32, and O'Fallon's Ethan Nieroda rounding out the top ten with a time of 16:41.32.

Grandone came in 12th in the race with a time of 16:43.87, while Draper had a time of 17:07.00, and Law had a time of 17:38.20 for the Tigers. Outside of Peterson and Paxton, Axel Muniz had a time of 17:09.11 for Collinsville, while Brock Cunningham came in at 17:38.95, Kevin Varela had a time of 18:11.86, Andrew Gonski was clocked in 18:35.95, and Evan Heinz came in at 18:42.42.

Dylan Forsythe was Alton's leading runner with a time of 17:19.57, with Christian Kotzamanis coming in at 17:45.01, Victor Humphrey being timed in 18:06.16, River Wrishnik was right behind at 18:07.75, Simon McClaine had a time of 18:21.83, Parker Mayhew came in at 19:03.27, and Trae Corby was timed in 19:14.71. East Side had three runners in the race, with Tyreese Meeks coming in at 19:54.00, Carlos Akins had a time of 20:30.55, and Devonte Ford came in at 20:33.84.

Edwardsville is now looking ahead to the IHSA Class 3A regional meet at Granite City's Wilson Park on Saturday, Oct. 24, and to the sectional at Normal Community High School on Saturday, Oct. 31.

"We're excited to bring back the Southwestern Conference championship," Patrylak said, "and looking ahead to the regional. That's our next opportunity to put things together."

And Patrylak also took an opportunity to praise the talent in the conference, especially the younger runners, as the future looks very bright for the league in cross country.

"Cross country is very underrated in our area," Patrylak said. "Coach (Jon) Burnett always has O'Fallon running well, and there's also a lot of young talent in our

conference. For example, the top four runners were all juniors, and the sixth and seventh runners were both freshmen. We always have a group of special runners, and there's a lot of talent out there right now."



[Colin Feeney also contributed to this story.](#)